

## Report on the meeting of the Beach Management Plan Advisory Group

15<sup>th</sup> July 2021

This meeting was unusual because Government rules currently don't allow decisions to be made in meetings held remotely on line. It was therefore much more of a briefing and 'question and answer' session

Tom Buxton-Smith refreshed our memories on the Aims of the BMP and then gave a [presentation](#) of the current situation in relation to the work being done by the consultants. The consultants have not yet done any modelling.

Although the original reason for pausing the BMP for 6 months was supposed to allow the consultants to take a look at new possibilities, in view of the increased funding available due to a change in Government assessment processes, in reality it has turned out to be a reassessment of the options which they presented in 2016.

The reasons for this have been given as a lack of time and money. It seems that 6 months is not long enough for the consultants to look more widely than the previous work they had done several years ago. The timescale for the work has already slipped.

They were told this needed to be completed by September but it will not be completed until later if we choose to go with a different plan than the 'preferred option' which is a supergroyne on east beach and a raised wall along the Esplanade with some minor work on the 'training wall' which protrudes into the sea at the mouth of the Sid.

If they judge the other options unviable we will know by September. It would then be the case that the plan reverted to the 'preferred option' which is actually preferred by no-one. The consultants don't think it is the best technical option and the town residents and businesses are strongly opposed to a raised splash wall cutting the town off from the sea and ruining the setting of many Listed Buildings.

The option was only 'preferred' because it was all we could afford. However, there are some questions about whether even that could have been afforded because of the huge costs which would be involved if the town residents fought against it at the planning stage.

The Pause Subgroup ( [see Subgroup reports](#) ) who have been meeting more frequently than the Advisory Group had been involved in many of the discussions leading up to the situation being described by Tom.

Again, the Subgroup is only advisory and the decisions are made by East Devon District Council members and the consultants who are Royal HaskoningDHV.

However, things had moved on from the last Subgroup meeting. It was news to those of us at this Advisory Group meeting that the consultants had ruled out the last remaining option we had asked them to consider: a groyne where the training wall is (which could perhaps later be turned into a landing jetty ) and two islands or a small groyne on east beach to give protection there.

Of the four broad options the consultants had been asked to consider only one now remains, that which is roughly based on Option 4b from the original 2016 consultation. This was the option the residents liked best at the 2016 public consultation and was the preferred technical option of the consultants. There is still a question over whether it can now be afforded even with the new funding available.

It was also news that the modelling of a new option, if one was to be judged viable, would only take place after such judgement was made, not as part of making the decision. This will extend the timescale they were originally given, pushing their final report back to the end of September or beyond.

It is of course very worrying that these delays will unavoidably delay protection for east beach and the houses on Cliff Road.

There was discussion about a) protection that could be obtained through islands and b) concerns about the financial and environment aspects of possible beach recharge. The marine environment was also mentioned as a factor of concern. When considering beach recharge it was pointed out that the 1992 islands had accumulated a large beach within 3 years of being built.

Problems which might crop up with new islands were considered including rip currents, potential blocking of the Sid by beach material and interruption of sediment transfer. Many of the same problems occur with large groynes.

Any possible new option needs to have been judged as technically and financially possible before we start modelling.

It has been proposed that, if we are faced with delays, planning permission is sought for a temporary revetment along east beach while the BMP work is carried out. This would give protection as soon as possible and probably on the same timescale as the 'preferred option' work would have supplied protection.

Tom reported that everything was lined up ready to start on such planning permission and consulting work, should it prove necessary. A revetment is strongly opposed by Natural England and the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site but they could possibly be persuaded not to oppose it if it was time limited. There is precedence for this with the temporary revetment at Branscombe.

The feeling in the meeting was supportive of the option of another set of islands off town beach and two smaller ones of east beach. Ideas were thrown around about how we could work to make them affordable. Tom will take these thoughts back to the consultants.

There then followed consideration of flood maps and how the town might be protected if water made it into the centre from the sea.

The flood maps provided by the consultants who predicted a 1:1 flooding event have been a point of contention for many years. The prediction of a 1:1 flood event means that the town will be flooded every year, this is clearly not what is happening. The prediction was made in 2016 and if the modelling was correct we should have been flooded every year since.

There have been many reasons given by the consultants for the mismatch between their modelling and observed reality. The fact that the reasons which are given change is unsettling. The current explanation given to Tom recently is that they are obliged to model the effects of a 48 hour storm where two high tides deposit water into the town and no draining occurs. This has been described as being like topping up a bath.

Having seen how much water comes over the Esplanade in this year's spring storms it is perhaps difficult to believe that even two such events without the drains working would do more than cause a couple of inches of water to stand on the Ham car parks, which are the lowest point in town.

Tom described how improvements to the drains had been used in other places to cope with water from the sea over-topping defences. If such improvements could be funded it might prevent the need for a raised splash wall on the Esplanade, and would also be useful at times of heavy rain causing water to run into town. He will continue to look into the subject.

A mention of the Coast Map record being made at Port Royal as part of a Citizen Science project drew Tom's presentation to a close.

The last discussion part of the agenda was a Question and Answer session.

We covered

- Q. Will islands turn out to be affordable and is there was a case for borrowing money in a climate of low interest rates to ensure a saving of future costs?  
A. The islands option will be 'touch and go' and it is not working up to returning to the 'paused option' by admitting that splash walls may still be needed. However, it is true that money spent now can save the need for money to be spent in the future.

- Q. What was the feeling of the group on what we would do if we had to decide between going for cheaper submerged options which took less rock but were more dangerous to sea users and accepting a splash wall.  
A. We are not at the point to make that decision, we would need consultations with sea users and the town in order to know that.
- Q. Are we keeping in mind the very strong concerns of Natural England and the Jurassic Coast Trust? We were reminded that they had said 7 years ago that they would ensure any planning permission given for any type of revetment at East Beach would be called in for review by the Secretary of State. Also if this failed to stop a revetment being built they would use the 'nuclear option' of referring it to UNESCO to decide if it should result in World Heritage status being withdrawn. So the question is if we have anything in writing to suggest they have changed their stance?  
A. No, nothing in writing although there have been informal discussions off the record. The situation is that things have changed in the last 7 years, there is now a reliance on Adaptive Pathways where it is accepted that human needs should be considered too. Also the cliff erosion had become much greater.  
The difference with this possible planning application for a revetment is that it would be temporary for a maximum of 10 years, with removal before that time if at all possible. From informal discussion which the Chair had been party to his impression was that it was probably closer to 'maybe' than 'no'.

This led to a general discussion about past interaction with Natural England.

It was pointed out that over the years the position of NE had been subject to change. In 2003 there had been no stated NE objection from one person in charge of the area; but that this had changed when a new person was appointed to the post. In 2016 NE were not 'completely opposed' to a small revetment. Other examples were given in an expression of frustration that we had to conform to constraints which were not possible to predict with any degree of certainty, we could only 'win' we did nothing to affect the World Heritage Site at all.

However, whatever the frustrations, we had to accept that the situation was that NE would not make a formal response to anything which was not an application for planning permission. They did not have the time or resources to comment formally on anything less. It was questioned whether this was local or national policy. The answer was that it was now national policy.

It was asked that all people who had contact with NE and the Jurassic Coast Trust use their best offices behind the scenes to collect opinions which would allow us to move forward in a way that was not going to require abrupt recalculations at a later stage. Failure to gain approval from NE would mean we had to revert to the Paused Option which had their reluctant support in principle.

- Q. Could we involve MPs to help us get clarity?  
A. MPs had been involved previously in discussions about the funding gap and so had knowledge of the constraints, it might be possible to include them again.
- Q. Had the Project Board, which is to sit directly below Cabinet and will be capable of making decisions at a fairly high level, been formed yet?  
A. No.
- Q. Has it been decided who will sit on it?  
A. It will be representatives from EDDC, the Environment Agency and other involved Agencies.

It was asked that the Advisory Group be informed of the members of the Project Board as soon as possible after it was set up, so that they could share the information with the groups they represented.

The date of the next meeting is to be decided.