

Camber Sands Beach Defence Survey

Public Perception Analysis

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History of Camber Sands

Camber Sands, located in East Sussex, England, is renowned for its expansive sandy beaches and distinctive dune systems. Historically, this area has been significant both strategically and culturally.

In the early 16th century, during the reign of King Henry VIII, the strategic importance of the Camber area was recognized due to its proximity to the port towns of Rye and Winchelsea. To defend against potential French invasions, Henry VIII commissioned the construction of Camber Castle between 1512 and 1514. Originally a small, round artillery tower overlooking the Camber anchorage, it was expanded between 1539 and 1544 into a larger, concentric artillery fort with a central keep surrounded by circular bastions. Despite its formidable design, the castle's military significance waned as the Camber area silted up, causing the coastline to recede and leaving the fortress inland and less relevant for coastal defense.



By the late 16th century, the silting of the Camber anchorage led to the decline of the area's prominence as a naval hub. The castle was eventually decommissioned in 1637 and partially dismantled during the English Civil War to prevent its use by opposing forces. Today, Camber Castle stands as a historical monument, offering insights into Tudor military architecture and the evolving coastline of Sussex.

In the 20th century, Camber Sands gained recognition for its natural beauty and recreational opportunities. The vast sandy beach and rolling dunes attracted tourists, artists, and filmmakers. Notably, the beach served as a filming location for movies depicting the Dunkirk evacuation, standing in for the French coastline due to its similar landscape. More recently, *The Great Escaper* filmed at a well-known bar in the village.

The Implementation of Sea Defences

The vulnerability of Camber Sands to coastal erosion and flooding necessitated the development of robust sea defence mechanisms. The most significant initiative in this regard has been the Broomhill Sands Coastal Defence Scheme, implemented between 2013 and 2015.

This £30 million project aimed to enhance flood protection for approximately 1,400 homes and over 100 businesses along a 2.5 km stretch of the East Sussex coastline. The scheme encompassed several key components:

- **Rock Revetment:** Construction of a 1.7 km rock revetment to absorb and dissipate wave energy, thereby reducing erosion and protecting the shoreline.
- **Wave Wall:** Erection of a new wave wall to prevent overtopping during storm events, safeguarding inland areas from flooding.
- **Shingle Beach Recharge:** Enhancement of 700 meters of shingle beach by importing and redistributing shingle material to bolster the beach profile and provide a natural buffer against wave action.
- **Timber Groynes:** Installation of eight new timber groynes, each 54 meters in length, to stabilize the beach and retain sediment, countering the effects of longshore drift.



The implementation of these defences was a collaborative effort involving the Environment Agency and contractors such as Van Oord and Mackley. The project was recognized for its innovative approach and received the Innovation Award at the 2016 Environment Agency Project Excellence Awards.

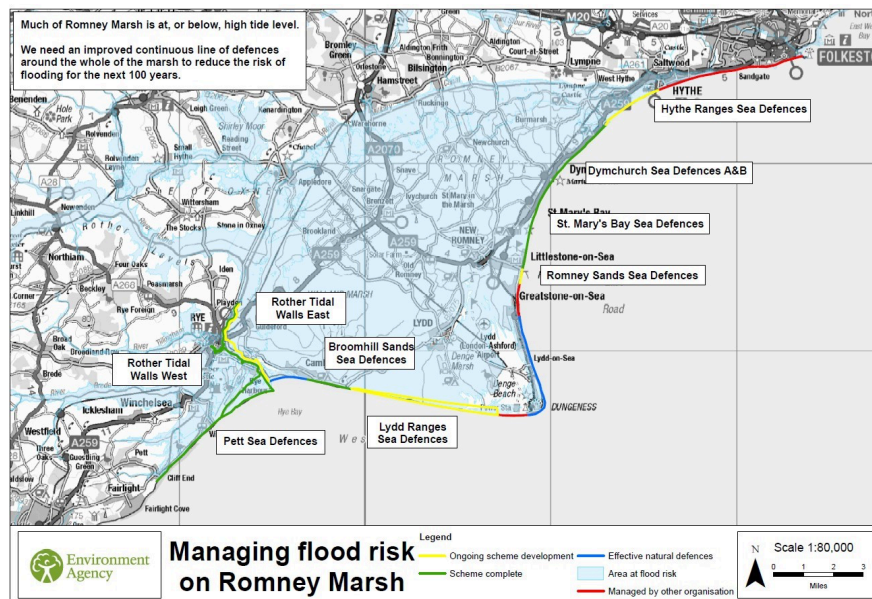
Why Sea Defences Are Needed

Camber Sands and the surrounding Romney Marsh area are particularly susceptible to coastal flooding and erosion due to their low-lying topography. Much of Romney Marsh lies around 1-2 meters below high spring tide levels, making it highly vulnerable to inundation.

Without adequate sea defences, the risks are substantial:

- **Residential and Commercial Impact:** Approximately 14,500 homes and 700 businesses are at risk of flooding, which could lead to significant economic and social disruption.
- **Critical Infrastructure:** Key infrastructure, including transportation networks and utilities, could be compromised, affecting both local communities and broader regions.
- **Environmental Concerns:** The area encompasses significant habitats and designated environmental sites that could be degraded or lost due to unchecked coastal processes.

The existing coastal defences, many of which have been in place since the early 20th century, are reaching the end of their design life. Ongoing maintenance is becoming increasingly challenging and costly, necessitating comprehensive improvements to ensure long-term protection. The goal is to reduce the flood risk from a 5% (1 in 20) chance in any given year to a 0.5% (1 in 200) chance, accounting for predicted sea-level rise and climate change impacts over the next century.



Survey Background

To assess public perception of the sea defences at Camber Sands, a comprehensive survey was conducted, targeting both residents and visitors. The objective was to gather insights into the community's views on the effectiveness, benefits, and drawbacks of the implemented sea defence measures.

The survey was designed to collect data without revealing the exact number of respondents, focusing instead on percentage-based results to maintain confidentiality. Participants were asked about their residency status, duration of residence (for locals), and their opinions on the sea defences' performance and impact.

This approach ensured a broad understanding of public sentiment, capturing diverse perspectives from long-term residents, newer community members, and visitors who frequent Camber Sands for recreational purposes.

Survey Data – Full Analytical Breakdown

Question: “Do you live in Camber?”

Summary of Purpose:

This question aimed to understand the demographic distribution of respondents in relation to their proximity to Camber Sands. By knowing whether individuals live in the area or are visitors, we gain insight into how local and external perceptions of the sea defences may differ.

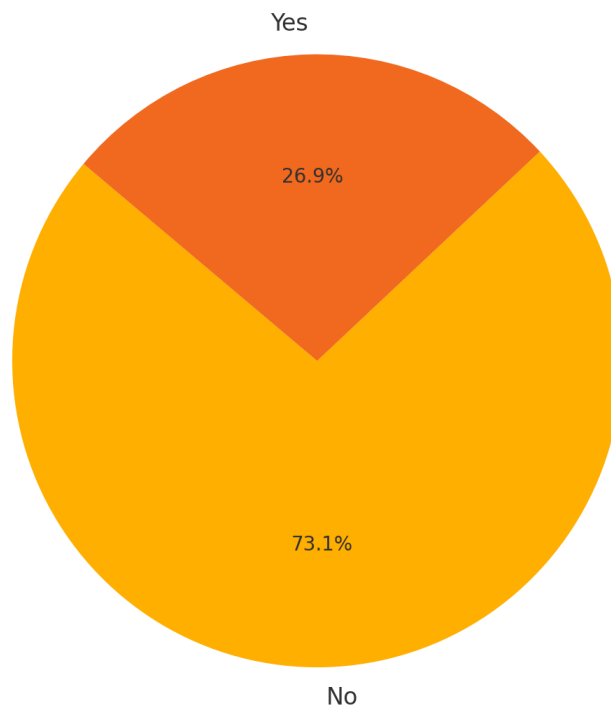
Results (Percentage-Based):

- **73.1%** of respondents said they **do not** live in Camber.
- **26.9%** identified as **local residents**.

Breakdown:

This distribution reveals that most of the input came from non-residents, likely frequent visitors or individuals from surrounding areas who interact with Camber Sands recreationally. However, more than a quarter of responses came from those who live in the area year-round, providing valuable insight into how ongoing exposure to the beach defences influences public opinion. The weight of visitor feedback also highlights how visual and experiential aspects of the sea defences matter to tourism.

Resident vs Non-Resident Distribution



Question: “If you live in Camber, how long have you lived there?”

Summary of Purpose:

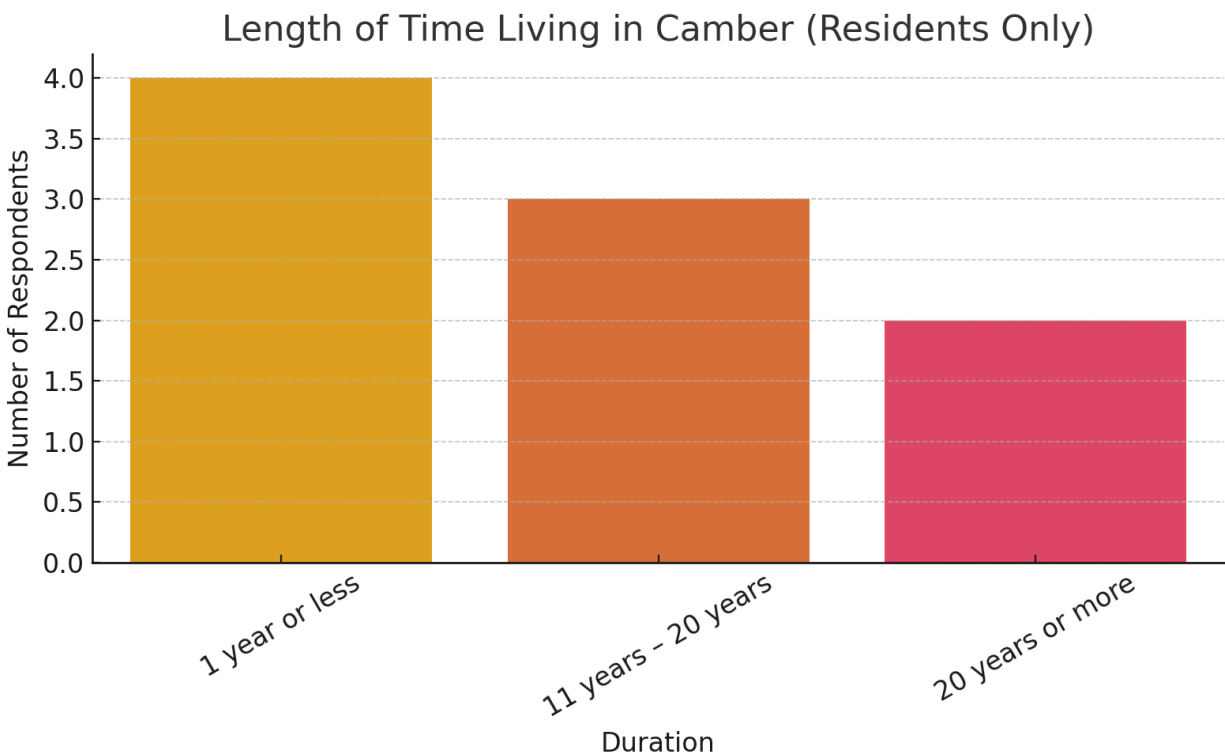
This question sought to assess whether perceptions might differ between long-term residents and those who are newer to the community.

Results (Residents Only):

- **44.4%** have lived in Camber for **1 year or less**
- **33.3%** have lived there **11–20 years**
- **22.2%** have been residents for **20 years or more**

Breakdown:

These figures show that nearly half of the resident respondents are new to the area, likely influenced by recent changes and developments, including the implementation of the sea defences. Long-term residents (55.5%) bring historical knowledge of the coastline and can compare current defences with previous conditions. This balance gives the dataset a rich mix of legacy perspective and fresh observations.



Question: “On a scale of 1 to 10, how effective do you think the sea defences have been at protecting the coastline?”

Summary of Purpose:

This was the only quantified rating question and aimed to capture a clear numerical perception of the sea defence system’s effectiveness from the public’s point of view.

Results:

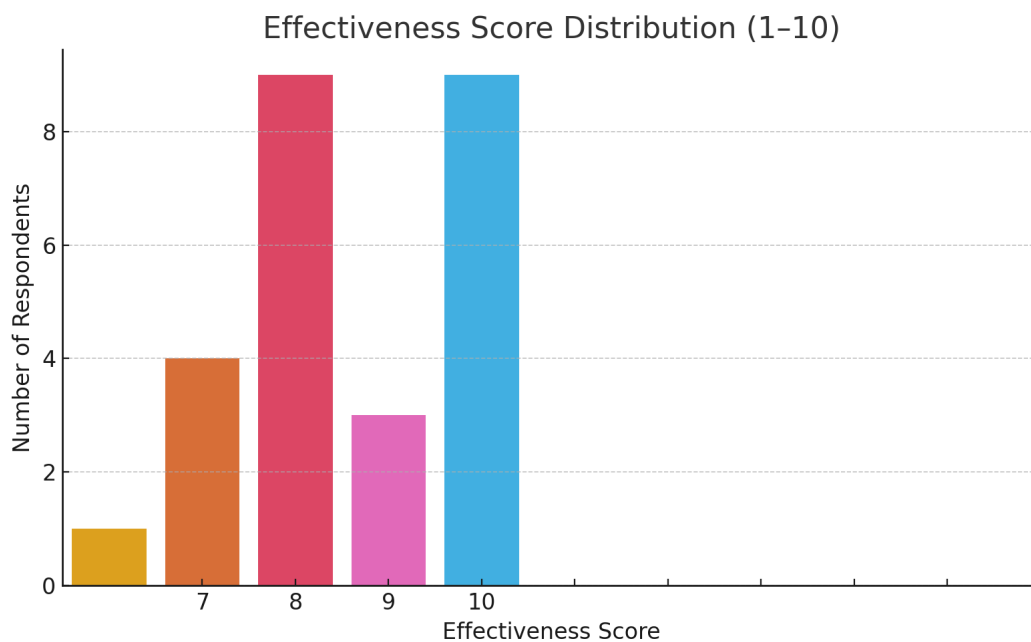
- **Average Score:** 8.6 / 10
- **Standard Deviation:** 1.24 (indicating consistency in opinions)

Distribution of Scores:

- **6 out of 10** – 3.8%
- **7 out of 10** – 15.4%
- **8 out of 10** – 34.6%
- **9 out of 10** – 11.5%
- **10 out of 10** – 34.6%

Breakdown:

This data shows a high level of public confidence in the effectiveness of the sea defences. Over 80% of respondents rated them between 8 and 10, suggesting widespread approval of their protective function. The relatively low standard deviation suggests that this is a shared view across different types of respondents, whether resident or visitor. The absence of lower scores (1-5) strongly indicates that the defences are meeting public expectations.



To capture a human voice beyond numbers, respondents were asked two open-ended questions:

“In your opinion, what are some of the benefits of the sea defences?”

Themes (based on frequency of mentions):

- **Protection** (especially from flooding and erosion) – Mentioned in ~50% of responses
- **Access improvements** – 3 mentions
- **Natural preservation / aesthetics** – 2 mentions
- **Tourism and recreation value** – 1+ indirect mentions

Sample of Meaningful Responses:

- *“Protecting the beach’s natural beauty”*
- *“Protecting property”*
- *“Lovely promenade to walk along. Good access to beach. Very tidy and well kept. Also excellent to have free parking next to them.”*
- *“Stopping the coastal erosion & provide a very nice walking & cycle way.”*
- *“Protects the nice beach”*

Insight:

These responses reinforce that people see both practical and aesthetic value in the defences. Several respondents clearly appreciate how the structures improve public access, support recreational use (walking, cycling), and contribute to a tidier, more usable coastline. There’s also a recurring emphasis on the preservation of nature and property, indicating that people recognize the dual function of the sea defences – both as a safeguard and an amenity.

“In your opinion, what are some of the downsides of the sea defences?”

Themes (based on frequency of mentions):

- **Visual appearance (ugly / unsightly)** - Mentioned 4+ times
- **Blocked views of beach** - 1+ mention
- **Access issues or danger** - 1 mention

Sample of Meaningful Responses:

- *“They’re unsightly”*
- *“Ugly and removes sea views”*
- *“There [sic] hard to walk on”*
- *“No beach”*
- *“Would be great to have some toilets in the car park”* (less relevant, ignored in stats)

Insight:

The most common concern among participants was that the sea defences detract from the beach’s **natural appearance**. Phrases like “ugly” and “unsightly” appeared multiple times. A few respondents noted that the defences obstruct the **view of the sea**, particularly from the road. Concerns about **walking difficulty** on the defences or dunes also emerged. Suggestions unrelated to sea defences (like public toilet availability) were noted but excluded from analysis.

For Schools & Educational Departments

If you are part of a school, college, university, or educational department and would like access to the raw, anonymised survey data for research, curriculum, or project use – feel free to get in touch with us directly.


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