

Meeting with Ian Thomas, Pevensey Coastal Defence Ltd – March 2020

Pevensey Coastal Defence Ltd is a consortium of three contractors who have a contract with the Environment Agency to maintain sea defences from the Harbour to Cooden Beach. The contract ends in 2025 but the Agency has the option of extending it for a further 10 years. Although the contract states that negotiations could begin as late as May 2024, Mr Thomas would like to get the process underway sooner. Mr Thomas also thinks that it will be more expensive to maintain the sea defences on this stretch of costs in the next few years. The number of storms is increasing, and the sea level was rising, albeit very slowly. The EA quantify the actual sea level rise every five years using data from several sources, but primarily national network gauges at Newhaven and Dover.¹

There are two sources for the shingle which is used to reinforce the beach. First, the dredger provides shingle from the Owers Bank off Littlehampton. The dredger had mechanical problems last summer, which coupled with a stormy winter, has meant no sea-dredged shingle was added. It is expected that double the usual amount will be added this year to compensate. The other source is shingle that accumulates in the harbour entrance and builds up between the most easterly of Eastbourne's groynes and the harbour entrance. Sea defences further west mean that there is less shingle coming into circulation from cliff falls and eventually rounding Beachy Head.

Ian Thomas does not think that groynes are generally an economic proposition as they cost up to £150,000 each and their effectiveness is doubtful – see www.pevensey-bay.co.uk/feature.html. The sea tended to hollow one side of the groyne while the other side fills up until shingle spills over and moves along the coast at the same rate as if the groyne wasn't there. That is, they only retained shingle to the height of the groyne. Mr Thomas does not think the beach northeast of Sovereign Harbour is particularly vulnerable as a rock revetment extended under the shingle to within 100 yds of Martello Tower No.64.

The current Shoreline Management Plan for this stretch of coast is to “hold the line”. Maintaining the existing shoreline depends on sufficient funds being available. Therefore “holding the line” is an aspirational policy. If the Environment Agency is not given sufficient resources by government, then it may not be possible to “hold the line”. The amount of work required to “hold the line” also depends on the weather experienced year on year.

As national sea defence policy comes from Defra, then it might be wise to start a conversation with Eastbourne MP Caroline Ansell, who is Parliamentary Private Secretary to Defra Secretary, George Eustice, and is therefore well placed when it comes to deciding what will happen after the end of the current contract. Pevensey Parish Councillors have been asking similar questions for several years, so joining forces with them may help raise the profile of the issue

End

¹ <https://www.ntsif.org/products/sea-level-trend-charts?name=Newhaven>
<https://www.ntsif.org/products/sea-level-trend-charts?name=Dover>