

Report on pre-consultants meeting of the Pause subgroup 31st August 2021

This meeting was full of frustration but ended on a positive note.

We are getting very close to having to decide whether we revert to the option we all hated or if we have something viable to replace it.

With this in mind it would be worrying if tensions weren't running high.

The main concern is that we still don't have anything 'on paper' from the consultants. This is understandable in one way because the consultants have to be completely confident about anything they put in the public domain, and it all has to be checked and signed off too. This is meant to avoid the situation where someone misrepresents the work in some way.

Of course that means it is impossible for the pause subgroup to understand at an early stage where the consultants are heading, and perhaps stop them heading that way!

If they can't tell us what they are considering until an idea is formalised, and we then have to send them back to the drawing board, the result is that we all spend ages going over and over the same ground; which is frustrating, not a good use of time, and certainly not a good use of money.

Despite these problems it would seem we are managing to make some progress. It is not yet clear, but through the mist we can see possibilities taking shape.

What we are looking for at this stage is what might be thought of as an Outline Design. It doesn't have much detail to it because we are only looking for the principles of what will work. Compare it to designing a new kitchen, we are at the stage of knowing what things we want in there to make it work as a good kitchen and we have the general idea of where they will go in relation to each other. We have not got down to precise sizes let alone choosing the colour for the walls.

Although calculations are not finished, and will never be finished at this preliminary stage, the consultants are pretty sure that we can find a solution which will avoid having a metre high splash wall all along the Esplanade. Coupled with that, we know we can afford a way of protecting Pennington Point and the houses on Cliff Road.

We must remember that even when we have a scheme which we think will work this is not the end of it. We then have to ask the people of the town what they think of it and consult other national bodies too. If we get approval then EDDC can put together an Outline Business Case which brings together all the information we have to submit to the Environment Agency to get the money released.

Once the Environment Agency agrees that the case is acceptable and releases the money we then start to make real progress.

In parallel with EDDC, and the current consultants, creating the Outline business case they will also be starting the process of appointing the consultants who will take the outline design through to a detailed design. This detailed design will include everything needed to go ahead and build it.

We also discussed, again, the formation of a Project Board. Pick almost any of the previous reports to learn more about this board whose formation has been promised for months.

The meeting of the subgroup with the consultants is on Thursday 2nd Sept and we have asked Tom Buxton-Smith to make sure they bring something, even if it is only 'sketched on the back of an envelope' level, to the meeting that we can share with you.

Discussion can be great, but when it comes to decision making you need to have clear written information to work from.