

## **Reinstatement of the A379 at Slapton Line**

Report of the Chief Officer for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste

***Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.***

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that Cabinet approves the proposed reinstatement of the A379 at Slapton Line, plus other associated remedial works, funded by the dedicated, emergency funding provided by Central Government.

### **1. Summary and Purpose of Report**

This report sets out the intended approach to the reinstatement of the length of the A379 at Slapton Line, which was closed following storm damage in early March 2018.

### **2. Background**

On the evening of 1<sup>st</sup> March and early morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> March, Storm Emma caused a combination of gale force easterly winds, surge conditions and extremely high waves. Coupled with high spring tides, the result was storm conditions with an estimated return period of between 1 in 50 and 1 in 100 years, which is even more significant than earlier storm events experienced at Slapton Line in 2001 and 2014. This caused the partial loss and undermining of the carriageway along the central section of the A379 to the north of the Slapton village junction. Damage was sustained over more than 400 metres, on either side of the length of road which had been previously re-aligned.

It was the original damage to and reinstatement of the road back in 2001 which provides the context for the current proposals at Slapton Line. In the light of the strong local concerns about the fate of the A379, key organisations, community and landowning interests established the Slapton Line Partnership. This partnership commissioned and, in 2004, published the first iteration of a Coastal Zone Management Study, which set out a future approach to the management of Slapton Line in the face of ongoing coastal change. This included proposals for the realignment of further lengths of the A379 to prolong its anticipated lifespan. Devon County Council (DCC) responded by obtaining planning consent in 2007 for the potential realignment of two sections of the road on either side of the original road reinstatement. An ecological management scheme was put in place to avoid difficulties and delays linked to the Slapton Ley Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR) in the event of a future need to undertake this work.

There has been an ongoing process of dealing with coastal resilience and adaptation measures at Slapton Line since then. Storms experienced in the winter of 2013/14 prompted significant investment in coastal defence works along Slapton Line, particularly at Torcross. More recently, options for future coastal management have been formulated through a draft 'Beach Management Plan', for which national funding will be sought later this year. An attempt was also made in January 2018, albeit unsuccessfully, to obtain European Structural Investment Funds to support road realignment and other highway works at Slapton Line.

### 3. Approach to Reinstatement of the A379 and Associated Remedial Works

Even before Storm Emma had fully subsided, site inspections and discussions about potential reinstatement of the A379 commenced. It quickly became apparent that the road between Torcross and Slapton Junction, whilst covered in shingle and other storm debris, could be cleared and re-opened, which happened over the following week. In contrast, the damage to the north of the Slapton turn-off required the closure of the road, with the only feasible approach to its reinstatement through realignment of the carriageway a short distance to the west.

The initial view was that the plans put in place in 2007 had accurately predicted the locations of greatest vulnerability and might allow for a relatively fast-track approach to the reinstatement of the road based on the existing planning permission. DCC was requested to pursue this option through a meeting of the Slapton Line Partnership held on 7<sup>th</sup> March and, later that same day, it was confirmed that emergency funding would be provided by Central Government for this purpose. Preparatory works started almost immediately with clearance works and have continued with various surveys, including unexploded ordnance, to inform the planning submission.

Since then it has become apparent that a revised design will have to be adopted for the northern section of the proposed realignment, which will require the submission of a new planning application, supported by an environmental impact assessment. The plan provided as Appendix 1 illustrates the general location of the two sections of damaged highway to be reinstated, to the either side of the 2001 realignment. The **southern realignment**, shown by Appendix 2, will be implemented based on the 2007 planning consent. The **northern realignment, shown by Appendix 3**, varies the 2007 design by extending it by a further 110m to the north and, for part of its length, by a few metres to the west.

In addition to the construction of the new road alignment, additional remedial work will be necessary to remove the remains of the damaged carriageway, large sections of which have collapsed onto the beach, to reinstate this as part of the Slapton Ley NNR and to provide a revised alignment for the South West Coast Path.

Based on the work undertaken to date, the steps and anticipated timing for the implementation of the proposed road reinstatement are as follows:

Scheme design, costing and contract preparation	May 2018
Preparation and submission of planning application and associated environmental impact assessment	May / Early June 2018
Select scheme contractor	June 2018
Undertake realignment construction work	Summer 2018
Finalise restoration of original, damaged, carriageway	Early Autumn 2018
Re-open A379	By late Autumn 2018

It should be noted that these timings may be affected by the progress of the planning application.

#### **4. Consultations/Representations/Technical Data**

Since early March there has been ongoing discussion with key organisations represented on the Slapton Line Partnership, as well as with the local Member of Parliament (MP) and with the Department of Transport. This consultation has been necessary to inform the approach to the proposed reinstatement of the A379 and how this relates to longer-term planning for Slapton Line. Of particular significance has been discussion with the landowner, the Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust, the Trustees of which have provided in-principle agreement to the proposed scheme, based on the support expressed by the wider Slapton Line Partnership. Detailed negotiation is ongoing with the Field Studies Council, the managers of the Slapton Ley NNR, and with Natural England, to inform the detail of the planning application.

The next stage of public / stakeholder consultation will be through the planning application for the revised design of the northern realignment. However, this will focus on the detail of the proposed design, given that the principle of the realignment was established through the planning consent obtained in 2007.

#### **5. Options/Alternatives**

There are two main alternatives to the proposed scheme:

- a) The first is to leave the northern section of the road permanently closed. The ultimate loss of the A379 along Slapton Line is inevitable. However, the strong local desire to repair and reinstate this strategic transportation link is recognised by the Slapton Line Partnership and is consistent with the approach currently advocated by the Coastal Zone Management Study.
- b) The second would be to implement both sections of the road realignment based on the 2007 planning consent. Whilst simpler and quicker to implement, it would leave the road highly vulnerable to future damage.

Several stakeholders have suggested the reinstatement of the road with a single lane carriageway. However, there is no clear practical benefit to this and it would present a series of technical, safety and environmental challenges. Questions have also been asked about the possible installation of new sea defences to protect the road, but these would not be viable from a cost perspective and would conflict with national policy.

#### **6. Financial Considerations**

DCC has been provided by the Department of Transport with £2.5 million of capital funding for the required works at Slapton Line. Although no detailed scheme estimate is available, as yet, the current indication is that this will fit within the capital sum awarded. In the event of there being any residual funding, consideration will be given to how this might, potentially, be used to implement a range of other highway-related resilience and adaptation measures at Slapton Line, which have been proposed through the recent development of the Beach Management Plan.

Following detailed design, estimated costs and timelines, a financial letter will be submitted to the Member for finance and property, in order to enhance the capital programme, funded by Department for Transport flood resilience fund grant.

## **7. Sustainability, Equality and Public Health Considerations**

The proposed works take the form of a highway management scheme which seeks to reinstate an existing road. As such, no significant equality and public health issues are likely to result from the intended implementation of the scheme, although the interim closure of the road is creating difficulties for local businesses and the community. These social and economic issues would be compounded in the event of the road not being reinstated.

Slapton Line is a highly sensitive environment given its national wildlife and geomorphological importance, recognised by its SSSI and NNR designations. It also lies within the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The issues were addressed through the environmental assessment linked to the 2007 planning permission and are being updated and refined through the further work to accompany the new planning application.

## **8. Legal Considerations**

To ensure compliance with planning legislation and national / local planning policy, the elements of the proposed scheme which vary from the design approved in 2007 will be subject to a new planning application. This process will also ensure that many other legislative requirements, such as those relating to environmental issues, are appropriately addressed. Permission for the new highway alignment and its construction will be provided through a legal agreement with the landowner.

## **9. Risk Management Considerations**

The shingle ridge along which the A379 runs at Slapton Line is a naturally evolving feature, which is influenced by coastal processes, exacerbated by the effects of climate change and sea level rise. Both the Coastal Zone Management Study and the Beach Management Plan recognise the severe risk presented by coastal change but suggest measures to prolong the lifespan of the A379 in the interim. This includes the potential realignment of the most vulnerable stretches, including the currently damaged length. Whilst the proposed design presents, what is believed to be, a viable option for the implementation of the scheme within the strict environmental constraints of the site, there can be no certainty about how long the realigned road might persist.

## **10. Reason for Recommendation/Conclusion**

To speed-up the delivery of the scheme, Cabinet is asked to approve the reinstatement of the A379 now, on the general basis set out above and illustrated by the appendices, subject to planning permission being granted for the revised design of the northern realignment. These proposals, based on a modified version of the scheme first approved in 2007 and facilitated by the dedicated funding provided by Central Government, is considered to represent the most practical option for a, relatively, rapid reinstatement of the road in a manner consistent with the protected environmental status of the area. This scheme will be implemented as part of a wider suite of measures proposed by the Slapton Line Partnership to improve resilience and support adaptation in the face of ongoing coastal change.

Meg Booth  
Chief Officer for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste

## **Electoral Divisions: Kingsbridge**

Cabinet Member for Highway Management: Councillor Stuart Hughes

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

Contact for enquiries: Peter Chamberlain

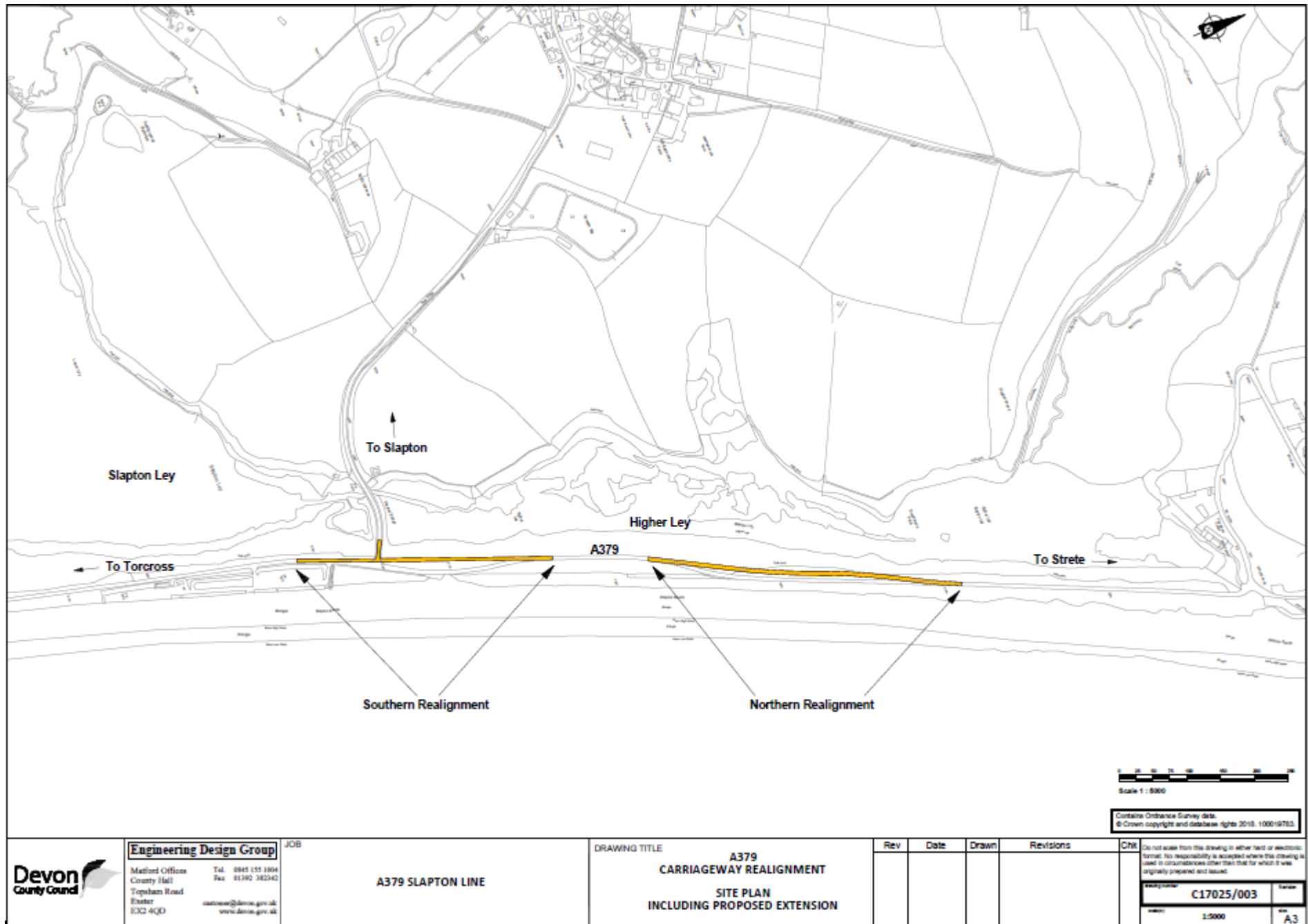
Room No. AB3, Lucombe House, County Hall, Exeter. EX2 4QD

Tel No: (01392) 383000

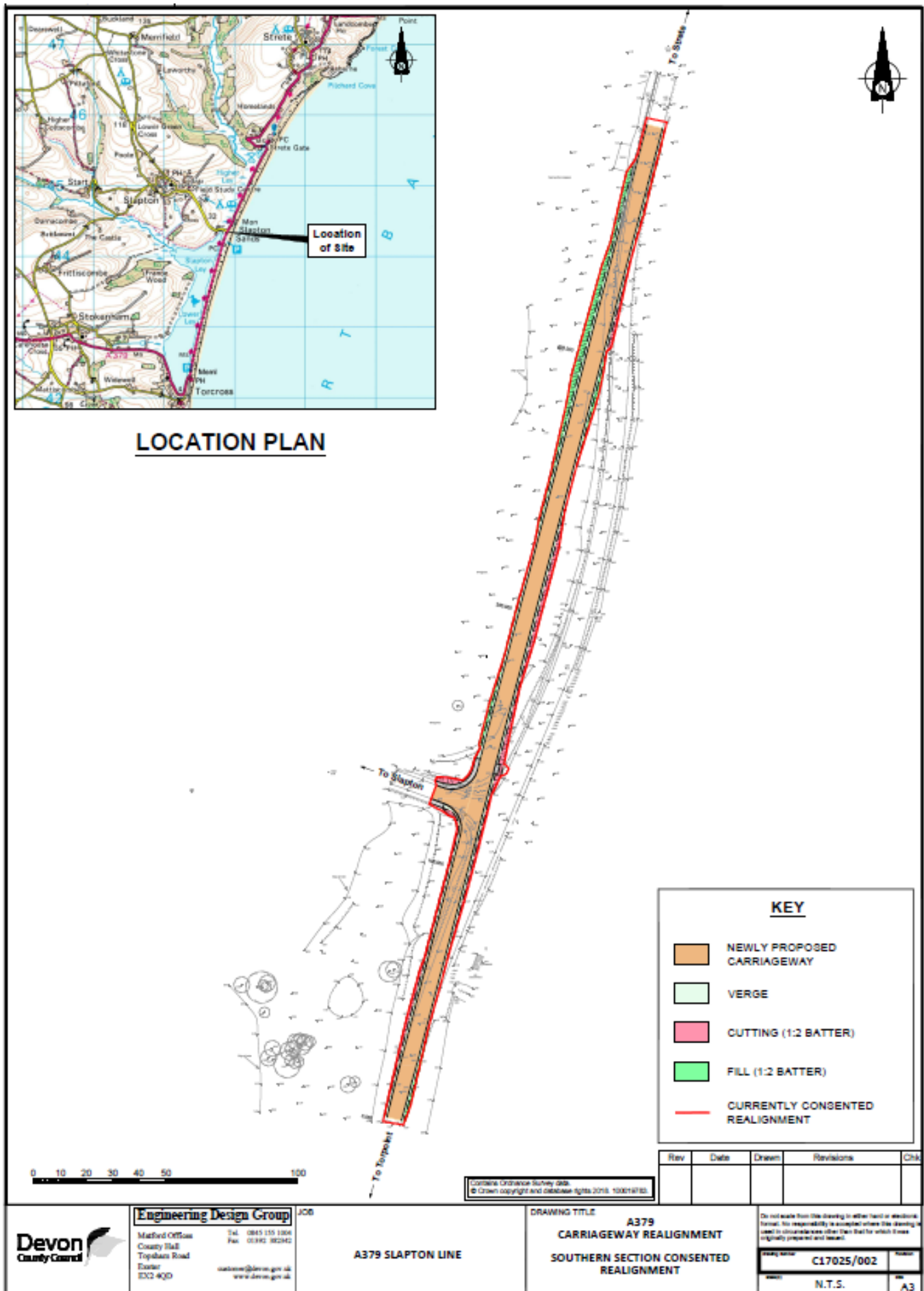
Background Paper	Date	File Reference
Slapton Coastal Zone Management Study	2004 (First Iteration) to 2006 (Final Report)	Available via Slapton Line Partnership web site at: <a href="http://www.slaptonline.org/library/index.php">http://www.slaptonline.org/library/index.php</a>
Slapton Sands Beach Management Plan	Draft information from 2016 onwards	Available via Slapton Line Partnership web site (as above)
Documents relating to 2007 planning permission for realignment of the A379	Various – from 2006 to 2014	Stored on MasterGov by DCC Development Management Team

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# Appendix 1 to HIW/18/31 – Proposed Reinstatement of Two Damaged Lengths of the A379 at Slapton Line



# Appendix 2 to HIW/18/31 – Southern Realignment Based on 2007 Planning Permission



# Appendix 3 to HIW/18/31 – Northern Realignment Modified from 2007 Planning Permission

