

Portsmouth Harbour - Storm Ciaran Damage & Blockhouse Repairs - Dec 2023

The original study, to determine repairs required to Blockhouse Wall, was due to complete in March 2021. With a revised date of early summer 2023, what is now known as the Jacobs Report already needs revising. On 7 Nov, the MOD issued this statement, post-storm:

"At this stage, all resource is focused on addressing the storm repair works. The Sea Wall Assessment Study (prepared by Jacobs) will need to assess the severity of the storm damage to determine whether this damage will impact on the options to be recommended"¹

If these assessments were to complete by, say, spring 2024, time is then needed to consider, consult, and finance. By way of comparison, the Southsea Coastal Scheme [SCS] took five years to complete this stage [2014-2019]. At Blockhouse, this stage might reasonably be shorter and perhaps be reduced to, say, three years, i.e. a decision to proceed by 2027.

The SCS, started in 2020, is now due to complete in 2029. Cost was originally estimated at £100M, coincidentally the reputed cost of the Blockhouse repair. Obviously there is no direct correlation between cost and time but they are not dissimilar projects. At Blockhouse, the physical length of the wall is shorter but the complexity is greater, and access more problematic. Time might be reduced by using more resources and a higher priority but further storm damage in the intervening period is almost inevitable. A very optimistic three years is pencilled in here.

Using these tentative dates, it will be 2030, at the earliest, before substantive sea defence is in place. Lacking, of course, is information on any other pertinent influencing factors. Take, for example, the increasing erosion over the centre of Hamilton Bank, see [report](#), pp. 7-8, denied by the MOD, but probably a major contributory factor in the recent hole formed under the radar mast. With limited foundations, and built on a sand and shingle bank, it has to be asked how much punishment the old fort can take? Further delays may prove terminal.

In my meetings with the Naval Base Commander in 2021, the loss of Blockhouse Fort and the potential risk to the harbour was discussed. As noted in the [report](#), p5: "... we are invited to accept that swift action, at the first hint of trouble, would effectively negate any such risk."

In a script which you couldn't really make up, the hole under the radar mast, caused by the storm in early November 2023, has enlarged significantly in the month since the event, increasing the damage caused, the costs involved and the time to repair - and subsequently, through undermining, has required closure of the main access road in the establishment.

Of course a temporary repair will buy time. But being forced to choose priorities at this stage indicates an overloaded and under-resourced staff; inadequately supported by a hierarchy, apparently divorced from the urgency of the situation. If this downward spiral is to be checked, a response would appear necessary on a wholly different scale, and 'swiftly'.

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¹ The 'options' process, intended by the MOD for handling the Jacobs report, see [report](#), p5, note 16, appears untenable when faced with ongoing damage.