

Thurnham Coastal Erosion update

This is a joint statement issued by the Environment Agency, Lancaster City Council (LCiC), Lancashire County Council and Historic England.

Recent erosion

Our organisations are aware of recent examples of erosion which have impacted the Thurnham coastline, stretching from Crook Farm (approx. SD4312655119) to Lower Bank House Farm (approx. SD4312753087).

The flood protection measures along the coast are a combination of raised sea defences, which are inspected by the Environment Agency, and natural high ground adjacent to Cockersands Abbey which falls under the jurisdiction of LCiC as the Coastal Protection Authority. Both are protected from wave action by stone pitching on the seaward side. A map demonstrating the approximate location of these flood protection measures has been included in Appendix A.

Reviews conducted over the summer had identified areas of erosion impacting the stone pitching along both the raised sea defences and natural high ground. Continued erosion may have implications on the coastal path which is a designated Public Right of Way.

Raised Defences

The Environment Agency's approach to the raised defences is informed by the Shoreline Management Plan and the specific management recommendations listed for this location (11C2.4). The current approach states *'Where protection is currently provided by coastal defence structures that might be maintained or repairs if funding allows, but not replaced if they fail or reach the end of their design life'*. This enables the Environment Agency to use permissive powers to bid for funding to carry out repairs to the sections of raised defences on behalf of the riparian owners.

Although the Environment Agency has received funding to carry out repairs in previous years, this funding is not guaranteed. Decisions around national funding requests are based on the demonstrable benefits any work will provide to reduce flood risk to properties. On occasions the Environment Agency have been able to utilise limited area budget to fund repairs in lieu of national funding, however financial restrictions mean that this is no longer an option.

October 2024 Emergency Works

Bids for national funding to carry out repairs during the FY 24/25 and 25/26 were unsuccessful. Because of this, and in recognition of the flood risk presented by a potential breach scenario, the Environment Agency undertook emergency repairs to the raised defences at two specific locations.

The emergency work had been made possible in part due to the condition of the Janson's Pool outfall, which could exacerbate flood risk if a breach occurred (repair to the outfall is scheduled for 2025). The nature of the emergency funding meant that repairs could only take place at locations presenting imminent significant flood risk to properties. There was no scope to extend the works to other sections of raised defence, or high ground which did not meet these criteria.

Before and after images of one of the damaged sections:



Before



After

Due to the present funding restrictions, this will likely be the last Environment Agency led intervention at this location. The Environment Agency are mindful to work with stakeholders and partners, including riparian owners and the Thurnham and Glasson Flood Forum, to explore alternative arrangements for future maintenance.

The Environment Agency will continue to routinely monitor the raised sections. If anyone notices areas of accelerating damage or new areas of damage, then these should be reported to the Environment Agency's Incident Hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Natural High Ground

Under the Coast Protection Act, Lancaster City Council (LCiC) have permissive powers in respect of managing coastal erosion and existing defences however, responsibility for the coast and protection of land remains with the landowner/occupier.

The erosion that is occurring to the high ground does not pose an immediate threat to people or their homes. The surrounding land is at a level that will continue to provide protection against tidal flooding.

Risk to people and property are the key considerations when allocating funding to flood defence or coastal protection schemes. As there are presently no properties that would benefit from investment here, LCiC are not able to undertake any significant repair works to the revetment or defences.

On previous occasions the Environment Agency have been able to and carry out small maintenance works to the stone pitching in front of the high ground on LCiC's behalf whilst repairing sections of raised defences. However, due to the limitations of October's emergency works similar repairs were not possible. Considering present funding restrictions, any future repairs to the high ground would need to be assessed as part of alternative arrangements for the maintenance of the coastline.

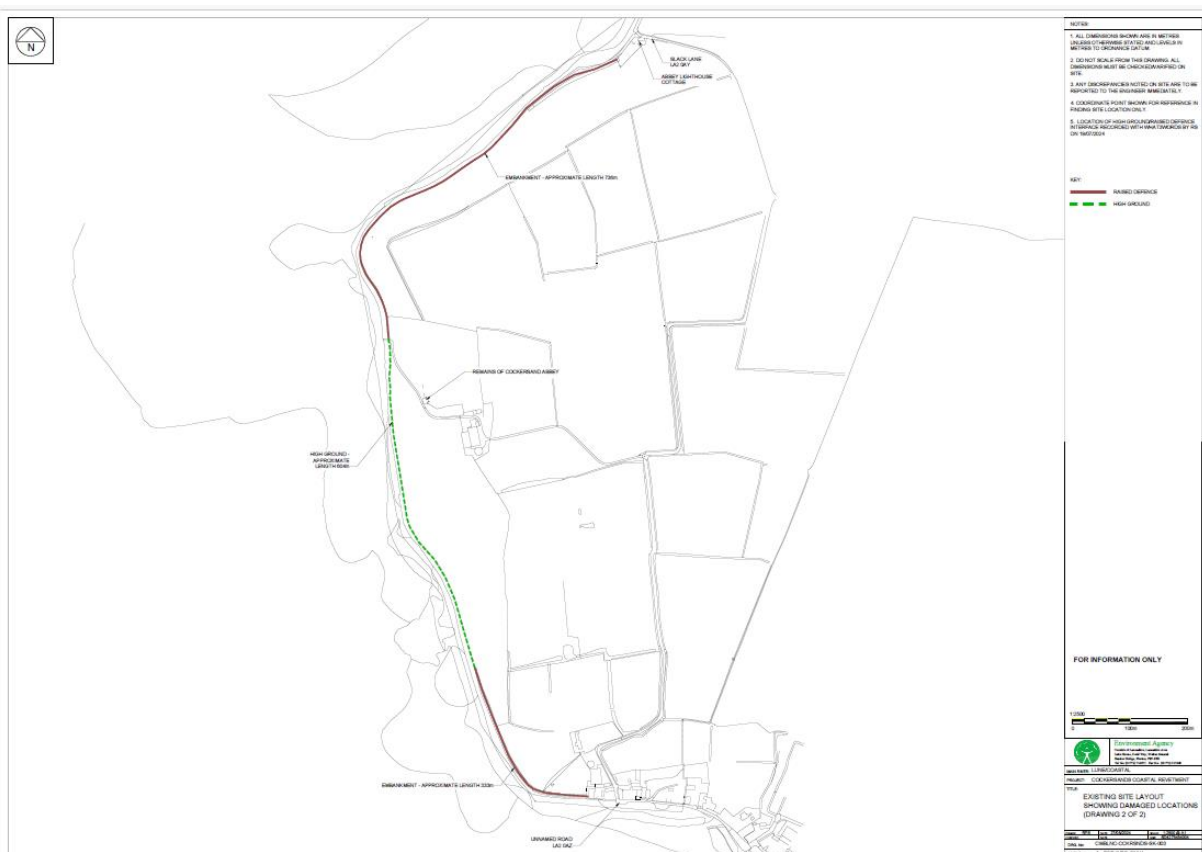
Public Right of Way

The emergency repair work carried out in October 2024 has helped to reduce the present risk facing the coastal footpath at this location. However, without continuing maintenance of the existing coastal defences the recorded line of the Public Right of Way and the King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail will be impacted by coastal erosion over the coming months. The Lancashire County Council Public Rights of Way Team will erect signage to raise awareness regarding coastal erosion where appropriate and monitor the impacts on public access.

Cockersands Abbey

A detailed survey of the Abbey site carried out in 2008 suggests that the key remains – those of the church and the buildings of the cloister - are not under great threat from erosion. However, some archaeological remains associated with the earliest monastic activity on the site, and parts of the Abbey's main drain, which carried wastewater out to sea, have been affected. Historic England has commissioned archaeological recording in the past and will assess the need to do so in the future if further erosion affects archaeological remains. It continues to monitor the condition of the site and will be contacting the site owner to discuss the need for further measures to protect the site or respond to episodes of erosion.

A



appendix A – Map of coastline showing location of raised defences and High Ground.