
CHICHESTER HARBOUR CONSERVANCY

SEA DEFENCE GUIDELINES

**INFORMATION FOR LANDOWNERS IN
CHICHESTER HARBOUR**





SEA DEFENCE

This leaflet has been produced by Chichester Harbour Conservancy to help landowners who have concerns about sea defences. It will answer the most often asked questions and introduce briefly the Conservancy's policy and Sea Defence guidelines.

There are now considerable ecological constraints on building new sea defences.

NATURE CONSERVATION STATUS

The Harbour supports a wide range of wildlife habitats supporting a diverse range of plants, birds and invertebrates. It is also important for certain geological features and land-forms. The estuarine habitats are internationally significant and support an internationally important assemblage of wintering waders and wildfowl, passage migrants and breeding birds.

In fact, Chichester Harbour is so important for wildlife that, together with other estuaries around the Solent, it is covered by several international and national nature conservation designations. The Harbour is a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) under the European Habitats Directive, a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the European Wild Birds Directive, and a Ramsar site under the International Convention on Wetlands. It is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).

COASTAL EROSION

The shoreline of Chichester Harbour is eroding. This, of course, has been happening for many thousands of years and the configuration of the harbours around the Solent is constantly changing. The whole area is slowly sinking – along with the rest of the southeast England – as a consequence of geological movements in response to the retreat of the ice sheet following the last Ice Age. Together with the effects of global warming this is leading to a rise in sea level and a decrease in the amount of intertidal land (that between high and low water) where the coastline is unable to retreat because of coastal defences: a process known as ‘coastal squeeze’. The result can be a significant reduction in the size of mudflats and salt marshes with a consequent reduction in the plants, invertebrates and birds that they support.

RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT

The national and international wildlife importance of Chichester Harbour – as recognised by the various statutory designations – brings with it certain obligations for appropriate management by public bodies. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) public bodies (this includes Chichester Harbour Conservancy, and the district and parish councils) have a duty to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of their functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of the Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Habitats Regulations 1994 state that on international sites (cSAC, SPA and Ramsar) public bodies may not undertake or give permission for any works that adversely affect the integrity of the site (there are certain limited exceptions).

THE CONSERVANCY'S POLICY

- **The defence should not be damaging to nature conservation interests**

Environmental impacts must be properly assessed.

- **The defence must be essential**

Responding to a real threat of erosion or overtopping/flooding.

- **The defence must be well engineered**

Capable of dealing with the forces acting on the defence.

- **The works should be as sympathetic to the landscape as possible**

The materials and style chosen must be carefully considered in each location and not selected purely by cost.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who is responsible for my sea defences?

The Environment Agency has powers to carry out sea defences to prevent flooding. It is not obliged to carry out sea defences in every situation but uses what is known as cost/benefit analysis. Simply put: if the cost of the defence exceeds, by any amount, the value of the land defended they will not become involved. Also if the defences will benefit just a single landowner then they are not likely to carry out any works.

The local maritime councils are the Coast Protection Authorities. Their concerns are for erosion; the loss of land to the sea. They operate similar rules to the Environment Agency. They have powers to carry out work but not a duty. They also will only become involved when there is a favourable cost/benefit ratio.

What do I need to know to carry out my own sea defences?

If you have decided that you need to defend then you will almost certainly need some professional assistance. Most sea defences require planning permission – they are engineering works. You will need plans drawn up showing the work proposed. These works have to be based on sound engineering principles so you will need calculations made to ensure the defences are going to be adequate.

In addition to any planning permission if the works are going to be below mean high water you will require a licence from the Conservancy.

Can the Conservancy help?

Yes, the Conservancy has commissioned a set of sea defence guidelines that provide drawings of recommended types of defence and all the necessary formulas and calculations to determine the size and height of the defences.

A member of the Conservancy's staff would be happy to meet with you to discuss all the options and to provide more detail.

How do I get hold of a copy of the sea defence guidelines?

The Conservancy holds several copies at the Harbour Office at Itchenor. You may borrow these at no charge.





This leaflet has been produced by Chichester Harbour Conservancy in association with English Nature and the Countryside Agency.

Chichester Harbour is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It is an internationally renowned area for nature conservation. The Harbour has 11 square miles of water, 11 square miles of land and 17 miles of navigable channels. The Conservancy works to maintain and protect this important environment. Further information on their work can be found on its website.



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