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SLAPTON COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT STUDY



Business Survey Report
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Introduction

- 1.1 The Village of Slapton lies midway between Kingsbridge and Dartmouth and is half a mile inland from Slapton Sands where the A379 route runs parallel to the coast and connects the villages of Torcross and Strete. This road runs on a shingle ridge which separates the sea at Slapton Sands and a fresh water lagoon, Slapton Ley.
- 1.2 Slapton has a general store, two public houses, village community venues (Hall Church and Chapel) the Slapton Ley Field Study Centre and two local campsites.
- 1.3 All business in Slapton and the surrounding settlements and catchment areas were contacted with a postal questionnaire. Questionnaires were sent with a covering letter explaining the purpose of the survey together with a reply paid envelope. In total 462 questionnaires were sent to businesses in the postal areas of Kingsbridge, Dartmouth Slapton and Chilmington.

Questionnaire Response

- 1.4 In the event, 109 questionnaires were returned equating to a 23.6% response rate. Postal surveys often achieve a response rate of no more than 10 - 15% and this response rate was therefore seen as acceptable.
- 1.5 A total of 18 responses were received from the Slapton/Torcross area, providing a similar response rate. The types of respondents from this area were holiday accommodation providers, pubs and eating establishments.
- 1.6 This short report analyses the response first in terms of response to road issues, with comment included from the wider area and the Slapton/Torcross area; then with analysis of the business context of respondents. This provides some insights into the types of businesses replying and indicates the ways in which road issues may affect their business.

Comments on Impact of Road Issues and Options

Businesses affected by the previous closure of the A379

- 1.7 Of the overall total of responses 62 (out of 109) said that they were affected by the closure of the A379 with 39 saying they were not affected. 8 failed to answer this question.

11 out of the 18 responses from Slapton/Torcross said that they had been affected by the temporary closure; 6 had not.
- 1.8 27 felt that they had suffered a loss of business, 25 said that this had been seen in the reduced turnover. 18 felt that the closure had made it difficult for staff to travel to and from work and 47 felt that access by customers and suppliers had been severely affected.

Of the Slapton/Torcross responses, 8 said that they had lost business; 10 had experienced difficulties in accessing supplier or customers; 4 had found difficulties for staff travelling to work; and 10 (the majority) had experienced loss of turnover.
- 1.9 Some indication was given by 29 respondents of the amount turnover was reduced by. 13 said that turnover was down by £2,500, 8 said that turnover was reduced by £2,500 to £7,500, 4 said that turnover was reduced by £7,500 to £15,000 and a further 4 seeing more than £15,000 reduction in turnover. This indicates an overall norm of approximately £6,000 loss of turnover per business as a result of closure - but the information from Slapton/Torcross area respondents indicated that losses may have exceeded £10,000 per business on average.

The importance of the A379 shingle ridge to business

- 1.10 The respondents who answered this question , 84 said that their business would be affected by the closure with 25 saying they would suffer no effect.

Nearly 90% of responding businesses in the Slapton/Torcross area said that retention of the A379 is important to their business.

The improvement of the existing inland route

- 1.11 92 respondents answered this question with 55 saying that improving the inland road was not an acceptable alternative and 37 saying that this would be an acceptable alternative providing that the road was widened to allow two lane traffic in all areas and no just a series of passing places.

Nearly 80% of Slapton/Torcross businesses said that the improvement of the inland route is not a suitable replacement for the A379 shingle ridge route.

The abandonment of the shingle road together with no significant improvements to the inland road

- 1.12 Of the 109 respondents 90 gave their comments. Respondents indicated that they foresaw various impacts of abandonment of the road. These have been grouped into 7 broad categories of impact:

Impact would be found in:	Number of Respondents	Proportion of Responses
Local Economy including tourism dependent on the existing road	18	16.5%
Loss of direct route to Slapton, Stokenham Strete Dartmouth and/or Torcross	24	22.0%
Loss of outstanding natural beauty	5	4.6%
Extra travel times for Residents, Customers, Employees and Pupils	18	16.5%
In favour of second road if the route is two lanes in all places	10	9.2%
Loss of Business which will lead to closure	15	13.8%
No impact	2	1.8%

- 1.13 Comments specifically received from businesses in the Slapton Torcross area indicated a range of problems from abandonment of the route. The main comment was the poor access of the alternative route. Businesses could see an increase in staff having difficulties getting to work and also possible recruitment problems in the future. The length of journeys would be increased for their suppliers as well with possible suppliers decreasing their deliveries to the area.
- 1.14 Businesses in this area see that they are the ones that are likely to be most affected by any diversion of the existing route and therefore with the most to lose financially. Two businesses from Beeson both said that the closure would increase the length of trips by themselves taken to Dartmouth, thus not having that time availability to spend on business matters at home.
- 1.15 There was one business response from Beesands that was very disturbed at the prospect of the road closure as they had just expanded the business and are relying on the road staying.
- 1.16 The current inland route has a series of passing places which result in slow moving traffic. All businesses that commented on this issue said that if this route was to be adopted the road must be at least two lanes if not more in all places.

Characteristics of Businesses Surveyed

Type of Business Responding

- 1.17 Not all respondents gave a clear description of their type of business. Those which were identified were as below

Business Type	Number of Respondents	Proportion of Total
Accommodation Providers	17	15.5%
Eating Establishments	6	5.5%
Attractions	1	0.9%
Pubs	5	4.5%
Other	41	37.6%

- 1.18 The 41 "other" businesses identified ranged from Taxi companies to Garden Centres.
- 1.19 The majority of the overall response came from Kingsbridge (69) where businesses did not feel that the closure of the road would affect their business. However they did feel that the closure of the road would affect tourism and trade within the immediate area of Slapton, Torcross and Beesands.

Opening Times

- 1.20 Respondents were asked to indicate their opening times throughout their trading year. Out of the 109 received the vast majority are open all year round. 3 schools are closed in August, 1 outdoor activity centre is closed January, February and December, 1 accommodation business closes January and February with a further one closing in January only.

Length of time operating in this location

- 1.21 Respondents were asked to indicate how long they had been in business in the area. The majority had been open for more than 5 years, and only 6.4% for 2 years or less.

Length of Time in Operation	Number of Respondents	Proportion of Total
Less than 1 Year	3	3.2%
1 - 2 Years	3	3.2%
2 - 3 Years	2	2.1%
3 - 4 Years	7	7.6%
4 - 5 Years	10	10.9%
Over 5 Years	83	76.1%

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Area

Strengths

- 1.22 90 businesses expressed views about the strengths and weaknesses of the area. 61% said that the major strength was that the area is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. 28.3% felt that the location was good from a business perspective, that being their own proximity to a town - though some commented particularly on very local advantages.

Weaknesses

- 1.23 57% of the respondents commented on weaknesses. Many of these comments related to local issues - for example car parking in Kingsbridge and Dartmouth was mentioned by 10.9% and others commented on their poor location at the top of a hill.
- 1.24 These answers are much less significant than the overriding issues of poor transport and poor communications. Respondents that commented on a more strategic weakness to the area - 41% commented on poor transport both through roads being too small for the volume of traffic and poor public transport links. However when asked the question "Are you likely to move away?" 73.3% said they would not move away.

Staff employed within the businesses

- 1.25 A total of 697 full time workers and 333 part time workers are employed by the 109 businesses responding (an average of nearly 7 full-time and over 3 part-time employees per business). The total number of employees shown to live outside the area was 371, or over 3.5 employees per business responding

Growth over the last 3 years

- 1.26 100 of the 109 respondents gave some information. 43 said that business had increased and 16 that it had decreased; 7 said that business had stayed the same.

Principal Customers

- 1.27 Businesses have a mixture of customers/clients from a wide base within the South Hams. 46 Businesses said that their trade was tourist based but many also had a mixture of clients from local residents, residents within the South Hams and businesses within the South Hams.

Business Supplies

- 1.28 The majority of businesses have their supplies sourced and/or delivered outside of the South Hams, but some of these businesses have suppliers from within the South Hams area. Some of the cafes, restaurants, pubs and Hotels said that they prefer to source their supplies locally with 38% coming from the towns of Kingsbridge and Dartmouth. Only 14.2% of the businesses have locally sourced supplies only.

Expansion Plans

- 1.29 96 respondents answered this question. 42 said that they were considering expansion, and 54 said that they had no expansion plans. The nature of expansion tended to be plans for new extensions to increase covers in some cafes, restaurants and pubs. Those that did not foresee expansion gave reasons of retirement and their premises were too small. On the whole not many reasons were given.

Destinations of business travel

- 1.30 Of the 109 respondents, a variety of business travel destinations were identified. Several businesses cited a variety of destinations visited most commonly. 61 businesses indicated business travel destinations within the Dartmouth/Kingsbridge area, 50 within the South Hams and 50 were identified outside the South Hams.

Tourism Industry Answers

- 1.31 This question related specifically to businesses in the tourism industry, serving visitors to the area. Businesses who responded to this question apparently served a total of 491,975 customers visiting the area. The averages spend per head varied from £5 per head to £50 per head.

- 1.32 Very few businesses identified where their visitors come from although 22 did state that their visitors were from outside the South Hams.

New facilities, Projects or Measures to minimise adverse affect on the local community and local business

- 1.33 The questionnaire included an opportunity for suggestions of measures that could be considered to minimise adverse impacts of route changes. There were few positive suggestions however a further emphasis at this point was that any inland route should be an "A" class road, as the shingle ridge road is now.

Conclusions

- A good response rate was achieved (24% of all those questioned)
- Roughly 50% of respondents were tourist based businesses
- 17% of responses were from businesses in the Slapton/Torcross area
- In total, respondents employed over 1000 people in the area
- Generally businesses had a positive view of the future, with many reporting increased business, and many are considering expansion
- The majority of respondents had been adversely affected by previous closure of the A379 - of those indicating the level of lost turnover, the norm was approximately £6,200 lost, possibly over £10,000 per business in the Slapton/Torcross area
- The vast majority of respondents expect a negative effect on their business if the shingle ridge road closes, and a majority say that improving the inland road is not an acceptable alternative. This view is particularly strong in the Slapton/Torcross area
- Over 30% of respondents in the whole survey area said that the inland route would be acceptable if it is widened to two lanes throughout; but nearly 80% of respondents in Slapton/Torcross said that this route would not be acceptable even if improved.
- Few suggestions were made about ways to minimize adverse effects of the route is changed.