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## BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Liv,

### **Planning consultation: P/22/076/FUL, P/22/077/FUL, and P/22/078/FUL Coastal Defensive Work**

**Location: Bryher, St Agnes, St Martins**

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 16 November 2022 which was received by Natural England on the same day.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

#### **SUMMARY OF NATURAL ENGLAND'S ADVICE:**

##### **OBJECTION MAINTAINED**

Natural England maintains its objection to these proposals. As submitted we consider they will:

- have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Isles of Scilly SPA
- have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Isles of Scilly Complex SAC
- damage or destroy the interest features for which Pool of Bryher & Popplestone Bank (Bryher) Site of Special Scientific Interest has been notified
- damage or destroy the interest features for which Big Pool & Browarth Point (St. Agnes) Site of Special Scientific Interest has been notified
- damage or destroy the interest features for which St. Martin's Sedimentary Shore Site of Special Scientific Interest has been notified
- damage or destroy the interest features for which Rushy Bay and Heathy Hill (Bryher) Site of Special Scientific Interest has been notified

In summary, the main further information and assessments required are:

- Assessment to determine the impacts of coastal squeeze from the proposed works on the features of the SAC (to inform the HRA)
- Further information/assessment and updated HRA to determine the impacts on the features of the SPA
- Further information/assessments within the ES to determine the impact on the interest

- features of the SSSI(s)
- MCZ Assessment

Please read this advice in full as Natural England's further advice on the HRA, designated sites, mitigation, other issues, and considerations for your authority are set out below.

We have advised in our previous response that the assessment does not currently provide enough information and/or certainty to justify the assessment conclusion and that your authority should not grant planning permission at this stage.

When considering the details within this letter please refer to our initial response to your consultation submitted on the 16<sup>th</sup> December where we advised that we were raising an objection to these coastal defensive works based on insufficient information and advised that we would follow up with further information outlining the details for this advice.

Further assessment and consideration of mitigation options is required, and Natural England provides the following advice on the additional work required.

## **1. ST AGNES AND BRYHER – ALL SITES**

Under the guidance on the use of Habitats Regulations Assessment 'An appropriate assessment must consider the indirect effects on the designated features and conservation objectives'<sup>1</sup>. The Designated Sites View system<sup>2</sup> details the features of the site(s) and the conservation objectives of the site(s).

The application currently does not have a map of the development for any of the sites in relation to the features of the designated sites and the site boundaries, making assessment difficult and also judgement on how far away the sites are from the designated sites. The first step would therefore be to create a map showing the development in relation to the features of the designated sites and review the conservation objectives on Designated Sites View and reflect on both the distance from the coastal defence and any impact pathways from the designated sites and the site features and objectives.

There is currently insufficient information for all works proposed for the sites on St Agnes and Bryher to determine the impacts of coastal squeeze on the features of the SAC. In terms of an assessment of coastal squeeze the Environment Agency produced a report in 2021 outlining methods to assess the impacts of coastal squeeze and what it is<sup>3</sup>.

*“Coastal squeeze is the loss of natural habitats or deterioration of their quality arising from anthropogenic structures, or actions, preventing the landward transgression of those habitats that would otherwise naturally occur in response to sea level rise (SLR) in conjunction with other coastal processes. Coastal squeeze affects habitat on the seaward side of existing structures.”*

The definition must be read together with the points of clarification in section 5.1 - Definition and points of clarification of this EA report.

The UK Climate Projections (UKCP18) user interface provides freely accessible information about sea-level rise estimates using 1990 as their starting year and are based on the IPCC 5<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report<sup>4</sup>. These predictions can be combined with local figures of tidal heights to indicate whether there is the possibility that the intertidal area would come into contact with the proposed defence works as evidence of whether the coastal defence works would impact on any landward migration of protected sites.

<sup>1</sup> [Appropriate assessment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> Environment Agency (2021) What is coastal squeeze?

<sup>4</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6038fafde90e07055c14049b/FRS17187\\_What\\_is\\_coastal\\_squeeze\\_report\\_1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6038fafde90e07055c14049b/FRS17187_What_is_coastal_squeeze_report_1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The UKCP18 user interface <https://ukclimateprojections-ui.metoffice.gov.uk/ui/home>

Natural England understands that currently none of the sites are located within the SAC, as the Annex I feature 'Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide' is mainly concerned with lower shore sandflats. However, holding the line in the face of future sea level rise could prevent the landward progression of this Annex I feature. As the SAC extends over the lower shore of all of the sites, a coastal squeeze assessment for all of the defence works is required to inform the HRA, so that the impacts on the SAC over the full lifetime of the defences can be fully assessed.

The HRA assessments do not refer to the updated SPA designation (the site was renotified in 2020), consequently the features are not assessed correctly however, the correct species are included.

The SPA currently has a recover objective for its features therefore the assessments need to consider if the proposals will be inhibiting recovery potential, this is important if areas of soft substrate or boulders with potential nest cavities are going to be lost in favour of areas that offer less nesting potential.

The HRA does not consider biosecurity risks appropriately. This is of particular importance for the current mouse and rat free St. Agnes complex (Natural England understands that Bryher is also mouse free). Introduction of mammalian invasive species presents a significant risk to the SPA but is not covered in the HRA. One pregnant rodent has the potential to result in complete removal of SPA breeding seabirds within a few years. The assessment needs to include the activities of both bringing in material and the plant required for the works and any landing craft that may be involved.

As part of the coastal squeeze assessment it should be noted that if works influence the location of MHW and MLW they may affect the SPA area/boundary as well as affecting habitat attributes.

We note the lack of quantified enhancements and biodiversity net gain (further details below), and advise that it may be possible to incorporate features into this sort of works that support the SPA, subterranean nest boxes and protected spaces in the boulders that provide nesting spaces, and this should be considered.

Natural England notes that the ES states that:

*Impacts to wintering birds through noise and visual impacts should be managed through sequential working, where works are completed at one site before moving to the next, to minimise energy use by wintering birds as they move to an alternative undisturbed location. Sequential working will minimise energy loss that would occur as a result of repeatedly moving between local beaches in response to multiple sources of disturbance.*

Via direct engagement we understand that the sequential working might not be possible and request further clarification on the viability of this proposed mitigation measure.

The submitted HRA assessed potential impacts to the Grey seal (Annex II species) and states the follow:

*Disturbance: Construction activity will cause an increased amount of noise and activity which may disturb any seals that are hauled out in the surrounding area.*

*The proposed scheme is not located near any known breeding colonies, with the closest main seal breeding area being the Northern rocks to the southwest of Bryher. The works area is not a known hauling out spot for seals, although it is possible it is occasionally used as such by some individuals. There is ample alternative habitat available, and therefore any potential impact on Grey Seals would be negligible. Haul out areas should be confirmed by local wildlife groups before works begin.*

The proposed mitigation is inadequate, seals are a mobile species and their haul out areas can change. We advise that the HRA should include the mitigation that works will not take place if a Seal is hauled out on the beach. Disturbance to a hauled out seal can lead to physical harm if fleeing, and further impacts such as energy wastage if at rest, the beach should be checked by an

appropriate person, if a seal is present they should back off to avoid it moving away and works should not take place until the seal has moved on its own fruition.

## **1.1 Bryher**

### **1.1.1 Great Popplestone**

#### **Designations**

The proposed works on this beach are located immediately adjacent to the Isles of Scilly SPA, 60 meters from the Isles of Scilly Complex SAC and adjacent/within the Pool of Bryher and Popplestone Bank (Bryher) SSSI.

#### **Comments**

We have no major geomorphological concern regarding this site as rock armour already exists in this location and beach lowering would be fairly minor (SSSI qualifying features also not affected). But the impacts of coastal squeeze on the SAC habitat need to be assessed due to the potential lengthening of the period of HTL SMP policy.

Following upper beach/foredune reprofiling, planting with native species could help to prevent uncontrolled erosion, whilst maintaining some dynamism.

We provided the following comments when consulted on removal of rock armour earlier this year:

*Natural England recognises the need to work with natural processes where possible and therefore supports the removal of the rock armour, which is an unnatural feature within the SSSI. The hard defence is likely to reflect wave energy during storm events, which could cause beach lowering in adjacent areas. The revetment also has the potential to be a barrier to cross shore and longshore sediment processes, especially in light of future sea level rise projections. Future sea level rise may cause outflanking and ultimately exposure of the rock revetment, which would accentuate impacts on wave processes, local dune morphology and sediment transport.*

*It is, however, noted that a natural coarse sediment beach ridge is present within the vicinity of the rock armour. It must be ensured that only the imported boulders are removed and all natural beach material is reinstated in the appropriate location.*

*Sand re-distribution from the specified area currently occupied by scrub is not advised. From a geomorphological perspective, increasing the scale of interference in the dune system by removing it from elsewhere in the system would lead to artificial levels of bare sand and a system not attuned to abiotic conditions. The SSSI VAM states that "dune management should aim to allow for all stages of the succession to be present on the site". The area of scrub has not significantly increased since 2007 and is likely to be representative of the limited sediment supply to the hinterland and climatic conditions. Both of these factors set limits on the natural mobility of dune systems. As the dune system rolls back in future, the vegetation community is likely to change.*

*The preferred option would be to regrade the sand at the location of rock removal and allow natural accretion to take place. It is appreciated that no sediment has been/is intended to be lost from the system as a direct consequence of the rock armour placement and removal. The elevation of the localised area will be slightly decreased, but it is anticipated that the foredune/upper beach would accrete over time and possibly move slightly more landwards. Increasing the mobility of this section of foredune will enhance local foredune dynamics, which would have biodiversity benefits, but would also allow sand to transfer further landwards, similar to the effect of notching or a blowout in the foredunes (Schwartz et al. 2018). This would allow the dune system to become more dynamic and resilient to sea level rise in the future.*

*Although the above approach could have long term benefits, it is noted that it may affect the FCERM function of the dune system during storm events in the short term, whilst accretion takes*

*place. Accretion may be slow due to the width of the beach and available sediment supply. Monitoring will be necessary to assess the evolution of the impacted area. Sand accretion could be enhanced by the placement of brushwood or fencing, but this would be a form of stabilisation which would reduce the potential benefits gained from the rock armour removal. If proven necessary from an FCERM perspective, imported sand could be used to raise the elevation of the works area, but this would need to be shown to be the minimum requirement to re-establish previous levels and sediment with similar characteristics to the existing sand would need to be sourced from elsewhere.*

Therefore, we advise that reprofiling the existing sediment as suggested would be the best approach as the beach sediment budget has been positive in recent years, so the outcome should be that new sediment will raise up the upper beach in time (and some sand will be blown inland).

The impacts of removal of rock armour from the upper beach/foredune should be discussed/assessed within the ES.

Natural England also understand that there are further works proposed at this site as detailed in the submitted documents:

*There is also an area, approximately 20m in length, in the north of the beach where some local erosion to the crest has occurred due to pedestrian access to the beach. Soft measures are proposed in this area to control access to the beach including:*

- *A potential board walk over this area to retain access to the beach with infill of locally sourced rocks and cobbles to help establish the beach crest*

There are currently no plans/mapping showing the location and details of this element of the works at this site, and these need to be provided and these works need to be included as part of this assessment.

Further to the above we note that the ES states that (page 190):

*The works will take place within the SSSI (Pool of Bryher & Popplestone Bank (Bryher) SSSI) and it is proposed to use areas within the SSSI for site compounds and material storage.*

*The works will directly impact the vegetation for which the site is designated through the provision of access tracks to the proposed work sites at Great Popplestone. There is the potential for the tracks to directly damage rare plants for which the SSSI is designated.*

The access tracks and site compounds and material storage areas should be assessed, allocated and clearly marked on maps. Using the mitigation hierarchy, these should be in areas that avoid impacts to the vegetation for which the site is designated. We advise to carry out the required surveys (at the appropriate time of year) and detail and proposed mitigation and further monitoring if required, which we request to be consulted on by condition to determine the extent of the impacts and if any mitigation proposed will be effective.

### **1.1.2 Stinking Porth**

#### **Designations**

These works are adjacent to the Isles of Scilly SPA, 60 meters from the Isles of Scilly Complex SAC, and adjacent/backed by Pool of Bryher and Popplestone Bank SSSI.

#### **Comments**

Increased crest elevation and slightly increased gradient of the defence could increase wave reflection, which could cause some beach lowering in front of the defence during storm events.

However, Natural England understands that the proposed defence follows the existing typical beach

profile fairly well and there is a significant portion of rock material in this location already, which should somewhat reduce this risk. There are potential implications for bird usage, and the proposed works could contribute to coastal squeeze of the SAC intertidal habitat that needs to be assessed.

### **1.1.3 Great Porth**

#### **Designations**

These works are adjacent/potentially just within (works beyond MHWS) the Isles of Scilly SPA, 80 meters from the Isles of Scilly Complex SAC, and adjacent/within the Pool of Bryher & Popplestone Bank (Bryher) SSSI.

#### **Comments**

Natural England have no major geomorphological concern regarding this part of the proposed works, as boulder defences are already present along the shoreline, and the proposed defences will be consistent with these. The proposed profile aligns fairly well with the existing profile, but raised crest may cause some wave reflection and beach lowering which could impact the SPA. Impacts of coastal squeeze need to be assessed, as for the sites above.

We also understand from the ES that the works will directly impact the vegetation for which the Rushy Bay and Heathy Hill (Bryher) SSSI site is designated through the provision of access tracks to the proposed work sites at Great Porth. There is the potential for the tracks to directly damage rare plants for which the SSSI is designated.

The access tracks should be assessed, allocated and clearly marked on maps. Using the mitigation hierarchy, these should be areas that avoid impacts to the vegetation for which the site is designated. We advise to carry out the required surveys (at the appropriate time of year) and detail and proposed mitigation and further monitoring if required, which we request to be consulted on by condition to determine the extent of the impacts and if any mitigation proposed will be effective.

### **1.1.4 Green Bay**

#### **Designation**

These works are imminently adjacent to the Isles of Scilly SPA, 100 meters from the Isles of Scilly Complex SAC, and 380 meters from the Rushy Bay & Heathy Hill (Bryher) SSSI.

#### **Comments**

The dune system on the eastern length of coastline is highly modified due to historic modification of the shoreline. Natural England understand that it's not a functioning dune system and is almost at the limit of geological constraint by Samson Hill.

We understand that the focus of the proposed works at this location is more to prevent overtopping than erosion, as the site is fairly sheltered from wave action but can overtop during surge events. Although some erosion of the embankment face may occur over time, we would not regard this a major concern. Holding the line could contribute to coastal squeeze of the SAC intertidal habitat (under NAI, much of the land behind would be under MHWS) but it is a very short section of coastline.

Planting the constructed dune with native species could apply here.

### **1.1.5 Kitchen Porth**

#### **Designation**

These works are adjacent to the Isles of Scilly SPA, 80 meters from the Isles of Scilly Complex

SAC, 120 meters from the Shipman Head & Shipman Down (Bryher) SSSI, and 120 meters from the Isles of Scilly Ramsar.

## **Comments**

The site is highly modified and additional rock is unlikely to significantly change the character of the site. The increased slope gradient could increase wave reflection and cause some beach lowering in front of the defence, although this is likely to be fairly minor as the crest height and permeability will remain similar.

There are potential implications for bird usage and preventing natural morphological rollback (within a NAI unit) could have impact on the SAC intertidal habitat via coastal squeeze and this needs to be assessed.

Further to the above comments Table 5-8 of the ES (within the Bryher – All sites section) details potential impacts on the Pool of Bryher and Popplestone Bank SSSI and states that *Direct damage if alternative access track is used... full vegetation survey of the dunes to be impacted should be carried out at an appropriate time of year. Any rare plants found will need to be suitably translocated prior to the works taking place.*

If this alternative access track is required Natural England requests consultation on the survey results and translocation plan by condition, before any works commence.

## **1.2 St. Agnes**

For the proposed works at Periglis, Porth Killier and Porth Coose, there appears to be a misinterpretation of the extent of the SSSI. For all sites the SSSI extent is down to MHWS and therefore includes the upper beach and dune ridge. There are multiply references within the submitted documents to the works being adjacent to the SSSI and the assessments that relate to this incorrect assumption need to be revisited.

The site is within Big Pool and Browarth Point SSSI, designated for vascular plant assemblages. Of particular relevance within the citation: “The strandline vegetation at the back of Porth Killier, Porth Coose and Periglis Bay is particularly notable for the population of sea radish *Raphanus maritimus* and sea kale *Crambe maritima* growing in association with frosted orache *Atriplex laciniata* and Babington’s orache *A. glabriuscula*”.

Therefore, the direct impacts of defence construction on the SSSI vascular plant assemblages (specifically those on the upper beach and dune ridge) have not been fully considered or mitigated for any of the sites. Although the dunes are not notified for specific habitat interest, they could support notified species. The main sites which need to consider impacts on the SSSI qualifying features are Periglis (where the dune ridge is to be excavated) and Porth Coose (where fill material will be placed on the top and rear of the dune).

If these works do receive the required permissions we would also advice planting with native dune species on the constructed dunes at Periglis and Porth Coose.

### **1.2.1 Porth Killier**

#### **Designation**

These works are within the Isles of Scilly SPA, 135 meters from the Isles of Scilly Complex SAC, and within the Isles of Scilly Ramsar and Big Pool & Browarth Point (St. Agnes) SSSI.

#### **Comments**

At this site the works will reduce beach lowering in front of the existing defence, and outflanking at the eastern end. We don’t have any major geomorphological concerns, as these issues would

continue in a NAI scenario, until the wall was undermined and failed. However, the footprint of the defence obviously constitutes habitat loss and holding the line could have coastal squeeze impacts.

Natural England question whether alternative options, e.g. wall removal and setback defence, should have been considered?

### **1.2.2 Porth Coose**

#### **Designation**

These works are within the Isles of Scilly SPA and Ramsar, 40 meters from the Isles of Scilly Complex SAC, and within Big Pool & Browarth Point (St. Agnes) SSSI.

#### **Comments**

The majority of works are to the rear of the crest and we understand that there is no space for a setback option, so it appears that all avoidance options have been explored. Increasing the height will increase wave reflection, but the upper part of the beach is already protected by a concrete mattress, so the risk to the upper beach face profile is minimal. Over time, it is likely that more of the concrete mattress could become more exposed. The ES notes that some parts of it are already exposed as cobbles have been thrown over the crest during large storm events. Increasing wave reflection could increase cobble mobilisation at the top of the beach during large storms, but it is unlikely to significantly erode due to the size of the material and the presence of the mattress.

### **1.2.3 Periglis**

#### **Designation**

The works are within the Isles of Scilly SPA and Ramsar, 45 meters from the Isles of Scilly Complex SAC, and within the Big Pool & Browarth Point (St. Agnes) SSSI.

#### **Comments**

The ES indicates that the dune ridge appears to be in a long-term erosional trend, with evidence of erosion and oversteepening in some locations. Sand-filled dumpy bags were placed on the seaward edge of the dune ridge following the 2014 event in an attempt to reduce further erosion. Although some accretion has been noted around bags, this should not detract from the fact that the long-term trend for the dune ridge is erosional. During storm events, sediment is eroded from the existing dune face, causing steepening and retreat of the ridge. With rising sea levels, erosion of the dune ridge would be anticipated to accelerate.

As the long-term trend of the existing dune crest is predominantly erosional, it can be inferred that both advancing the alignment of the dune crest seaward and raising the elevation of the dune crest within the proposed design is highly likely to exacerbate erosion of the dune face during storm events. As the defence prevents natural rollback, the dune face will become sacrificial, and exposure and undermining of the geobags will occur, as has been observed on other wave-exposed sites where the net dune sediment budget is negative. On exposure of the vertical, resistant surface of the geobags, wave reflection is likely to occur, which could subsequently erode and steepen the beach face. The strandline as viewed on aerial imagery is overlapping with the toe of the proposed defence; therefore, it would be anticipated that this sensitive area would be subject to erosion following construction of the defence.

The cumulative impacts of storms and future sea level rise will likely eradicate existing strandline vegetation and remove any potential for re-establishment, as the defence will prevent rollback and natural morphological adaptation of the beach profile. The impacts of this type of erosion on the strandline vegetation, which is a designated feature within the SSSI, need to be considered within the ES.



The SMP policy for this unit is Hold The Line for all three epochs. However, alternative options, such as a setback defence, could significantly reduce impacts on the SSSI and should therefore be fully considered.

Further to the above at para 5.4.4 Mitigation measures and enhancements it states that:

*A vegetation survey should be undertaken immediately prior to the works taking place and will set out the limits of all site compounds and access roads. The site limits will seek to avoid damage to areas of the more sensitive areas of the SSSI and any rare plants recorded can be avoided. An Ecological Clerk of Works should then ensure that the site limits are adhered to. Suitable track matting will be used where tracks do not already exist and will be monitored following the works to ensure that the vegetation cover is recovering sufficiently.*

A vegetation survey should be carried out detailing and quantifying the loss of the SSSI site's features, from all site compounds and access roads. Site compounds and access roads should avoid the SSSI completely, and if this is not possible seek the least impactful alternative. We advise to carry out the required surveys (at the appropriate time of year) and proposed mitigation and further monitoring if required, which we request to be consulted on by condition to determine the extent of the impacts and if any mitigation proposed will be effective.

## **2. ST. MARTIN'S**

### **2.1 Lower Town Beach**

#### **Designations**

These works are adjacent to the Isles of Scilly SPA, Isles of Scilly Complex SAC, and St. Martin's Sedimentary Shore SSSI. These works are 105 meters from the Isles of Scilly Tean MCZ.

#### **Comments**

The ES on page 160 states that:

*St Martin's Sedimentary Shore runs along the eastern shore of St Martin's. The northern edge of this SSSI lies adjacent to the Lower Town Beach work site. The SSSI is designated for its geological interest and is not actively managed.*

The statement indicates that the SSSI is only important for its geological interest which is not the case as St. Martin's flats form the largest area of sand exposed at low water within the Isles of Scilly. They are a fine example of moderately exposed sandy shores dominated by bivalves, burrowing heart urchins and polychaetes. The nature of the habitat is notable since it supports species that would normally occur offshore in coarse shell and gravel deposits.

The habitat is sheltered and unpolluted, being remote from most major sources of disturbance and having almost no freshwater input, as such it supports an exceptional range of marine biota. The shores show an excellent transition into the sublittoral zone (i.e. below mean low water level) with marine communities that are considered to be of national and international importance, including the Purple heart urchin (*Spatangus purpureus*) dominated community.

Natural England regards the works at Lower Town Beach as minor in nature however, as the habitat is sheltered and unpolluted, being remote from most major sources of disturbance the assessment should include consideration of the impacts resulting from increased boat usage and the potential for pollution incidents from the provision of the removable slipway enhancing beach access, and the risk from pollution incidents by providing the open grid product appropriate for vehicle loading.

## **3. Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009**

These works are sited near to the above Marine Conservation Zone however, an MCZ assessment has not been submitted with this application. Natural England advice that the MCZ assessment should be carried out identifying any potential pathway by which impacts from the development would affect the interest features of the site.

#### **4. South West Inshore and South West Offshore Marine Plan**

Natural England understand that the MMO have deferred regulatory responsibilities to your authority in determining this application therefore we advise your authority to assess if the proposed works are consistent with the above Marine Plan policies.

#### **5. Shoreline Management Plan Policy**

Natural England note that a large proportion of the defence works are within NAI (No Active Intervention) policy units (further detailed below).

Natural England questions if these proposed defences conform to SMP policy. Where the defence policy in the Shoreline Management Plan is NAI under the scenario testing of the SMP policy this outlines that the policy was chosen in some cases to satisfy the objectives relating to the AONB and Isles of Scilly SAC designations. This is potentially to prevent disturbance to or an reduction of the area of the interest features (with regard to the SAC) and ensure policy to enable adaptive response to sea level rise and erosion. Where any sub-policy under NAI details that local activity can be permitted, justification should be sought as to how the coastal defence works related to the overarching policy.

Natural England also advise that it would be useful for your authority to seek the view of the Environment Agency on the matter of SMP policy and the implications, if planning permission is approved for the proposed works that do not conform to SMP policy, and any further implications for the HRA associated with the SMP and the policy units.

##### **5.1 Great Popplestone**

The works here are within policy unit 45.4. The SMP2 identifies the preferred policy for Great Popplestone Policy Unit as HTL up to 2025, with NAI up to 2105. Planning and management policy here should be currently looking towards a transition away from the unsustainable HTL to the sustainable policy of NAI.

For policy unit 45.5 the policy up to 2105 is NAI to satisfy the objectives relating to the AONB and Isles of Scilly SAC designations.

Natural England note the further descriptive text within the SMP:

*Assessment of erosion risks at Great Popplestones indicates only a small amount of recession is likely adjacent to the Great Pool (see inset map, above). There are water resource issues related to the Great Pool and an initial hold the line policy should monitor the rate to test that a longer term aim to move to no active intervention is correct. This policy choice only applies to the area fronting the Great Pool.*

##### **5.2 Stinking Porth**

The SMP2 identifies the preferred policy here within policy unit 45.2 currently and up to 2105 as NAI with no significant risks identified.

##### **5.3 Great Porth (Great Par) North of Great Carn**

The SMP2 identifies the preferred policy here within policy unit 45.1 as currently HTL moving to NAI

(with localised HTL) the SMP details that the intended is that the HTL policy only applies to the rock armour defence which is currently in place along the most northerly part of the shoreline. In the medium to longer term the preferred intent of management would be to allow the wide upper beach and vegetated zone to be managed as a no active intervention area, providing a natural and responsive beach-dune system more able to adapt itself to sea level rise and coastal squeeze pressures. There may be some economic justification for continued holding the line beyond epoch 1 if ongoing rates of erosion were likely to pose substantial risk to the hotel and other development, given the significance of this to Bryher's economy.

#### **5.4 Green Bay**

The SMP2 identifies the preferred policy here within policy unit 45.12 currently and up to 2105 as NAI, with the NAI approach to satisfy the objectives relating to the AONB and Isles of Scilly SAC designations. Some re-routing of coastal footpaths would be necessary.

#### **5.5 Kitchen Porth**

The SMP2 identifies the preferred policy here within policy unit 45.8 currently and up to 2105 as NAI, with the NAI approach to satisfy the objectives relating to the AONB and Isles of Scilly SAC designations.

#### **5.6 Porth Killier**

The SMP2 identifies the preferred policy here within policy unit 46.14 currently as NAI and up to 2105 as NAI (with localised HTL) as it appears to be little justification to continue with HTL policy along this frontage. Erosion risks concluded to be very slight; therefore a NAI policy is preferred. The NAI approach would satisfy the objectives relating to the AONB and Isles of Scilly SAC designations.

#### **5.7 Porth Coose**

The SMP2 identifies the preferred policy here within policy unit 46.12 as HLT currently and up to 2105 due to the risk to the Big Pool from erosion and inundation.

#### **5.8 Periglis**

The SMP2 identifies the preferred policy here within policy unit 46.11 as HLT currently and up to 2105 due to the risk to the Big Pool from erosion and inundation.

#### **5.9 Lower Town Beach**

The SMP2 identifies the preferred policy here within policy unit 43.4 currently as NAI and up to 2105 as NAI. The no active intervention is the preferred ongoing policy and would satisfy objectives relating to the AONB and Heritage Coast designations.

### **6. CEMP**

Natural England notes the CEMP has been submitted as part of this application and will require updating once the further assessments/information has been provided.

### **7. Priority habitats and species**

The submitted ES states that *The islands display a striking diversity of landscape, including lowland heath and small pastures enclosed by stone walls and banks, plus tiny, hedged bulb fields, and a varied coastline. Surveys have shown the presence of 18 priority habitats across the Isles of Scilly, including lowland heathland, coastal sand dunes and coastal vegetated shingle, and over 200 priority species (Natural England, 2013).*

We note that the works described within the ES have the potential to impact Priority Habitats and Species, which are of particular importance for nature conservation and are included in the England Biodiversity List published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

Most priority habitats will be mapped either as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, on the Magic website or as Local Wildlife Sites. List of priority habitats and species can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) Natural England does not routinely hold species data, such data should be collected when impacts on priority habitats or species are considered likely.

The ES should thoroughly assess the impact of the proposal on protected species and the impact of the proposals on habitats and/or species listed as 'Habitats and Species of Principal Importance' within the England Biodiversity List, published under S41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

We would draw your attention to Section 40 of the NERC Act (2006) which states that 'Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'. Section 40(3) of the same Act also states that 'conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat'.

We would advise that your authority requests further detail on **how any loss of priority habitat will be avoided, mitigated or compensated**. If net loss cannot be avoided or mitigated by use of alternative methods, we suggest that appropriate compensation is secured. This should consider biodiversity enhancement and net gain where possible. We advise that an appropriate planning condition or obligation is attached to any planning permission to secure these measures.

## **8. Environmental Gains**

Natural England are disappointed to see no quantified Biodiversity Net Gain as part of this proposed development.

Development should provide net gains for biodiversity in line with the NPPF paragraphs 174(d), 179 and 180. Development also provides opportunities to secure wider environmental gains, as outlined in the NPPF (paragraphs 8, 73, 104, 120, 174, 175 and 180). We advise you to follow the mitigation hierarchy as set out in paragraph 180 of the NPPF and firstly consider what existing environmental features on and around the site can be retained or enhanced or what new features could be incorporated into the development proposal. Where onsite measures are not possible, you should consider off site measures.

Natural England's [Biodiversity Metric 3.1](#) may be used to calculate biodiversity losses and gains for terrestrial and intertidal habitats and can be used to inform any development project.

Natural England's [Environmental Benefits from Nature tool](#) may be used to identify opportunities to enhance wider benefits from nature and to avoid and minimise any negative impacts. It is designed to work alongside Biodiversity Metric 3.1 and is available as a beta test version.

## **9. Protected Landscapes**

The proposed development is for sites within a nationally designated landscape namely Isles of Scilly AONB. Natural England advises that the planning authority uses national and local policies,

together with local landscape expertise and information to determine the proposal. The policy and statutory framework to guide your decision and the role of local advice are explained below.

Your decision should be guided by paragraphs 176 and 177 of the National Planning Policy Framework which gives the highest status of protection for the 'landscape and scenic beauty' of AONBs and National Parks. For major development proposals paragraph 177 sets out criteria to determine whether the development should exceptionally be permitted within the designated landscape.

Alongside national policy you should also apply landscape policies set out in your development plan, or appropriate saved policies.

We also advise that you consult the relevant AONB Partnership or Conservation Board. Their knowledge of the site and its wider landscape setting, together with the aims and objectives of the AONB's statutory management plan, will be a valuable contribution to the planning decision. Where available, a local Landscape Character Assessment can also be a helpful guide to the landscape's sensitivity to this type of development and its capacity to accommodate the proposed development.

The statutory purpose of the AONB is to conserve and enhance the area's natural beauty. You should assess the application carefully as to whether the proposed development would have a significant impact on or harm that statutory purpose. Relevant to this is the duty on public bodies to 'have regard' for that statutory purpose in carrying out their functions (S85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000). The Planning Practice Guidance confirms that this duty also applies to proposals outside the designated area but impacting on its natural beauty.

## **10. Further advice on sustainable management of flood and erosion risk**

Natural England believes that sustainable management of flood and erosion risk is best achieved by solutions that work with the physical processes that shape coastal environments, with sympathetic land management and land-use planning, which makes space for coasts to evolve sustainably and safeguards supplies of sediment, this is crucial for our coasts to adapt in response to climate change.

Hard coastal defences do not work with natural processes, and they are not a sustainable management solution, and these types of schemes and interventions are highly unlikely to be impact-free on habitats, designated sites, and protected landscapes.

Sea level rise and coastal change are inevitable creating both opportunities and challenges and sustainable coastal management needs to embrace change. Coastal conservation's initial priority is about management of the physical system, ensuring that wherever possible there are active coastal processes, this creates the structural diversity required by coastal habitats and the species they support. It also makes a major contribution to the character of coastal landscapes. As the coast changes so the mosaic of habitats and species as well as landscapes, recreational opportunities and its 'local distinctiveness' will change and evolve. These changes need to be managed to ensure the best outcomes for the natural environment.

Allowing the coast to respond and adapt to climate change will need adaptation mechanisms that, where appropriate, support relocation of valued assets away from areas of risk and deliver socially acceptable solutions when it is necessary to abandon existing defences so avoiding conflict between communities and the natural environment. There is a need for a shift to collaborative long-term thinking and planning at the coast that recognises the need to respond to changes over long timescales.

Consideration must be given to the long-term implications of hard coastal defences when there inevitably comes a point when they are no longer effective protection from erosion or flooding, and maintenance or enhancement and may not be technically feasible or financially viable, leaving a legacy of financial burden and environmental impact for future generations to resolve.

We understand that coastal communities face difficult decisions and an unprecedented challenge, and a short term unsustainable intervention of hard coastal defences when affordable and technically feasible is desirable however, long-term planning and sustainable solutions are required to support the longevity of communities and the environment underpinning their sustainability. Transformational change achieved by nature based solutions that work with physical processes should be your primary action or pathway with the use of combined approaches to coastal adaptation explored, and unsustainable hard coastal defences should be an absolute last resort.

Natural England would advise you to consider implementing Coastal Change Management Areas as part of your Adaptation Planning.

Coastal Change Management Areas (CCMAs) have been identified as a key coastal planning tool. They are to be defined in Local Plans as areas likely to be affected by coastal change, such as physical change to the shoreline through erosion, coastal landslip, permanent inundation, or coastal accretion (e.g., accumulation of sand), over the next 100 years. Policies and guidance to support this approach are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF - [Here](#)) and its associated Planning Practice Guidance (PPG - [Here](#)).

Planning Practice Guidance provides more detailed advice on the sources of information which can be used when defining CCMAs (including: Shoreline Management Plans, catchment flood plans, estuary management plans, harbour management plans, river basin management plans and Environment Agency's coastal erosion map). The NPPF maintains that local planning authorities should reduce risk from coastal change by avoiding inappropriate development in vulnerable areas or adding to the impacts of physical changes to the coast. They should identify as a CCMA any area likely to be affected by physical changes to the coast, and:

- be clear as to what development will be appropriate in such areas and in what circumstances; and
- make provision for development and infrastructure that needs to be relocated away from CCMAs.

Within CCMAs interactions between coastal change and new development/infrastructure proposals (or relocation of existing development and/or infrastructure) may often need to be resolved. While the primary reason for defining CCMA are physical processes affecting the coast, National Planning Practice Guidance suggests that local planning authorities may also want to take account of boundaries of existing settlements and requirements 'for facilitating roll-back and relocation of land uses'.

It's important that CCMAs are not only defined, but also have the mechanisms in place (via a management plan) to capture information about the need for effective adaptation planning to support their implementation.

The Shoreline Management Plan (SMP - [Here](#)) is a key document for CCMA's. It provides the analysis and recommendation for a defined area which may need to be designated as a CCMA. These recommendations when adopted and detailed in Development Plan Documents (Local, Neighbourhood, and Climate Emergency Development Plans) are for those areas likely to be affected by coastal change, such as physical change to the shoreline through erosion, coastal landslip, permanent inundation, or coastal accretion.

Defra led a Coastal Change Pathfinder (CCP) programme between 2009 and 2011 to explore new ways of adapting to coastal change. Under this programme, 15 projects were delivered by English local authorities working in partnership with their communities, to trial innovative approaches to planning for and managing coastal change. This guide ([Link](#)) on planning approaches to coastal change adaptation has been developed to share and build on these outcomes and identify successful approaches from non-CCP authorities. This document provides specific Coastal Change

Adaptation Planning Guidance (CCAPG) for coastal managers, engineers, planners, and professionals involved in managing coastal change and implementing the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in coastal areas.

The guidance provides all authorities with clear consistent guidance on the development of CCMA's, utilising data developed for the SMP. The guidance recommends a staged approach that starts with the policies and mapping in the SMP, integrating with other risk data to inform definition of the risk areas and based on that, the CCMA area itself.

For any questions relating to this advice letter please contact me using the details below.

For further consultations and when the above requested information and updated HRA is available please contact us at [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk).

Yours sincerely,

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