

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Sidmouth and East Beach BMP Project Steering Group held at Kennaway House, Sidmouth on Friday 6 March 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 1.00 pm

1 Welcome and apologies

Councillor Geoff Jung, Chairman of the Steering Group, welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introductions were made.

2 Notes from the previous meeting and Terms of Reference.

Notes from the previous meeting held on 22nd August 2019 were not agreed due to inaccuracies of notes.

Page 1 – Item 2 - Amendment required. It was not discussed or agreed to change the Terms of Reference. They currently stand as before.

Points raised:

- More Councillors were invited to join the Steering Group because the BMP scheme needed to be better communicated to residents and agreed at Council.
- Historically, the original “Steering Group” (a term used in the industry) was a Project Steering Group with a Project Manager consulting locals and gathering local knowledge and information which was reported back to Officers and Councillors. The Steering Group originally was not set up to make decisions but for guidance and advice. However, word circulated that politicians were making decisions they should not be making and the group grew to include more Councillors and representatives from community groups.
- A request had been made to update the Terms of Reference. The membership has changed and now includes Deputy Leader, District Councillors, Town Council etc.
- It was challenged if the Terms of Reference could be changed. The Steering Group makes recommendations. Local representatives can attend meetings and Councillors give comment and explanation but the final decision is made at a higher level and by full Council.

Cllr Cathy Gardner requested the Terms of Reference be updated. The group should have more power.

John Golding noted the group with its wider representation has been really effective and the Terms of Reference should reflect this.

It was proposed that the Terms of Reference state ‘local representatives and Councillors’.

Page 3 – First para – Paragraph incorrect. Hoteliers did not attend the meeting. Their concerns on parked vehicles/vans were discussed in their absence but as vehicles do not block the sea view it was agreed the wording would be amended.

RESOLVED that:

1. Wording in minutes (22/08/19) be removed - “*updated Terms of Reference for the Steering Group were agreed*”.
2. Wording be revised in first paragraph on page 3 to read “*On the report of hoteliers concerns it was pointed out that such concerns could be dismissed as vehicles / vans do not block the sea view*”.
3. Terms of Reference to be amended to include local representatives and Councillors on the Steering Group.

3 **Scheme Refresher – Timeline / Critical Path**

██████████, Engineer Projects Manager delivered a presentation summarising the following. The presentation is appended to these minutes

- **Scheme refresher - Slides 2 & 3**

- **Raised splash defence / beach recharge – Slide 4**
- Potential saving on not recharging beach to 1990 levels, but not been modelled to see if the standard of protection is compromised. Recharging the beach has not been modelled. Likely to be a £40K cost. It was suggested to delay running the model but this has now been agreed to proceed.

- **Timeline / Critical path – Slides 6 & 7**
 - 2020 – Secure partnership funding, finalise and submit OBC, start detailed design
 - 2021 – Construction phase commences

It was noted that the detailed design, and construction costs of design choices can be picked up in the detailed design phase, once we have funding for the current scheme in principle. It could help with securing funding from others.

4 **Funding Sub Group meeting outcomes and principles of shingle volume analysis** (including figures from RH on the reduction this would bring to the funding gap)

Specifically on beach recharge / replenish

- Since the 1990s the beach was supposed to be replenished. The profile was at the top of the rock groyne.
- Need to establish what the beach is like now to include different sections of the beach and investigate the recharge/replenish cost.
- TB – The 1990s design beach is 1m below prom / 10m . / 1:7 slope to sea bed
- How is the beach recharge costs split up? What are they going to be in the future? - TBS to update group once known.
- Ongoing beach costs are separate from the scheme costs.
- TB-S – Original scheme and beach design profile by Posford Duvivier to protect wall and erosion risk. Original scheme was an erosion scheme not coastal defence.
- Climate change is being factored in.
- Minor source of shingle from dredging River Sid – 100 tonnes. However, more waste licensing paperwork involved for EA and MMO permissions.
- Pebbles now at Jacobs and tonnes of pebbles on Beer Beach.
- There is a shingle bank further out in the bay. Tide runs west to east so shingle deflected out to Lyme Bay.

- Grading of the material used to replenish needs to be right. Smaller more mobile material moves east to west.
- Figures for replenishing need to be included in the budget every year. Costs will go up and funding will be harder to get.

Specifically on the funding:

The affordability and success of the scheme was challenged by some members factoring in climate change, rising sea levels and more storms in the next 100 years.

██████████ commented that two factors now affected costs, benefits and decisions:

- i. Financial situation – global recession – Coronavirus
- ii. Climate change – rising sea levels

Also commented that ██████████ did not provide figures to EDDC for funding the best option – offshore islands. Told too expensive. ██████████ noted it would cost £20M to build which would mean a funding gap of £12M which could not be plugged.

██████████ agreed to check recharge costs for Option 3 – Construction £8M - Life costs - £13M - and circulate the figures.

Councillor Cathy Gardner noted that full costs need to include the recharge costs and communication to the community on the preferred scheme (Option 3) needs to be honest and transparent. Inform them the preferred scheme is not ideal but funding for the best scheme is not available.

██████████ suggested borrowing money to build a breakwater. Savings made on replenishing could pay for the borrowing. Sea levels are rising. Breakwaters work, groyne less so, and there's no fall back for the splash wall. It will just need to be raised.

██████████ noted EDDC has a Climate Change Action Plan with adaptation measures to protect communities from rising sea levels i.e. Seaton, Exmouth.

██████████ advised the financially viable preferred option needs to go ahead as there is no viable alternative. It is do the preferred option, accepting that it's a compromise, or do nothing, letting Sidmouth flood regularly. Other options may be better, but are unaffordable, so not viable.

Specifically on rock revetment / breakwater:

Questions and comments were raised on appealing against EA and Natural England's objection to the rock revetment.

Could ██████████, Environment Secretary, help with challenging the decision?

██████████, Principal Engineer – Bridges and Structures, Devon County Council, provided information regarding a scheme at Heathrow Airport. He also noted there were long protracted conversations with NE and the only way permission was granted for Alma Bridge was to build it inland.

██████████ suggested going ahead and installing the breakwater without planning permission to raise awareness and gain support in challenging the EA and NE.

Specifically on the modelling of the rock revetment

██████████ stated a rock revetment option would need to be modelled. Increased erosion can result when a hard structure is placed next to a soft structure.

Updated climate change figures would be used. A significant sea level rise in 100 years - 1.62m. However in 50 years we need to allow just under half a metre for sea level rise. Projections are minimum 1.2m / max 1.6m for 100 years

All modelling is based on current data and the scheme is still valid on this data. The beach volume analysis is useful, as it shows when to recharge the beach is needed. Preferred option has been modelled on returning beach to the 1990 level. Other factors were looked at and splash wall considered.

██████████ queried the risk of only parts of the beach being replenished. The original beach profile was to protect the promenade from erosion. Recommendation was to maintain it. Technical decision made by sub funding group not the Steering Group.

██████████ noted there won't be a cost to have paragraph inserted stating how the validation and calibration was carried out. (As it was missing from the modelling report)

Specifically on the FDGiA grant and PF calculator:

Questions and comments raised:

- Were costs to the environment included in the calculator? - No – but could be in the new calculator.
- Hanger Path, Alma Bridge and coastal path along the seafront are a significant benefit. Are they included in the calculations? – No. as been designed to last 100 years, however erosion rate could be looked at, and its economic damage be brought forward.
- Do the boats have a value? - An amenity value in 1990 study but needs to be looked at again. – Need to check if boats and economy of boats included
- Sea wall value included? - The wall is OK. There are no cracks.
- Does EDDC have a statutory obligation to protect homes? - EDDC is the risk management authority. We have permissive powers, which we can chose to use. We don't have any obligation to protect homes. However Decisions have to be made within financial and regulatory constraints. EDDC Funding is comparable with Feniton, Exmouth and Whimple given the homes protected.

██████████ reminded the members of Cliff Road residents' mortgagability and contribution to the fund.

Cllr Cath Gardner noted that Cabinet still need to approve EDDC's contribution to the fund and Cliff Road residents' contribution will be taken into consideration.

██████████ noted that protecting the River Sid wall is primary reason for reducing erosion at Pennington Point. Collectively all the sea defences should protect the wall and housing on Cliff Road.

██████████ noted that plugging the funding gap needs to be proportional and are currently about right. EDDC own the beach so need to fund it and protect the town.

5 **Funding update**

██████████ presented a breakdown of the confirmed funding available (£1.5M) and the current gap in funding (£1.6m) noting:

- Local Levy has been agreed at £500k
- An increase in the gap from £1m to £1.6m by counting what we have had agreed and indicated, and discounting any un confident contributions.
- FDGiA - Eligibility from central government is likely to change to make it more beneficial to the scheme.

At the end of April the PF calculator will change. Currently 5.56p in the pound. 6p has been recommended but could rise to 7p in the pound as Government's main policy is to protect homes and inflation will be factored in.

Other factors were not included in the previous calculations e.g. loss of life, car parking revenue, utilities infrastructure (see slide 17). The Scheme could be entitled to a further £341K but this still leaves a £1.3M funding gap.

Carbon neutral costs/benefits may be included in the PF calculator.

6 **Update on utilities letters and meetings – see slide 19**

██████████, SWW, provided an update and responded to questions from members:

- SWW has to report to regulator OFWAT every 5 years - 1st April 2020/21
- Electricity and other costs to Sidford pumping station / sewage treatments works being evaluated
- Training wall being damaged may cause damage to outfall
- Salt contaminated foul water could affect bacteria at treatment plant.
- Fines for a category 2 or 3 spill can run into 6 figures.
- Bathing beach water quality also important.
- SWW need the resilience risk data required from the 3rd option.
- TBS to present overtopping volume data to SWW to look at future pumping costs to aid a business case for contribution funding.

██████████ queried if there is an oversize sewer running along the promenade acting as a pumping sump. SWW was going to investigate

7 **Splash defence report on trial and alternative options for the defence. Timeline of this element.**

The splash panel received good public, press and social media interest with some negative but mostly positive feedback.

The splash panel has survived the recent storm with only three small chips on the dry side – possibly caused by vandalism – so a viable option so far. (Note – it has since had the inner pane smashed by a vandal, but remains in a serviceable condition)

The panel will be removed before Easter. (Note – Will now be removed after Corona Virus passes)

Examples of questions raised by the public:

- What is its actual purpose?
- Why is it not on the splash wall?
- It is high enough? Public concerned about the sea level.

Questions raised by the Steering Group members:

- The panel already looks dirty/grubby. Will it self-clean? Will need some cleaning
- Will the splash panel be all the way along? No – some sections may be a solid wall in parts.

Answers to these questions and others to be presented at the next public consultation / exhibition and FAQs on EDDC's website.

Members queried costs for the splash wall/panel (500 mm / 1000 mm) and NASA's sea level predictions. It was noted if sea levels do rise significantly in the next 20 years there could be another product on the market to replace the splash panel installed.

It was agreed to present damages and benefits and ongoing costs on a graph form to aid understanding of how damages avoided soon in the scheme life produce the biggest benefits

Images of other splash wall / panel options were presented with pros and cons.

- Part wall / part gate
- Floating wall
- Temporary top up wall - put up / take down
- Solid wall with cladding

Images of flood walls and gates currently installed in Devon at Teignmouth and Instow were shown. Exmouth's tidal defence includes using homeowners and hotel's garden walls as a defence with flood gates along the esplanade in various sections.

Member queried if the existing short wall at Sidmouth was substantial enough to take the splash wall. Two points were raised – i) although the wall is in good condition it would need to be structurally checked so it can withstand wave action / pressure – ii) installing a splash panel on the wall would make the wall narrower and people would no longer be able to sit on it – a feature the public have enjoyed and raised in consultations.

Member queried the maintenance costs for the panels. Costs for the design line, cleaning costs, storm damage and vandalism have already been queried with the supplier and will be fed back.

8 **Update on UKCP18 climate change data on the BMP**

We have looked at the difference between UKCP09 on which the modelling was based on, and the new UKCP18 data. This was a requirement of the Environment Agency. Having done this, there is very little difference within the first 50 years, however after year 50, climate change allowance increases with UKCP18 compares to UKCP09. Although the damages avoided/benefits are small from year 50, so the affect is little. It would be prudent to give allowance for any splash wall to be increased in the future. Good news is we can use UKCP09 data without having to re run for UKCP18 data and incur further costs.

9 **Technical FAQs – long list of questions and answers and Q&A around this**

There are currently technical and public FAQs on EDDC's website which will now be split for easier understanding:

- i) Technical FAQs
- ii) Public FAQs

The whole database of questions is currently being reviewed to revise any answers that will need climate change factored into the responses.

10 **Next steps and next planned communications activities - Slide 10**

- Economics to be updated using the new Government FDGiA calculator (updated in April) and circulated to members.
- Replenishment costs and savings required.

11 **Any other business**

11.1 **Meeting with MP Simon Jupp**

Cllr Jung, ██████████ and ██████████ meeting with MP Simon Jupp on Friday 13th March to discuss emergency measures at Pennington Point.

A number of points and questions were raised by the Steering Group:

Q If Pennington Point goes there will be a risk to life. Would this not be considered an emergency?

A As it stands today this would not qualify for emergency funding from central government.

Q Can you still carry out emergency works?

A Yes, but the EA will not support it. We would have to justify it.

Qs There are 400 large concrete temporary retaining blocks which the Alma Bridge contractor needs to move. Would these be helpful? Could they be used as rock armour? EDDC could liaise with the contractor and purchase them.

A Moving them is a possibility and currently being investigated but there will be a cost and 100,000 tonnes of unnatural blocks relocated onto a SSSI World Heritage site will cause objections.

Q As a temporary emergency measure?

A Then we would have a further cost of removing it to landfill and there would also be a carbon cost involved.

The group were reminded that Natural England objected against revetment. ██████████ ██████████, Environment Agency told the group at a meeting on that it does not meet the BMPs agreed action. Changing the BMP would essentially start the project again

Q With climate change, could Natural England's objections now be challenged?

A Potentially

11.2 East Beach emergency egress

The Sid River is currently stopping people access East Beach from Sidmouth beach at low tide. Access from the beach cannot be closed off completely because it is a World Heritage site. The steps are being repaired and a one-way sprung gate/railing installed with access only from the beach. A Sidmouth Lifeguards beach rescue is another means of evacuation from East beach. The rock armour at the bottom of the steps is also being looked at.

12 Date of next meeting

Next Steering Group meeting to take place at the beginning of June to present the final and updated economics prior to the public consultation / exhibition in July. Timescales to be checked.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

[Redacted names of councillors present]