

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Sidmouth and East Beach BMP Project Steering Group held at Kennaway House, Sidmouth on 22 August 2019

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.02 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.

The notes from the previous meeting held on 9 August 2018 were agreed, as were the updated terms of reference for the Steering Group.

3 Recap on Beach Management Scheme project

John Golding, Strategic Lead for Housing, Health and Environment, provided an extensive recap of the project, with additional explanation and technical advice provided by [REDACTED] from RHDHV. The presentation is appended to these minutes.

The Steering Group had been convened to help progress the project and work towards the outcomes of:

- An agreed direction of travel for the project, with the agreement of all stakeholders;
- A focus on delivering the preferred option, or its lower cost variants, if funding dictates;
- Securing community and stakeholder support;
- Channelling effort into securing the necessary partnership funding;
- Implementing the preferred scheme before the loss of Pennington Point through erosion which would lead to reverting scheme to protect the town frontage.

The Group were reminded of the risk considerations, particularly the impact on the project if Pennington Point is lost. The presentation also set out a reminder of the components of the long and short list proposals, with visual representations of the short list options. Alice also reminded the Group of the expected shingle movement across the frontage.

The preferred option was re-iterated to the Steering Group:

- It aims to manage the risk of coastal flooding and erosion along the Sidmouth frontages;
- It must not adversely impact the integrity of the environmental features;
- The Beach Management Plan (BMP) identified measures to develop and implement a sustainable solution;
- It represented the most appropriate environmental, technical and economic option;
- It includes one or two new rock groyne along East Beach over a distance of 200m;

- Modifies the length of River Sid training wall, East Pier Rock Groyne (if required) and raising of the splash wall;
- Repairs to River Sid training wall;
- Beach recharge and recycling along Sidmouth Town and East Beach frontages.

A number of questions were posed from the Steering Group including:

- Clarification was sought and given on the length of groyne, which would not be attached to the base of the cliff. There would be varying levels of shingle forming in the gap between the cliff base and the groyne. The gap was not expected to increase the rate of erosion to the base of the cliff;
- Consideration as to whether the east beach element of the project could be separated out, as there would be less opposition to that scheme. In response, the east beach element of the scheme did not have enough merits (in terms of EA grant value) in its own right to progress – effectively the town frontage scheme was helping fund the east beach works;
- There was a significant risk in losing EA funding if the scheme did not progress and the partnership funding was not realised;
- The funding formula may change in the future, depending on how the value of commercial property is taken into account;
- Seafront hoteliers have indicated that basements have flooded before, but that related mainly to excess rainwater;
- Need to ensure that the scheme was robust enough for rising sea levels as a result of climate change; in response the figures quoted in the rate of rising sea levels were challenged and there was a difference of opinion over what level should be taken into account;
- Still a need to convince the public with clear, understandable science behind the scheme to prove that it is needed;
- How such projects are funded needs clear communication to the public – for example, funding at Exmouth related to a much larger number of domestic properties that needed protecting. The public may have better understanding why so much partnership funding is needed if the funding formula is shared with them.

Specifically on the splash wall:

- The splash wall height was debated. Consideration was given to the height of the splash wall and whether it could be installed at a lesser height, and then added to in future years, or to have a mechanism to raise the height of the wall during storm events. Whilst these options could be considered, there was a significant increase in cost for including a mechanism, which would also attract more maintenance than a static solid structure. The risk from a “100 year” storm could still occur at any time, therefore a lower wall height would not protect the frontage sufficiently to protect from the flood risk ;
- A lower height splash wall would be more acceptable to the local community and should be considered;
- Take the opportunity to be creative with the splash wall design, to create something unique that enhances the seafront area, as well as considering if the wall can be at different height at the east beach frontage;
- The proposed height in the preferred option was a difficult option to accept, as there would likely be local opposition to raising the wall, but it was acknowledged that the design was the minimum needed for protection;
- Use local schools and art groups in deciding on the design of the sea wall;
- Awareness of wall height impact on properties on the seafront and that the road and the promenade are at different levels, the road being lower;

- Hoteliers' concerns about parked vehicles, especially vans, parked along the seafront was causing more blocking of the sea view than the proposed increased height of the splash wall;
- Evidence presented supports the height of the wall as being optimum for protection, so the focus now should be on good design.

Specifically on the partnership funding shortfall:

- Suggestion to discuss with utility companies, especially if the scheme is protecting any of their assets;
- Raising the issue with local MPs;
- Cliff Road residents already contributing, with a suggestion that perhaps they consider increasing their contribution as they were deriving significant benefit from the scheme;;
- Look to approach regular visitors;
- Consider crowdfunding;
- Sidmouth businesses did not have excess money to commit – better to tackle Government to change policy and fund the work required;
- A smaller group should work on reviewing stakeholders already approached and develop strategy for obtaining more interest in funding;
- Needs a target date to reconsider funding overall, if no additional partnership funding can be secured – discussion took place on considering either August 2020 or December 2020 as a point when alternative lower cost options are considered.

The Steering Group members present, with the exception of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], showed their support for the preferred option S1 by a show of hands. [REDACTED] commented that he felt more clarification was required before he could support it.

[REDACTED] commented on his involvement in the project over a number of years and still felt that the notes taken of Steering Group meetings were not accurate. He still felt that information requested had not been provided and therefore felt that he could not vote until such information was given.

The Steering Group also agreed that there must be a time limit set on trying to secure the additional partnership funding still required, as the need for the scheme to be delivered was still pressing.

RESOLVED that:

1. The BMP preferred option Option S1 had the support of the Group;
2. That local involvement is sought to help develop the splash wall design;
3. That a sub-group be set up to focus on securing partnership funding to cover the remaining funding gap, consisting of the Group Chairman, the local Ward Members and the Chairman of Sidmouth Town Council;
4. That the funding commitment be reviewed in December 2020 if clear that no additional partnership funding can be secured;
5. A press release be issued to help inform the public of progress and the funding gap outstanding.

Attendance List

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]