

Local Development Framework Briefing Paper Coastal Zone Policy



Devon County Council's advice to Local Planning Authorities.

This is one of a series of briefing papers prepared by Devon County Council to assist the preparation of Local Development Documents.

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Local Planning Authorities are requested to take the following matters into account in preparing their Local Development Frameworks and other documents:

Core Strategy should:

- 1. Set out a long term sustainable vision for the coast, in particular Devon's undeveloped coast, for its protection, management and enhancement***
- 2. Set out the adaptation strategies to be developed for those locations considered at risk of coastal erosion and flooding, particularly where there is priority for defence.***
- 3. Define the Coastal Zone / Coastal Preservation Area for the developed and undeveloped coast in diagrammatic form on the key diagram, taking into account its relationship with adjacent areas***

Other Local Development Documents should develop the core strategy by:

- 1. Locate development and infrastructure away from areas that might be threatened by coastal erosion and flooding. Where such development is essential it should not be located where coastal defence is uneconomic and/or causes environmental damage that cannot be mitigated.***
- 2. Take account of Shoreline Management Plans and their implementation, maximising the use of coastal re-alignment schemes and working with natural process wherever possible.***
- 3. Locate minerals and waste development away from areas where the activity interferes with natural coastal processes or may be at risk from coastal erosion and flooding.***
- 4. Develop a long term strategy for the waste disposal site to minimise the risk of environmental pollution at the coast, for example at Northam Burrows,***
- 5. Consider the longer term needs of settlements located in the coastal zone in terms of the risks to property from coastal erosion and flooding, locating new development where it can serve the community without the need for coastal defence, and considering the costs and benefits of re-locating uses threatened by coastal processes (e.g. having regard to a 100 year time horizon).***

Partnership Working

Devon County Council wishes to work in partnership with District Councils, in further developing the above policy areas with colleagues and other organisations and would wish to be involved in any discussion relating to them.

1. Introduction

The coast and surrounding seas make a unique contribution to the character of Devon and are recognised as important for commercial, tourism and recreational uses.

The coast area is recognised for, its landscape quality through its designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, its geological significance through the designation of much of the East Devon coast as a World Heritage site, and its nature conservation through international designations such as the Northern Devon Biosphere reserve and the Exe Estuary Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site. The coast is also special in that it is dynamic and changing constantly, giving it a distinctive and valuable quality.

The undeveloped coast is specifically recognised as a finite resource both in County and national terms and is strictly protected from development through the Devon Structure Plan Coastal Preservation Area policy¹.

The defence of the coast against erosion and flooding by the sea has been an important issue for Devon communities for many years. Coastal defence schemes help to prevent loss or inundation of assets such as coastal settlements and infrastructure such as roads, in the short to medium term. Climate change predictions indicate that storm events that would only have occurred once every 50 years may be as frequent as every other year by the end of the Century and sea level may have risen by 76 cm in the same period. These changes will intensify this competition and challenges of prioritising areas to defend.

The Government is currently consulting on strengthening the strategic approach to sea flooding and coastal erosion risk management.² The outcome of this and other climate change discussions will need to be taken into account. The Government is also investigating the potential to establish a system of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP). It is essential that any system of terrestrial planning and coastal defence is integrated with any new provisions within MSP.

Devon County Council plays an important role as a strategic coordinator, leader and participant, with responsibilities for coastal management, planning and the provision of infrastructure.

This briefing paper sets out the need to deliver a sustainable and strategic approach to activity that might affect coastal processes.

2. Vision

The coast represent a valuable environmental, economic and social asset for Devon that need to be protected, managed and enhanced.

The **vision for the coast** includes the need to:

- a) To conserve and enhance the coastal and estuarine landscape and cultural heritage
- b) To conserve and enhance maritime influenced, marine and littoral biodiversity and protect wildlife habitats
- c) To ensure that Devon's maritime natural resources are managed in a sustainable way.
- d) To have regard to possible effects of climate change
- e) To define the developed and undeveloped Coastal Zone/Coastal Protection Area
- f) To have regard to the possible effect of climate change in determining the location of development and approaches to coastal defence.
- g) To protect the finite resource of the undeveloped coast from unnecessary development
- h) To provide for new development, including provision for land based maritime uses, where it would not conflict with the need to conserve and enhance the environment
- i) To protect the quality of all water bodies, including coastal and transitional waters.

¹ Coastal Preservation Areas (CPA's) were first designated in Devon in 1966 in response to Government advice which identified the need for effective action to safeguard the unspoiled stretches of the coastline.

² Making Space for Water: Environment Agency Strategic Overview (published August 2006)

- j) To ensure that thorough and effective assessments of drainage impact and flood risks are carried out; that sustainable approaches to drainage management measures are introduced and that risk to life and property of flooding is reduced.
- k) To set out the strategy for the management / protection of the shoreline

The definition of Coastal Zone - for planning purposes PPG20 advises that the inward extent, from low water mark should be based on local circumstances and key coastal issues. On the higher land therefore the Coastal Zone normally extends to the visual watershed beyond which inter-visibility with the coast ceases and maritime influences are largely lost. On the low-lying coastal levels there is no abrupt cessation of views and maritime influence, but a progressive reduction inland. In distances over 2 km from the high water mark the visual impacts would be reduced by being in the middle distance. Within Devon the key local issues are the landscape, ecology, earth resources and cultural resource of the coast and the adjacent moors. The primary local consideration will be that the landward section acts to effectively protect and enhance the finite resource of the coast. As the maritime environment influences the ecology of the coastal hinterland, it also helps define the landscape thus vegetation might also be used as a descriptor of the coastal zone.

However, in order to be inclusive in protecting the coast the definition of activity that influences the coast needs to be responsive. A development in the headwaters of a watercourse can have profound effects on water quality, which are then manifest in the flood plain, estuary and coastal areas.

Three **Shoreline Management Plans** (SMP) cover Devon these set out the agreed approach to determining the priorities for coastal defence and will be replaced by revised plans over the next two years (SMP II). The process of coastal management will be better informed when the results of the Strategic Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme for the South West are in place.

Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) is being developed and the County Council see a need for a statutory process of Coastal Zone Management Planning to co-ordinate existing powers, duties and responsibilities in integrating coastal management processes.

3. Key Issues to Address

Key issues to be addressed include:

- o **Coastal Defence** - Change in the climate with predicted giving increased occurrence of storm events and an increase in the levels of the seas that surround us is increasing pressure on coastal defence.
- o **Resources** to improve coastal defences are stretched and revisions to Shoreline Management Plans are about to be progressed. The revision of the SMP for the South coast of Devon is about to be started and the North Coast SMP is expected to be started in 2008.
- o **Maritime Issues** - The County Council's Maritime Role and Action Plan contains policies relating to the biodiversity of the coast and marine environment, its unique and dynamic geology and coastal archaeological resources. The impact of development needs to be carefully assessed for its impact on these resources. The coast is subject to natural processes. Intervention in these processes should deliver overriding social gain in the longer term and mitigation of environmental damage.
- o **Prioritisation of coastal defence** will be necessary given limited resources. Some coastal settlements and infrastructure may be uneconomic to defend. There is a need to manage the expectation that a length of coast will be defended. The needs of biodiversity, landscape and heritage conservation and economic activity such as tourism may not always be best served by undertaking coastal defence schemes. There is a need to give special attention to key infrastructure, such as transportation links, to ensure that a full analysis is done with appropriate forecasting to take account of climate change impacts.
- o **Coastal waste disposal sites** [e.g. Northam Burrows] may be at risk from coastal erosion.

- **Mineral exploitation** on the coast can exacerbate erosion problems.
- **Risk assessment approach to planning** - There is a need for a risk assessment approach to planning for the coast that takes account of land uses and activities and their relationship to coastal processes; the hinterland role of coastal settlements and infrastructure; the scope and cost/benefits of coastal realignment to provide coast protection and environmental gains.

4. The Content of LDFs

The Core Strategy

The coast makes a unique contribution to the character of Devon; its protection, management and enhancement should form part of the sustainable long term vision of each LDF and the risks of coastal erosion and flooding indicated through cross reference to issues such as climate change [cross ref climate change paper]. The Coastal Protection Area [cross ref landscape] should be indicated in diagrammatic form on the key diagram, taking into account its relationship with adjacent areas.

Other Local Development Documents

Other local development documents should develop the core strategy and:

- Locate development and infrastructure away from areas that might be threatened by coastal erosion and flooding from the sea. Where such development is essential it should not be located where coastal protection is uneconomic and/or causes environmental damage that cannot be mitigated.
- Take account of Shoreline Management Plans and their implementation, maximising the use of coastal re-alignment schemes and working with natural processes wherever possible.
- Locate minerals and waste development away from areas where the activity interferes with natural coastal processes **or may be at risk from coastal erosion and flooding.**
- Develop a long term strategy for the waste disposal site at Northam Burrows, to minimise the risk of environmental pollution.
- Consider the longer term needs of settlements located in the coastal zone in terms of the risks to property from coastal erosion and flooding, locating new development where it can serve the community without the need for coastal defence, and considering the costs and benefits of re-locating uses threatened by coastal processes. (E.g. having regard to a 100 year time horizon).
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5. Partnership Working

Devon County Council wishes to work in partnership with District Councils, in further developing the above policy areas with colleagues and other organisations and would wish to be involved in any discussion relating to them.

Key Devon Structure Plan Policies

CO3: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

CO5: Coastal Preservation Areas

CO9: Biodiversity and Earth Science

CO10: Protection of Nature Conservation and Sites

CO13: Protection of Water Resources and Flood Defence

References

Maritime Role and Action Plan: Devon County Council 2005