Spring works under way to bolster coastal defences in Sussex

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Spring coastal defence works are under way in Sussex, shifting shingle and installing £250,000 of timber to protect 3,000 homes through 2027.

Major coastal defence works are under way along the Sussex coastline as the Environment Agency begins its annual spring programme to protect thousands of homes and businesses from flooding.

Part of a major investment scheme to better protect Pevensey and Eastbourne from rising seas and stronger storms, the project has started to receive seven lorry loads of timber that will be used later this summer to improve wave screens along the Pevensey frontage.

The Environment Agency has also launched its annual shingle bypassing operation, moving 5,000 cubic metres of shingle, roughly the equivalent volume of 50 double decker buses, from Eastbourne to Pevensey Bay. Six tipper trucks are making up to 96 trips a day, travelling four miles to relocate shingle that accumulates at a rock spur in Eastbourne due to longshore drift. In total, Pevensey Beach will receive around 12,000 cubic metres of shingle from various sources this year.

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The shingle itself acts as the primary sea defence. This bypassing work prevents shingle from clogging Sovereign Harbour and replenishes the Pevensey Bay frontage, where the material then migrates naturally along the coast via longshore drift, benefiting communities the entire length of the frontage.

On site, the team is also using a hybrid bulldozer to profile and build up shingle defences along the crest, saving around 30% in fuel use thanks to its part-electric engine.

The current works form part of the interim phase of the scheme (2025–2027), which sees operational beach activities along the Pevensey Bay frontage. This phase will protect more than 3,000 homes and businesses from flooding while longer-term plans are developed. More than £8 million is being invested this year alone, as part of our recently announced national flood funding settlement to strengthen coastal defences between Holywell and Cooden Beach.

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The scheme in the long term (2027-2037) will be one of the most significant coastal flood risk projects in the country, covering a varied 15km stretch of coastline (Cooden Beach to Holywell) that includes chalk cliffs, shingle beaches, promenades, heritage sites and a large marina, and will protect more than 5,000 homes across the next decade.

Amber Carr, Beach manager of Pevensey Bay, said:

> Spring is one of our busiest times on the beach, and it’s great to see the programme in full swing. The shingle bypassing works are a smart way of keeping sediment where it needs to be — rather than letting it build up at the harbour; we’re moving it along the coast to where it does the best.

> The delivery of timber for the new wave screens is another important step, and we're looking forward to seeing that work come together later in the summer. This is a dedicated local team doing vital work to keep coastal communities safe.

Nick Gray, programme sponsor for major projects in Solent and South Downs, said:

> This is one of the most important coastal flood risk projects in the country, and the spring works represent a significant milestone in our long-term commitment to protecting communities along the Sussex coast.
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> The recently confirmed £8 million investment is a clear signal of the government's ambition to strengthen our coastal defences, and I'm proud that we're delivering that in a way that is not only effective but sustainable — using innovative equipment and local expertise to reduce costs and our carbon footprint. With up to 18,000 properties to protect over the coming century, this work really matters.

Looking ahead, the medium-term phase (2027–2037) will bring the Eastbourne and Pevensey Bay frontages together under a single programme, including upgrades to existing groynes, before a long-term strategy takes effect from 2037 to address projected sea level rises of over a metre by the end of the century, with the potential to safeguard up to 18,000 properties over the next 100 years.

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Background

- The Pevensey Bay to Eastbourne coastal defence scheme covers 15km of the Sussex coastline.
- The interim phase (2025–2027) is being delivered with contractor VolkerStevin.
- The medium-term phase runs from 2027 to 2037; the long-term strategy begins in 2037.
- The initiative is being delivered by the Environment Agency in partnership with Eastbourne Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, Rother District Council, and Wealden District Council.
- Regular monitoring and surveys of the beach will continue throughout the project to track shingle volumes and movement.
- The beach will remain open to the public throughout the works, though visitors should follow safety guidance around working machinery.
- Residents living in flood risk areas are urged to check their flood risk, sign up for free flood warnings and keep up to date with the latest situation at https://www.gov.uk/check-flood-risk

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/spring-works-under-way-to-bolster-coastal-defences-in-sussex