

Report on the meeting of the subgroup on 17th June 2021

This was originally going to be a meeting with the consultants but was postponed until they are able to give solid information to help us make decisions.

Alice Johnson has been invited to join this June group meeting, she works for [Binnies](#) consultancy, but is currently seconded to the Environment Agency.

1) Admin matters - looking forwards to the Advisory Group meeting which will be in the form of a briefing.

Government legislation now doesn't allow decisions to be taken over Zoom. Following an earlier court case, any group making recommendations or decisions has to physically meet to do so. With social distancing requirements this means the hire of [Westpoint](#) for a group of average size, at a cost of approximately £3,000 .

Groups who continue with Zoom can only make *suggestions* to EDDC officers, who can then write a paper to cabinet. Wording therefore has to be judged carefully. The subgroup or Advisory Group can advise but they can no longer make a formal recommendation.

It was asked whether we should delay the Advisory Group meeting until we can meet without social distancing? This was not considered to be a viable way forward as it would mean that officers would then be in meetings constantly when restrictions were raised and other work wouldn't get done.

The subgroup said they trust Tom to accurately assess the feeling in the room and act accordingly.

It was mentioned that figures showed that meetings by Zoom had an increase of 25% in attendance, that there was a 50% increase in people attending meeting they don't need to attend, and public viewing of the recorded meetings over that of attending physical meetings had increased astronomically. So Zoom meetings were good for democracy and transparency.

It was felt that it would be best for the upcoming Advisory Group meeting to be held over Zoom.

2) The question of whether the subgroup was in fact making 'decisions' was addressed. They are not held to be making decisions, and the responsibility for making any decisions ultimately lies with EDDC Cabinet.

The hierarchy of the project is that the subgroup meets more frequently than the Advisory Group in order to act as support to the Engineering Projects Manager (Tom) in making open and transparent day-to-day decisions about the progress of the Pause study.

The Advisory Group sits above that and is capable (under normal conditions) of agreeing recommendations for Tom to put to Cabinet. However, the Advisory Group also does not make decisions. Small decisions can be made by Tom, based on their advice, but big decisions need to go to Cabinet.

3) There will be another layer of hierarchy, that of a Project Board. This will sit above the Advisory Group and have delegated powers of decision-making for a level above those that Tom can make on his own authority. They will be answerable to Cabinet.

Although the formation of this Board has been discussed before it has not yet been constituted.

It will definitely need to be in place before planning applications are made but as the 'bare bones' of setting it up are already in place it should be possible to do it sooner.

There was a previous Project Board, which lapsed, so all that is needed is to reconstitute it. The suggested makeup of this board should be presented to the next Advisory Group meeting for their information and to gauge their support. It will be an agenda item.

It is hoped that it will be possible to include any organisation making a significant financial contribution to the project. Therefore it should include representatives of Sidmouth Town Council, Cliff Road Action Group, Devon County Council, etc; as well as representatives of statutory organisations. It will be 'Service led' by one of the EDDC officers in charge of Services, will include the Portfolio

Holder (Geoff Jung), and the Environment Agency as budget holder. The make-up may change as the project continues.

This will all be discussed in depth at the next Advisory Group meeting and hopefully it will be possible to set it up without having to go through Cabinet approval processes.

There followed discussion on the previous 'Project Board', how it had not been well understood and in fact may not have ever met. It could have been confused in the public mind with a group with a similar name.

It is important that there is clarity in future. Any Project Board will have their meetings recorded and minutes will be published. How 'open to the general public' the meetings will be is to be determined.

4) With reference to the meeting of the subgroup last week, Tom has fed back views to the consultants.

Although they are pretty certain that only the off-shore islands will work they have decided to keep two options open (see last week's [report of the 10th June](#)); that of off-shore islands, and of a large groyne at Port Royal. It is important to have documentation to clearly justify any dropping of options.

Tom has decided to adjusted the Scope to account for the dropping of a third option rather than redraw the Scope and delay the consultants 'really getting going' for another week. This adjustment is by way of a 'negative compensation event', for the work they will no longer be undertaking due to the reduction in the options we are asking them to consider. There is also a reduction in cost because they are no longer being asked to look at environmental factors at this stage (much work has already been done on these factors in the Paused Option documentation).

This choice, to reduce the work being asked for, is in the hope that in a month's time we will have enough information to know if there is a technically and financially possible alternative to the Paused Option.

There was some confusion within the subgroup as to how closely we are now sticking to the Scope which we gave to the consultants at the beginning. At the time, we told them we wanted them to look widely, we are now almost telling them to look at nothing but off-shore options, for which we have got an appraisal already in the form of 4 and 4b from the 2016 Beach Management Plan.

The discussion then ranged over the following:

It was brought back to our attention that the Paused Option had only been chosen for financial reasons and an undertaking had been given that if more money became available we would reassess 4/4b.

We seem to have now reverted to those 4/4b options having spent lots of money on consultants, to little effect.

It was asked if, given how much work had already been done on those options, shouldn't the consultants be asked just to look at those again? However it was felt that we had spent so much time and thought deciding what to ask the consultants to do that tying them down at this stage would just waste work they had done. We had been quite clear with them that we wanted them to look more widely than what had already been covered in the BMP.

It was also pointed out that the price given for 4/4b was still unaffordable even with the extra money. Was it worth obtaining up-to-date costings?

Part of what the consultants had been asked to do was reviewing the relevant documents, to read the BMP, the HR Wallingford documents, etc. We should expect that this had been done, there was no need to tell them again

The consultants have said that they have more confidence in the rock islands option because there was more data available on them, they could draw on all the previous work done on the BMP and reach conclusions more quickly because of that. They are basing a lot of their work on the existing BMP data. If there is information about the feasibility of off-shore rock islands they will take it on-

board.

Questions were raised as to if we changed now to 'only looking at 4/4b' as a starting point for reassessment we could almost be said to be starting from the wrong place. It may be that three islands or two islands could do the job.

The number of islands does not change a lot of the work that has previously been done on the Outline Business Case, for example environmental concerns will be similar. What we are asking the consultants to do is, within the remit of off-shore islands and budget, be creative and try to establish the optimum solution. This must fit inside the funding framework that we have. Alice said that her understanding was that we needed to look at smaller and/or fewer islands in order to get an affordable solution, more tuned to what is needed on the shoreline. It was agreed that this summed it up very well.

The dangers of changing the focus of what we had asked the consultants to do was discussed. It was felt that any change would lead to the consultants having to spend time on resubmitting their charges rather than getting on with the work they had been asked to do, thus causing at least a week of delay. It might also close their minds to other possibilities which were similar to, but not the same as, the course they were following. There was also the consideration that asking them to read more deeply into the BMP might impact adversely on their ability to get on with design work.

It was agreed not to give them new instructions, only to remove work as mentioned at the beginning of this discussion.

There followed a discussion of what [Halcrow](#) had felt, when they were the consultants, both about shore-parallel and oblique offshore islands and the depths of water in which they should sit. It was explained that islands are to reduce wave height and work better the closer they are to the beach, the greater the 'shadow' effect. (Or perhaps it is the other way round? It seems to vary with the situation! Rather like the difference between a shadow cast by a light near you, where the shadow cast by an object is larger the closer it is to the light, or that cast by the sun where the shadow casting object needs to be closer to you; perhaps). There was much discussion on this point.

It was mentioned again that the solutions required will be different on Town Beach and East Beach as we do not want to encourage people to go onto East Beach. Safe swimming on Town Beach must be maintained.

With reference to ideas in the BMP of 2016 it was stated that all ideas shown to the public were developed at a high level strategic process only, and that the lower levels of detail were left to the Outline Business Case to be developed further. So the options had only been worked out sufficiently to decide they would work in principle and no further. (It appears that high level = the initial fairly rough working out.)

It was questioned as to whether this Pause study would want to follow the same process again or would modelling take place within the study? The answer was that hopefully in a month's time we would know whether an off-shore option was technically and financially feasible, at that stage we would need a model, but not all of the runs which would be needed for an Outline Business Case.

We already have a lot of information from the current OBC. If the initial model run was hopeful we would then ask for more modelling to be done to bring it up to OBC standard and then back it up with a rewritten OBC. Rewriting the Outline Business Case accounts for most of the delay which changing to an alternative option would bring.

It was stated that there was great confidence in all the options shown in 2016 and they all had the potential to have been taken forward to the OBC if conditions, such as cost, had been met. What we needed now was an additional and different option in which we could have similar confidence. We should let the consultants get on with producing that; based on the BMP work which can inform their thinking.

5) The consultants have less confidence in a Port Royal groyne option than in an islands option because there is less evidence they can draw on from the BMP. In order to try to reassure them it was worth looking at as a viable option Tom had discussed with them the following points.

- The consultants' bathymetric survey. The consultants felt the water depth off the training wall was considerably deeper than where the Paused Option had the Supergroyne placed, this would increase the cost of a groyne. However, data from other bathymetric surveys suggests there is not much difference in depth. Graphics were shown to the subgroup. The only area of greater depth appears to be where the river affects the seabed. This reflects what locals have observed over the years.
- Any groyne on Town Beach would also require some structure on East Beach. This caused the consultants concern that the mouth of the Sid would be blocked but the subgroup felt this would not be a problem. There is photographic evidence of huge beaches having been moved away when the Sid is in spate. It is important that any recharge material used matches what would be there naturally if we want to rely on what has happened historically continuing to happen in the future.
- It is practically certain that if groynes could work they would be an affordable solution.

Discussion of all aspects of shingle movements and recharging then occurred, with Tom drawing ideas to illustrate. It was accepted that although the ideas could be discussed, in principle, modelling would be required to test them.

6) Update on possible planning application for temporary revetment on East Beach.

The potential costs are known from previous applications for revetments or rock armour.

Two consultants have been approached to quote for the work which would be necessary to create such an application, one of which had been involved in the 2003. That consultant would potentially only need to perform an update.

Devon Council Council has done some survey work recently on part of the cliff but most of it would need to be resurveyed. There are also more environmental sensitivities to be taken into account in planning applications now than was the case in earlier years.

By the next Advisory Group meeting there should be more information. It is hoped that the planning application will be ready to go in should we decide, as the outcome of the Pause Study, to go with an Alternative Option.

If it is thought desirable to proceed with an alternative option, then the September Cabinet meeting will make the decision as to whether or not to instruct the consultant to submit the application. This could mean the planning application going in around Christmas 2021, so work on East Beach might be able to start in the summer or autumn of 2022.

7) At the end of July the outcomes of the consultants' work should be known and we will then be in a position to give them instruction about how much modelling we want them to do on the design proposed.

Meeting ended.