CABINET

Report subject	**Sea Cliff and Chine Management**
Meeting date	26 November 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	Along the BCP coastline there is approximately 15.5 miles of sea cliffs and chines. The responsibility for much of the management of the sea cliffs and chines falls to BCP Council (either as landowner or leaseholder). In order to address cliff slips and falls, past engineering efforts during the 20th century have introduced various forms of cliff drainage and stabilisation works including pinning and netting, slope regrading and installation of over 700 sand drains along large sections of the BCP coast. Engineering that would cost many tens of £millions at today's prices Ongoing work to develop a new BCP cliff management strategy has identified that costs for cliff management along the BCP frontage over the next 20 years are currently estimated to be in excess of £41m. In order to address some of the issues being identified in the immediate term, one-off funding of £1.446m has been allocated by the finance team for cliff management over this financial year and next. It is planned to prioritise this funding on items identified through the Cliff Management Working Group.
Recommendations	**It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet Recommends to Council to:** **(a) Note the challenges being faced in managing BCP's sea cliffs and chines, including the impacts of climate change and limited resources allocated to this in the recent past.** **(b) Support the immediate allocation of £1.446m from reserves to support responses to current cliff management issues and mitigate the lost income from commercial services on the seafront.** **(c) Delegate to the Director of Commercial Operations in consultation with the Chief Operations Officer and Portfolio Holder the allocations of the funding.**

Reason for recommendations	To support achievement of the BCP vision for where people, nature, coast and towns come together in sustainable, safe and healthy communities, by contributing the delivery of the following objectives: • People and places are connected by sustainable and modern infrastructure. • Our communities have pride in our streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces. • Climate change is tackled through sustainable policies and practice • Our green spaces flourish and support the wellbeing of both people and nature.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Andy Hadley, Cabinet Member for Climate Response, Environment and Energy
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton – Chief Operations Officer
Report Authors	Alan Frampton – Strategy, Policy & Environment Manager Matt Hosey – Head of FCERM Julian Case – Principal Geotechnical Engineer Anthony Rogers – Head of Seafront
Wards	Boscombe East & Pokesdown; Boscombe West; Bournemouth Central; Canford Cliffs; East Cliff & Springbourne; East Southbourne & Tuckton; Hamworthy; Highcliffe & Walkford; Mudeford, Stanpit & West Highcliffe; West Southbourne; Westbourne & West Cliff;
Classification	For Decision

Key terminology to understand in reading this paper:

- **Coastal erosion** is a natural process where material (sediment, rocks and manmade features) is taken away from shorelines by the action of waves, tides and currents (often to be deposited along other parts of the coast or moved to offshore areas). This is not replaced by new material, resulting in the coastline being 'eroded'.

  Waves, currents, tides, and wind can all contribute to coastal erosion.

  Importantly, coastal erosion is driven by forces at the base of cliffs (i.e. along the shoreline), though the impacts result in retreat of the cliff top that in turn can lead to loss of properties and infrastructure located on top of cliffs.
- **Cliff stability** is the ability of inclined soil or rock slopes to withstand destabilising forces. This is related to conditions within the cliffs / slopes including the mass characteristics of the geology and groundwater conditions which on occasion may cause excessive destabilising pressures due to the build-up of water levels within the cliffs due to rainfall and/or other sources.
- **Cliff instability** occurs when the stabilising forces within the cliff are exceeded, leading to rockfalls, mudflows, landslips and landslides. These may be confined to the face of cliffs and slopes or they can be deep seated and cause damage/risk to life to people, property and infrastructure on or at the base of the slopes, or they may also result in retreat of the cliff top position in which case they can then also lead to loss of properties and infrastructure located on

top of cliffs.

Background

1. This paper should be read in conjunction with the background paper on Cliff and Coastal Erosion Management Across the BCP Coast presented to the BCP Council Environment & Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 July 2025.

2. Along the BCP coastline there is approximately 15.5 miles of sea cliffs and chines fronted by sandy beaches, extending from the boundary with New Forest District Council at Chewton Bunny in the east to the boundary with Dorset Council in Lytchett Bay in the west (see Figure 1).

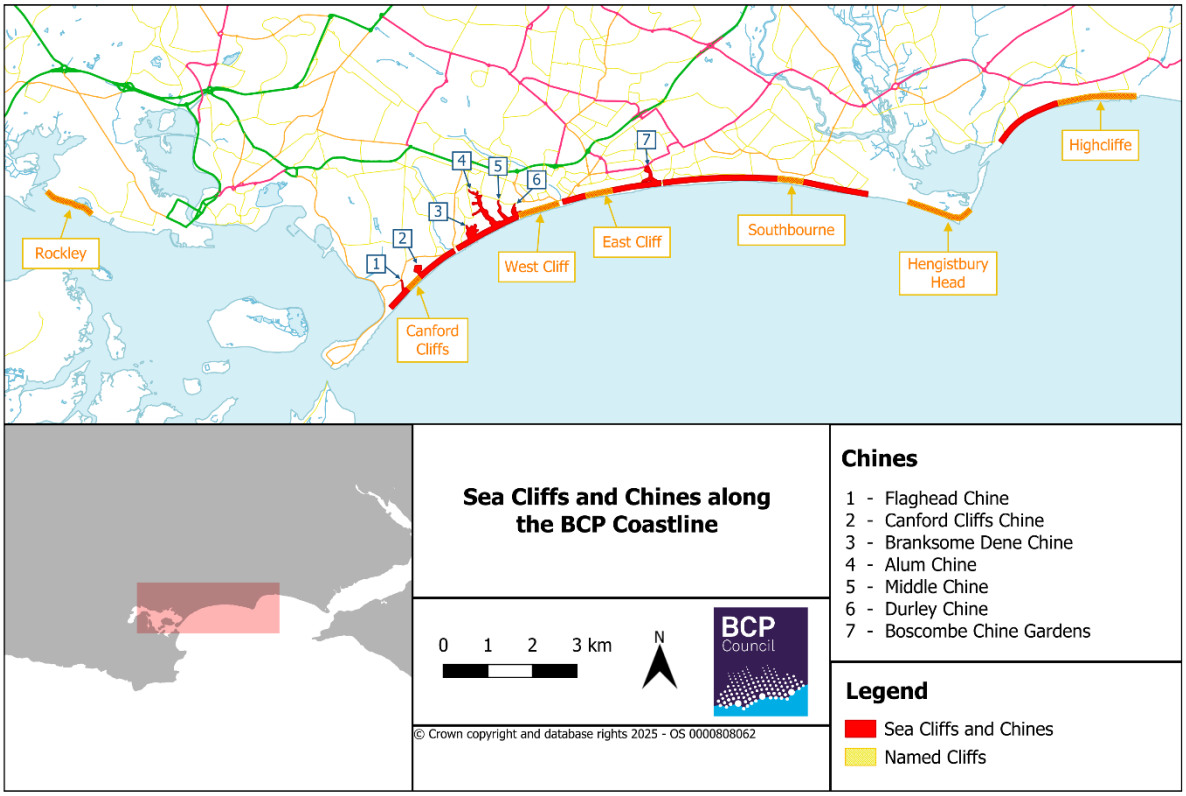

Figure 1 Extent of sea cliffs and chines along the BCP coast

3. The responsibility for much of the management of the sea cliffs and chines falls to BCP Council (either as landowner or leaseholder), however about 1.4 miles of sea cliffs and chines are in private ownership and so the responsibility for management lies with those private owners (see Figure 2). These private cliffs often have a relationship to adjacent sections of cliff, or assets at the top and bottom of the cliff, that are the responsibility of BCP Council, which poses challenges for integrated management.

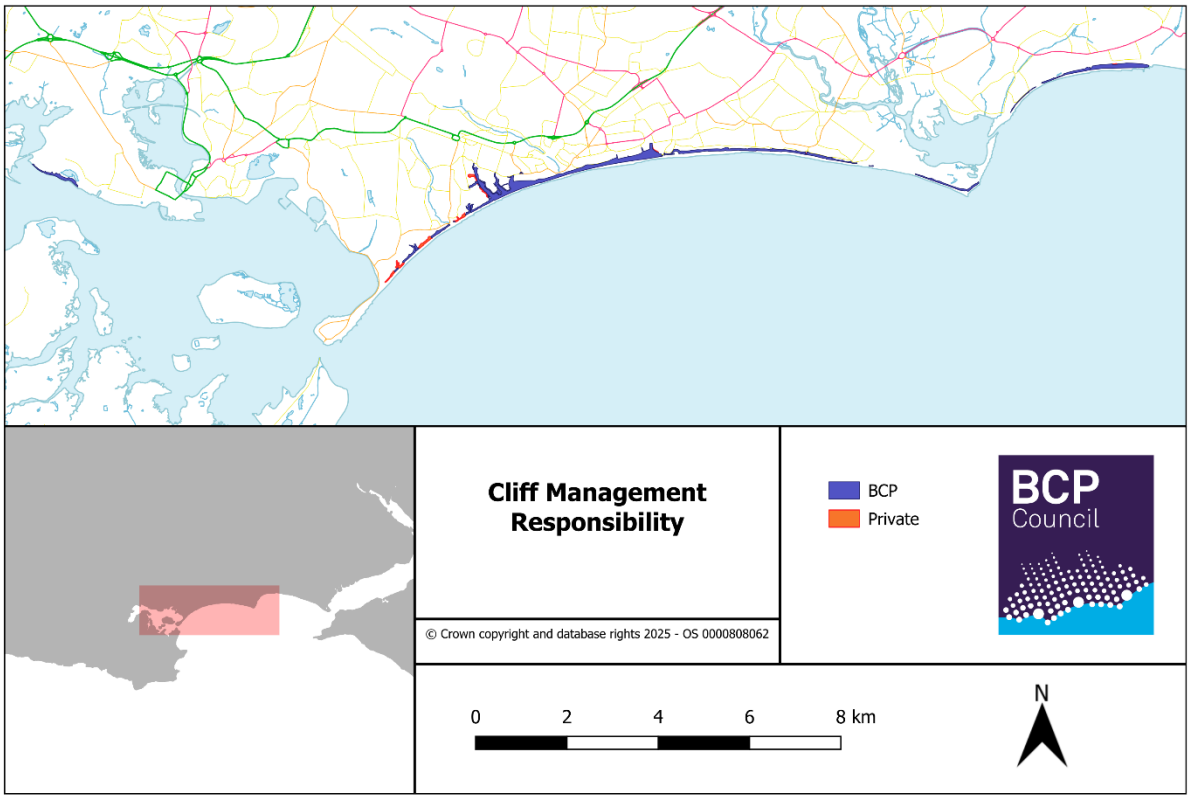

Figure 2 Sea cliffs and chines management responsibility along the BCP coast

4. Since the late 19th century, we have been building coastal defences along the shoreline at the base of the cliff to prevent coastal erosion. Whilst the introduction and evolution of coastal defences along the base of the cliffs have been very successful in stopping coastal erosion by marine action, they were not successful in stopping cliff instability landwards of the coastal defences. Cliff slips and falls were still occurring throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century, including most recently at West Cliff on 9th and 19th October 2024, and East Cliff on 28th November 2024 and 30th January 2025 adjacent to the slip at East Cliff lift that occurred in April 2016.

5. The distinction between coastal erosion and cliff stability/instability (which relates more to landslips) is significant for the management of the sea cliffs and chines along the BCP coast.

6. If we were to stop maintaining coastal erosion defences along the BCP coast, these defences would eventually fail and this would lead to the resumption of cliff retreat that, over a 100 year timescale, would put around 7,000 properties at risk of coastal erosion across the BCP coast. However, we are able to access central Government funding to provide coastal defences along the shoreline/base of cliffs via FCERM Grant in Aid (GiA) to stop this risk arising.

7. In reality therefore, although much of the BCP coast is protected against coastal erosion by seawalls, groynes and beach nourishment located along the base of the cliffs, these coastal erosion defences do not stop landslips that are the result of groundwater driven cliff instability. We therefore still regularly see landslips and falls along much of the BCP

coast albeit to a lesser scale than if the sea was still able to attack the base of the cliffs When these events occur they pose a risk to life, property and infrastructure.

8. However, unlike coastal erosion, dealing with landslips caused by cliff stability issues is not eligible for funding from central Government via FCERM GiA. In fact there is no national funding available at all for managing this. Rather the funding to deal with cliff stability / landslip issues is the responsibility solely of the landowner or responsible operating organisation, which as noted in paragraph 3, is largely BCP Council in this case.

9. As noted above, from the mid/late 19th century coastal defences have been constructed along the shoreline of much of the BCP coast to prevent coastal erosion. However, these coastal erosion defences did not stop the groundwater driven cliff instability issues along the coast. The clay layers within the cliffs are a significant factor in this regard which together with perched water tables were found to have provided the primary sliding mechanism to a number of cliff falls and landslips in the past. Given this, past engineering efforts have also introduced various forms of cliff drainage and stabilisation works including pinning and netting, slope regrading and installation of over 700 sand drains along large sections of the BCP coast.

10. Despite these efforts, we still have fairly regular cliff instability failures along the BCP coast, albeit smaller in scale and less often than if we have not coastal defences and full coastal erosion was able to occur.

11. As noted above, the management of this residual coastal instability risk is not eligible for FCERM GiA and so is reliant on BCP Council funding. A consequence of the funding required for sea cliff and chine management largely having to come from BCP Council is that, as this is not a statutory requirement and as budgetary pressures have grown, it has in the past not always been prioritised, meaning that it can take years to address and remedy cliff instability failures.

12. The Cliff Management Strategy is still in development and aims to be completed by March 2026. At its core is treating the cliffs as an asset system and applying an asset management system approach to their management. This involves establishing systematic and repeated inspections to assess whether cliff stability issues are present and whether existing cliff stability measures are functioning as they were designed to do. In addition, we undertake regular inspections across the seafront, to report any signs of cliff instability that may develop. Regular inspections of cliff drainage systems built into the cliffs also take place to identify any maintenance and/or monitoring requirements.

13. This information is then reported to a new Cliff Management Working Group (CMWG) that has been formed to better deal with the integrated issues of cliff management across BCP. The CMWG regularly brings together officers from all services in BCP that have a role in managing aspects of the sea cliffs and chines, and includes:

    - the Seafront Service who are responsible for managing people and services including: general visitors and access (including land trains and cliff lifts), beach huts, catering concessions and sports clubs.

- Environment service who undertake things like cliff vegetation management under the Natural England approved Higher Level Stewardship scheme to systematically remove invasive species and reintroduce native species to enhance ground cover and cliff stability. NB: This Higher Level Stewardship funding is the only other sources of external funding BCP Council receives to manage the cliffs.

14. The focus of the CMWG is to review and discuss the latest cliff inspection findings and recommendations and to prioritise actions to address issues identified. Actions recommended may range from communicating with private landowners and establishing cliff monitoring works, to enlisting geotechnical consultants to undertake detailed stability assessments and if necessary, the detailed design of stabilisation measures. Actions taken following this process in the last 2 years have cost BCP Council in excess of £750k and include:

- GPS cliff monitoring by the South West Flood & Coastal team;

- Commissioning expert advice such as stability assessments, structural assessments and / or detailed design of stabilisation measures;

- Cliff maintenance work; and

- Portman Ravine Emergency Works involving physical intervention to remove partial slip and stabilise cliff face.

15. In order to address some of the issues being identified in the immediate term, one off funding of £1.446m has been allocated from reserves for cliff management over this financial year and next. It is planned to prioritise this funding on activities including:

- A rolling programme of inspection, maintenance, recommissioning and replacement (where necessary) of over 700 sand drains and other cliff drainage systems located in different sections of cliff, including along various cliff zig zag paths/access steps such as those at Tofts, Fisherman's Walk, Manor Steps, East Cliff and Highcliffe as doing so can greatly reduce risk at relatively low cost; and

- Detailed assessment of areas identified as being of concern by visual inspection, and design and implementation (subject to cost / availability of funding) of any recommended remediation measures, including at West Cliff / West Cliff Lift, Honeycombe Chine and Pinecliff Gardens, so that areas can be made safe for the public use of such areas and enable seafront operations to resume.

Options Appraisal

Do not invest in sea cliff and chine management along the BCP coast

16. This will lead to ongoing cliff falls and landslips, posing risk to life, property and infrastructure along the cliff top and along the base of the cliffs (i.e. promenade, beach huts and concessions), as well as access routes from top to bottom of the cliffs (i.e. steps, zig zag paths and cliff lifts).

17. As a result we will see more closures of roads, suspension of parking and partial / full closure of sections of promenade, etc.

18. As well as being disruptive to residents, businesses and visitors, it will also lead to loss of income to BCP Council (e.g. loss beach hut revenue) and increased spend on incident management and fencing/diversions to ensure public safety. The Seafront Service currently generates a surplus of more than £6m/yr from commercial facilities and services.

19. This can be further exacerbated by the perception that the seafront is closed to visitors due to the way such events are portrayed in the media with associated negative impacts on the local tourism sector as well and reputational damage to BCP Council.

Undertake investment in sea cliff and chine management along the BCP coast

20. Investing in the proactive, evidence-based management of the sea cliffs and chines along the BCP coast will mean we will be able to ensure effective maintenance of existing stabilisation systems is occurring, reducing the risk of future cliff falls and slips occurring.

21. This won't fully prevent cliff falls and slips occurring, but will ensure we are doing everything in our power to minimise the risk to people, property and infrastructure. It will also reduce the risk of loss of income to BCP Council from having to respond to such events and having to close beach huts etc.

Summary of financial implications

22. Currently there is no base budget for sea cliff and chine management. However, if annual funding was earmarked for this area it will enable steady progress to be made in tackling the issues identified to date and over time reduce the risk of future cliff falls and slips requiring sudden requirements for funding to be found in an emergency situation as well as reducing the risk of lost revenue to BCP Council. The need for future funding allocation to sea cliff and chine management should therefore be considered as part of ongoing medium-term financial planning.

23. At the present time, £1.446m of BCP Council funding has been allocated, and it is proposed to utilise this one-off funding amount in the near term to progress priority items identified through the CMWG.

Summary of legal implications

24. There is no legal duty on BCP Council to undertake cliff stabilisation and associated cliff management works. However, failure to do so will have implications for public safety and leasehold agreements, as well as insurance premiums etc.

Summary of human resources implications

25. The implementation of this approach requires geotechnical expertise to be retained within the BCP Council FCERM team (South West Flood & Coastal) in order to provide the technical advice on risks and priorities to the CMWG, and to also then aide the effective management of consultants and contractors.

26. The South West Flood & Coastal team currently employs a Principal Geotechnical Engineer and Graduate Geotechnical Engineer who lead on these aspects for BCP Council.

Summary of sustainability impact

27. The purpose of the BCP Cliff Management Strategy is to provide an integrated, sustainable approach to all aspects of cliff management across the BCP coast.

28. The ongoing implementation of the approach, processes and procedures that the cliff management strategy has developed will require ongoing investment by BCP Council to ensure this integrated, sustainable approach to managing the risks of cliff falls and slips occurs.

Summary of public health implications

29. Investment in sea cliff and chine management across the BCP coast will reduce the risk of cliff falls and slips which can and do cause mental health stress in those affected, for example be that through risk of loss of property or loss of access along the seafront due to path closures etc.

Summary of equality implications

30. There are no equality implications of this recommendation.

Summary of risk assessment

31. Without investment in sea cliff and chine management across the BCP coast, there will be an ongoing risk (that with climate change could increase) of further cliff falls and slips. These will impact people, property, businesses and infrastructure, and lead to loss of revenue and sudden need for emergency, unplanned funding for BCP Council. Staff resources would be in demand for reactive measures, delaying other pre-planned activity.

Background papers

a) Cliff and Coastal Erosion Management Across the BCP Coast. Paper presented to the BCP Council Environment & Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee (9 July 2025).

    - Full minutes of the 9 July 2025 Environment & Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee for this agenda item.

Appendices

There are no appendices to this report.