

If you were standing with us on West Beach on 1st February 2021 you would have experienced the largest and most dangerous erosion and flooding event since the February 2020 storms.

But in 2020, the weather and sea conditions were completely different. In 2020, we had Storm Ciara, and the conditions were wild. But on 1 February 2021, there was no storm, in fact there was no wind and the surface of the sea was glassy – see photos below – except for large ‘tsunami’ type waves roaring in creating havoc.

| | FEB 2020 | FEB 2021 |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Wind | Force 10 | Force 0 |
| Tide Height | 5 mtrs | 4.8 mtrs |
| Wave Height | 4 mtrs | 2 mtrs |
| Time between Waves | 20 seconds | 28 seconds |

Erosion damage and flooding are caused by high energy waves, which are created by large swells coming from the west up the English Channel as a result of major storms in the Atlantic and Western Approaches days earlier. These swells sweep round the Isle of Wight and generate the unique and damaging wave forms which are often experienced on Hayling Island – and are loved by wind- and kite-surfers!

It is known that the warning signs for a serious event are a tide height of 4.8 mtrs or over and a gap between waves of 20 seconds or over, which will be amplified by storm activity. Low Air Pressure will increase tide height by up to .6 mtr during storms.

The conditions on 1 February 2021 were not forecasted. No warnings were given and the West Beach access gate remained open. The devastating results are there for all to see.

As these events are unpredictable and their frequency and severity unknown, there is no way to predict the speed of the erosion on our beach. Havant Borough Council’s (HBC) Coastal Partners (CP) have already acknowledged that they are ‘surprised by the rate of erosion.

Let’s be clear – this erosion is a consequence of the removal of the West Beach sea defences and the HBC decision to allow the shoreline from the Coastguard revetments to Gunner Point to erode. We cannot see anything to prevent this erosion and flooding continuing at an accelerating rate driven by climate change. (The Environment Agency predicts a sea level rise of in excess of 1 mtr out to 2100.)

CP are currently working on a Coastal Strategy for Hayling (due in 2022) but the ‘no intervention’ status for the western half of the beach is unlikely to change. But we believe our ‘unique’ exposure to erosion risks requires an equally-balanced ‘unique’ Coastal Strategy. <https://coastalpartners.org.uk/authority/havant/>

If this column has caused you concern, we strongly recommend you email coastal.team@havant.gov.uk

