

Report on the Advisory Group meeting on Sidmouth Beach Management Plan  
25<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021

Discussions were wide ranging so there is no way this report can be seen as Minutes: it does not follow the agenda items but the subject matter.

There were a couple of things on the Minutes of the last meeting which were addressed. One was from Richard Eley, a very welcome return to the Group ( representing the Chamber of Commerce). He wanted to clarify that the Chamber had not put forward any costed proposals for what could be done in deviating from the Plan but had simply provided information about alternative costings for elements already in the Plan. Tony Burch was concerned that the information about the Aims and Objectives gave the opposite impression to what is actually the case, he asked that he be allowed to give further explanation after the meeting so that the situation could be clarified in the written record.

The main part of the meeting revolved around new, as yet unconfirmed, calculations about funding and what freedom this might give us. Timescales were of particular interest as projected timings and lead times seemed very long to those of us who had not worked in the public sector.

If the funding calculations prove to be accurate we can now look at things which were previously unaffordable, but if we do so there is the potential for the anticipated time for starting work to be put back from 2 years from now to 4 and a half years from now. This is assuming a 6 month 'pause' in the process to reassess the options, that this assessment produces something very different from the current plan, and that much of the documentation will need to be redone.

It was explained that the Outline Business Case, which is needed to apply for funding from the Environment Agency, was not produced 'in house' by EDDC so if it needed major rewrites this could be a drag on the process. We know that the OBC has slowed us already, as it had been hoped it would have been ready for the December meeting and it has not yet been shared with the Advisory Group.

During discussions with outside Agencies it had become apparent that if the projected start date in two years time was pushed back due to reassessments it would be possible that a temporary structure could be put in place to protect the cliffs at East Beach. This was of course something which caused great interest.

It was stressed that such protection was not certain but that there were precedents in areas of great conservation value though not in the World Heritage Site. Cllr Ian Barlow begged to differ on this point as Branscombe has temporary protection. It was suggested by members that planning permission for such a temporary measure should be applied for now; Cliff Road Action Group have all the documents from a 2011 application which could be reused with little updating. Having the Planning Approval in place could mean that if a temporary structure was acceptable to outside Agencies, and could be funded, it might even be possible to get protection in place as soon as this winter. It was stressed, however, that next winter was a more likely target. If, and this is still quite a big if, this way forward was acceptable then the cliff could get protection sooner than the current scheme would permit.

It was made very clear by representatives of outside Agencies and by the EDDC Project Manager, engineer Tom Buxton-Smith, that such a temporary structure would only be allowed if we could show a 'clear exit strategy'; that is there needed to be a plan in place that we were working toward and that would be implemented within an acceptable timescale.

Once the new funding calculations have been confirmed, explorations of a temporary scheme will be investigated as a matter of urgency, if approved by EDDC Cabinet.

The advantages of proceeding with the current scheme were explained, as was a slightly adapted scheme; and a more greatly adapted scheme which was not really as good an option. The main advantage of continuing with the current scheme was that we were pretty certain to get the funding we needed and that the proposals we submitted to get funding did not necessarily have to be built exactly as proposed, it would be possible to determine the exact design at a later stage. There would not be any penalties if we didn't spend all of the money we were entitled to; it would just be returned to the funding bodies.

It was agreed that the webcam footage from the storm of the 14<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021 ( [available here](#)) showed that no green water was currently making it on to the Esplanade, but the Project Manager stated his fears that it may do in a worse storm. He showed images of the Sidmouth and Seaton storms. Tony Burch said that in his view making the beach higher over time as sea levels rose could lead us to the same situation as had occurred at Seaton where the high beach had helped the sea to run up and overtop the defensive wall. With this in mind it might be better to look at some sort of submerged structure at Sidmouth to slow the waves. This could possibly mean that the beach recharging and the splash wall both became unnecessary, or that the need could be reduced.

If any reassessment didn't come up with a better, or equally good, plan compared with the current one within a 6 month 'pause' we would have to proceed with the current plan as it was not possible to allow more time without potentially losing funding. Funding rules are always open to change.

When we felt that all the ramifications of the different options had been explored we were asked to vote on whether we paused the process for 6 months to consider other options ( with a temporary east beach protection applied for), or whether we continued with the currently preferred option. We were told that whatever recommendation we made would be taken to EDDC Cabinet for a decision.

75% of those eligible to vote, voted to pause the process to reassess; on the understanding that temporary protection for East Beach would be actively pursued.

It was decided to have a sub-group to take this reassessment forward for 6 months and the Chair and Project Manager suggested that the group should be composed of the following:

Tom Buxton-Smith EDDC Project Manager (engineer),  
Sidmouth Town Councillor Chris Lockyear (engineer),  
Tony Burch (retired engineer) who has been involved with the project for many years,  
Richard Eley representing Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce, and  
a representative from the Cliff Road Action Group ( yet to be determined).  
This was acceptable to the Advisory Group.

A further item of interest to be reported are that we were also given projected costs for each section of the current option; they were :

Maintenance at Jacob's Ladder = £100,000

Recharging at Town and East Beaches = £2,635,000

Splash wall on the Esplanade = £2,475,000

Supergroyne on East Beach = £1,004,000

Construction of a new ramp at Port Royal to allow machinery onto East Beach for maintenance purposes and improved access for boats and the Lifeboat = £270,000

Total = £6,485,000

The Chairman gave his thanks to Jeremy Woodward of the Vision Group for Sidmouth who had put together a [comprehensive document](#), with links, about possible problems with the 'preferred option' plan and possible alternatives which could be accommodated within the plan.

The setting up of a 'Project Board' as the next step above the Advisory Group in the hierarchy was again referred to and it is hoped it will soon be formed.

The next meeting has a provisional date of 4th May, at 9.30 am. This will be a Zoom meeting, and again public and recorded.

Mary Walden-Till