

Portfolio holder decision – Portfolio holder for Environment & Sustainability – 19 February 2025

Maintenance & Management of Hurst Spit

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>Hurst Spit is located at the eastern end of Christchurch Bay, forming the boundary with the Western Solent. Historically the Spit has been maintained by NFDC, particularly since the completion of the capital project undertaken in 1996.</p> <p>Although NFDC has no Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk (FCERM) duty or land ownership responsibilities to undertake maintenance works, they have in the past been undertaken under the powers of the Coast Protection Act (1949) and when NFDC has been in receipt of grant-in-aid (GIA) funding and the necessary licences.</p> <p>As the ability to attract sufficient GIA funding has now significantly reduced, along with a lack of contribution funding from landowners and other organisations, NFDC can no longer commit to undertaking any required maintenance works.</p>
Recommendation(s)	<p>1. That it be noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFDC is not a landowner of Hurst Spit • NFDC has no statutory duty to undertake FCERM <p>2. That when maintenance and repair work is required to Hurst Spit, NFDC approach those landowners and organisations that have an operational interest in Hurst Spit to gauge their interest and likely financial support to enable repair works to be undertaken.</p> <p>3. That NFDC will consider undertaking maintenance and repair works to</p>

	<p>Hurst Spit if in receipt of external funding (Grant in aid or other) and if works are required to protect against flood and erosion risk and if the appropriate licences and permissions are in place.</p> <p>4. That the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability write to the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs to express concerns over the potential impacts of damage to Hurst Spit and the lack of funding provision to undertake repair works.</p>
Reasons for recommendation(s)	<p>That due to a lack of external funding NFDC cannot commit budget to undertaking maintenance works on an asset that it has no responsibility for.</p> <p>Should funding become available through GIA or other external contributions then NFDC will consider undertaking maintenance works.</p>
Ward(s)	Milford and Hordle, Pennington and Lymington
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Geoff Blunden – Environment & Sustainability
Strategic Director(s)	James Carpenter – Place, Operations & Sustainability
Officer Contact	<p>Steve Cook Service Manager Coastal 02380 285311 Steve.cook@nfdc.gov.uk</p>

Introduction and background

1. This Portfolio Holder Decision report is to consider current and future management and maintenance of Hurst that may or may not be undertaken by NFDC.
2. This follows the completion of recent engagement (November 2024) of the draft preferred pathways for the Hurst Spit to Lymington Coastal Strategy. The engagement has resulted in there being increased media interest and information requests to NFDC regarding past, current and future management of Hurst Spit, that has historically been undertaken by NFDC.

Location

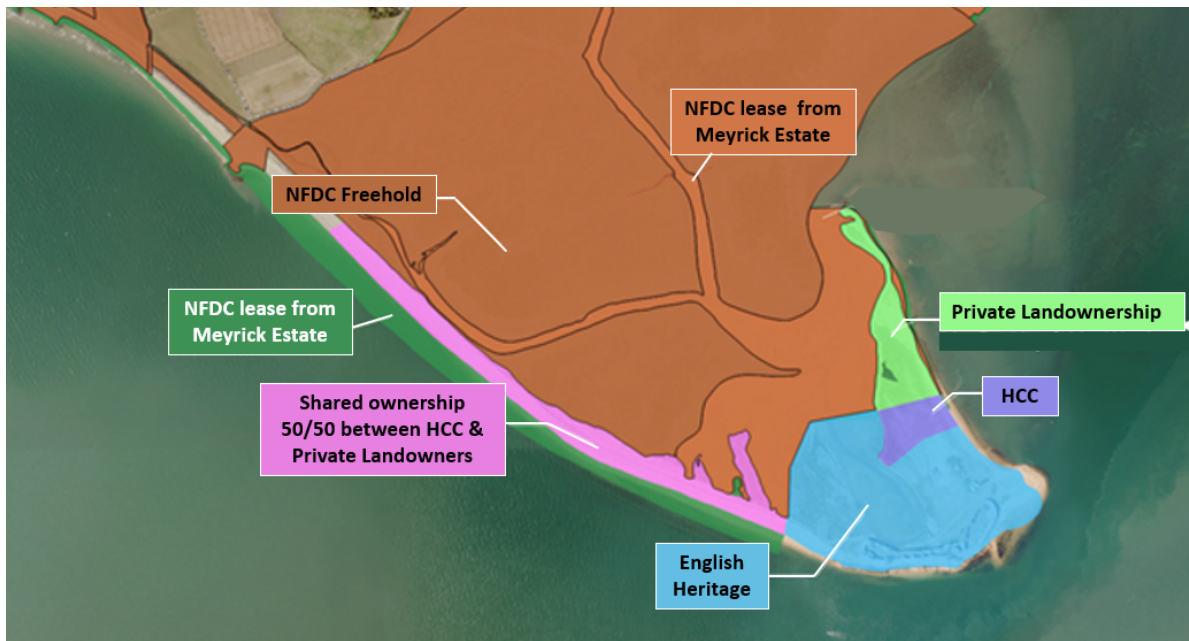
3. Hurst Spit is a prominent coastal feature that lies to the northeast end of Christchurch Bay, forming the boundary between the Western Solent and Christchurch Bay. The spit extends approximately 2.5 km south easterly from Milford-on-Sea beach to Hurst Castle and then northwards for approximately 1km to the entrance to Keyhaven River.

Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Function

4. Hurst Spit is sometimes aptly referred to as "The Guardian of the Western Solent", due to its role in sheltering the Western Solent from severe wave action during south-westerly storms. The exact level of protection offered by Hurst Spit is difficult to quantify, but there is evidence from numerous sources (numerical modelling, comparisons of the 1989 vs 2014 storms and anecdotal evidence) of resulting impacts following storm damage.

Ownership

5. Hurst Spit is jointly owned by several landowners including Hampshire County Council, English Heritage and private individuals. NFDC have permissive powers to undertake works to Hurst Spit under the Coast Protection Act 1949. Although NFDC does not own any section of Hurst Spit, NFDC own the freehold over the saltmarshes immediately to the north and leases the foreshore of Hurst Spit and the river channel to the lee (from Meyrick Estate) where moorings are located, as shown below:



The Management of Hurst Spit

6. Hurst Spit was once a natural shingle barrier but can no longer be termed a natural feature in the purest sense. Increasingly, through the 1980's Hurst Spit required significant artificial beach renourishment and reprofiling to survive after severe storms. By the early 1990's, Hurst Spit was considerably lower than it had been in the past.
7. The current management policy within the relevant Shoreline Management Plan is to hold the line. This though is not supported through any funding provision.
8. The Hurst Spit Stabilisation Scheme was undertaken by NFDC in 1996/97, with funding provision via a Government grant of 75%, with the remaining 25% being funded through contributions from HCC and NFDC.
9. Along with NFDC undertaking the capital project in 1996, subsequent beach management operations (in the form of beach recycling) have been undertaken to maintain Hurst Spit to a standard of service that protects against wave attack and flood risk in the lee of Hurst Spit.
10. These works have been undertaken by NFDC as the Coast Protection Authority through the powers afforded under the Coast Protection Act (1949). It should be noted that NFDC has no legal or statutory duty to undertake flood and coastal erosion risk management activities at Hurst Spit or for any other areas of the New Forest coastline, nor any obligation to maintain Hurst Spit. The powers to act are purely permissive, with funding provision being made via the environment

Agency as GIA to support the delivery of the beach management recycling operations, while NFDC has provided officer support to enable the delivery of these operations. This being through the development of business case applications to seek funding and in designing, procuring and supervising the works.

11. As the powers to act are purely permissive, NFDC may or may not intervene (and undertake works). The decision to intervene is generally driven by funding availability, risk and appropriate licensing and permissions being in place. Consideration is also given to any environmental restrictions that may limit the ability or timing of undertaking any works.
12. The subsequent (maintenance) works undertaken refer to regular recycling operations, undertaken approximately every one to two years, to restore the volume and maintain a defined cross-sectional profile of Hurst Spit along sections which are prone to erosion. Further intervention works have been undertaken at times as result of storm impacts, such as the 2014 Valentine's storm.
13. More recently, however, the funding of maintenance works has significantly decreased through the GIA system. The most recent works of recycling material from North Point were undertaken in the Autumn of 2022, funded via GIA (£13,000) and supporting contributions from NFDC, English Heritage & HCC to meet the works costs of £58,000.

Current State of Hurst Spit

14. A record number of storms, during the 2023/24 storm season, left a section of Hurst Spit severely depleted. The eroded section lies immediately west of the hinge point and is a known weak point of Hurst Spit. The width of Hurst Spit had been reduced to ~6-7m in this section and was as narrow as 4m in places. With such a narrow crest width the standard of service is significantly reduced. As it is the section most frequently impacted by high energy waves, the level of protection is reduced meaning the ability to withstand storm attack during winter storms is severely compromised.
15. In considering the undertaking of recycling works to address the increased risks in section 13 above the coastal team engaged with those organisations that have a land ownership, operational or asset interest on Hurst Spit to seek funding contributions for the works. Both organisations supported a beach recycling operation but confirmed that they were unable to contribute to the works on this occasion.

16. A further discussion took place on 16th December 2024 with a representative of the private landowners to principally update on the draft preferred pathways for the strategy. At this meeting the landowner was made aware of the NFDC proposal to not undertake maintenance works due to a lack of funding. They made it very clear that they had no intention to contribute and considered that maintenance / funding as a local authority issue.
17. More recently, from late January 2025, Hurst Spit, along with other coastal sites was severely impacted by Storms Eowyn and Herminia with significant narrowing of the crest taking place over an approximate distance 300m. At the narrowest point, the crest width has been reduced to ~1m, effectively now only allowing pedestrian access. No vehicle access is possible for the management of Hurst Castle, which is likely to have a significant impact on their operations.
18. Initial site inspections have been undertaken by the Coastal Team, along with a post storm survey by the Channel Coastal Observatory Team. Once fully assessed and analysed the team will be in a more informed position to better understand the volume changes and impacts.
19. Should repair works not be undertaken, Hurst Spit will almost certainly become further depleted and damaged, particularly in the event of further storms. There is a risk that this may lead to increased flood risk at Keyhaven and Lymington, total loss of access along Hurst Spit (important for recreation, wellbeing and tourism) as well as the potential to affect the operational viability of the NFDC moorings.

NFDC Management Policy

20. It is proposed that the Portfolio Holder agree that NFDC will not undertake maintenance of Hurst Spit under the current conditions. NFDC may continue to undertake maintenance of Hurst Spit if the following conditions apply in future:
 - a. Funding is available either through GIA or contributions to support required works **and**
 - b. Works are required to protect against flood and erosion risk. Noting that NFDC will not undertake works to enable vehicle or pedestrian access along Hurst Spit, **and**

- c. Appropriate and necessary assents and licences are in place to enable works to progress, including Natural England assent (to work within a site of special scientific interest, (SSSI)).

21. It is noted that due to the funding constraints (through Central Government or other organisations and stakeholders that own or have an operational interest in Hurst Spit) that there are currently no proposals for NFDC to undertake any maintenance works that may be required as a result of recent storm impacts. It is recommended that NFDC again approach interested parties on the matter of funding.

Corporate plan priorities

22. The Place priority no.2 refers to "Protecting our climate, coast and natural world", although this decision does not totally align with this, it should be noted that the corporate plan does state that we will work with partners to deliver Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management strategies to set actions for protecting our coastline.

23. NFDC has been and continues to work with the Environment Agency to deliver the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy, this being to consider future risk and the actions and opportunities that can be delivered (subject to funding) to better protect and enhance this coastal frontage.

Options appraisal

24. NFDC has a limited annual coastal maintenance budget and needs to focus this resource to assets and areas of greatest risk that are in the ownership of the Council.

25. The only available options are to undertake or not to undertake the required maintenance works to repair Hurst Spit.

26. In lieu of those organisations who have a land ownership or operational interest in Hurst Spit not willing or able to financially contribute then NFDC is unable to undertake any required works.

Consultation undertaken

27. Although this decision paper is in relation to the current and future management operations of Hurst Spit by NFDC it does link closely to the Hurst Spit to Lymington Coastal Strategy.

28. Issues and concerns raised around current NFDC management have come about as a result of the November 2024 strategy engagement to seek views on the draft preferred pathways for the management units across the strategy frontage.

29. Engagement has been undertaken internally through discussions with the Assistant Director for Place Operations, Strategic Director for Place, Operations and Sustainability, as well as the relevant Portfolio Holder. The consensus was an agreement to NFDC no longer undertaking maintenance works when not in receipt of GIA funding and /or contributions from other interested organisations.
30. Milford on Sea Parish Council have been made aware of this proposal through regular coastal briefings undertaken with the Parish Council and NFDC ward members.

Financial and resource implications

31. NFDC has an annual asset management and capital investment programme, which it uses to deliver corporate plan priorities and maintain the authority's assets. Consideration was given to Hurst Spit Works as part of the 2025/26 annual budget preparation, but for the reasons already outlined (no NFDC ownership and lack of partner funding), no funding was allocated to this work.
32. Should there be any progression towards undertaking maintenance repairs (works) following recent further damage (caused in recent (2025) storms) it is likely that costs would now be significant. Any available grant aid will be limited due to the small number of properties at flood risk. Further work would be required to fully understand these requirements, including:
 - a. Full assessment of damage and volume changes
 - b. Suitable sources of material – possibly through crest trimming, North Point recycling and importing of material
 - c. Natural England assent would be required

Legal implications

33. Under the Coast Protection Act 1949 there is no statutory duty on NFDC to undertake flood and coastal erosion risk management activities.

Risk assessment

34. There are a number of risks associated with not undertaking maintenance works to Hurst Spit because of a lack of external funding:
 - a. Lower standard of service afforded by Hurst Spit to land, assets and properties that lie within the lee of Hurst Spit.
 - b. Increased flood risk through breaching and overtopping.
 - c. Potential loss of use of Keyhaven moorings.

- d. Operational impacts to Keyhaven River
- e. Impacts on designated sites.
- f. Loss of access to Hurst castle, for both recreational purposes and operational purposes.
- g. Impact on the future management of Hurst Spit though the Hurst to Lymington Strategy.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

- 35. Hurst Spit is located within a highly designated coastline comprising Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), Ramsar and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).



- 36. Full long-term environmental impacts are considered through the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy.

Equalities implications

- 37. None identified.

Crime and disorder implications

- 38. None arising from the recommendations.

Data protection/ Information governance/ ICT implications

39. None arising from the recommendations.

New Forest National Park implications

40. It should be noted that Hurst Spit, along with the coastal frontage through to Lymington lies within the national park area.

Portfolio holder endorsement

41. I have agreed to the recommendations of this report.

Signed: **Cllr Geoff Blunden**

Dated: 19 February 2025

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None

Date on which notice given of this Decision – 19 February 2025

Last date for call in – 26 February 2025