

This was the first meeting for 10 months and everyone was keen to find out what had been going on.

The gap in meetings was explained away by the fact that there was little to tell as the Outline Business Case (OBC) travelled backwards and forwards between EDDC and the Environment Agency (EA) as various aspects were questioned, answered, debated, chewed over, rephrased, until a document fit for purpose was achieved. There was nothing the Advisory Group could do to help with this process. We were promised that the OBC would be published on the EDDC website by the end of the week so that the public could read it if they were interested. However, although there is a huge amount of information on the website about [Sidmouth's Beach Management Plan and Scheme](#) it still isn't there on Feb 2nd. In fact most of the information in this section of the website says that it is out of date! (The Advisory Group link leads to the old Steering Group meeting notes which stop in 2020 and you have to follow a link from there to get to [the current page](#) Which is not that current as it doesn't mention Chris Lockyear, Paul Griew or me as members and does list people I have never met there or who have been replaced. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera as the King of Siam would say in 'The King and I'. But I digress, this is not the place for a rant about the EDDC website.)

To return to the details of the Beach Management Plan and Scheme.

Scarily, once the OBC was accepted by the EA and the money release was triggered they hit another huge snag. Because this BMP has been rumbling under for so long, with nothing much appearing to happen, the EA decided that we didn't have an urgent need for this money; so they would take the project out of the current funding phase and push it back into the next one meaning there would no hope of starting the work before 2027. Fortunately the combined might of EDDC and its forces for good managed to avoid this catastrophe.

Having dealt with the issues since the last meeting we went on to consider current and future works. As we really need to get a move on EDDC were keen to avoid having the delay of asking for tenders for both further design and construction separately. Instead they have taken advantage of an [EA scheme](#) which offers Local Authorities the chance to contract with pre-approved firms. The Advisory Group is in full agreement with this approach if it gets the job done. EDDC have therefore asked a partnership of two firms to put together a proposal for getting through the next stages including construction. The firms are [AtkinsRéalis](#) and [Keir](#), if EDDC likes the proposals then it should be full steam ahead.

Members from both firms were present at the meeting and gave the impression of being very keen on collaborative working and public consultation ... but we have heard that sort of spiel before! I must say though, in fairness, that they did seem more convincing than we are used to; I am therefore almost tempted to start hoping.

They said that if they were appointed they would be looking to talk with the Advisory Group more frequently than has been happening, and that they were committed to being open-minded about the final design which would emerge from detailed planning, mathematical modelling and tank testing. They also clearly understand that the breakwaters should avoid the raising of the splash wall if at all possible as that solution is not acceptable to the town. They said they have experience of working in areas such as Dungeness where bodies had strict rules about what changes were permissible in order to achieve coastal protection so know how to work with the constraints imposed by World Heritage status. The defences at Dungeness are briefly [described on this page](#)

Both Atkins and Keir have offices in Exeter and are familiar with marine conditions in this area. They hope to have completed their proposals for tender by the end of March, if EDDC approves those then they will be able to give a clearer idea of timescales for all parts of the work.

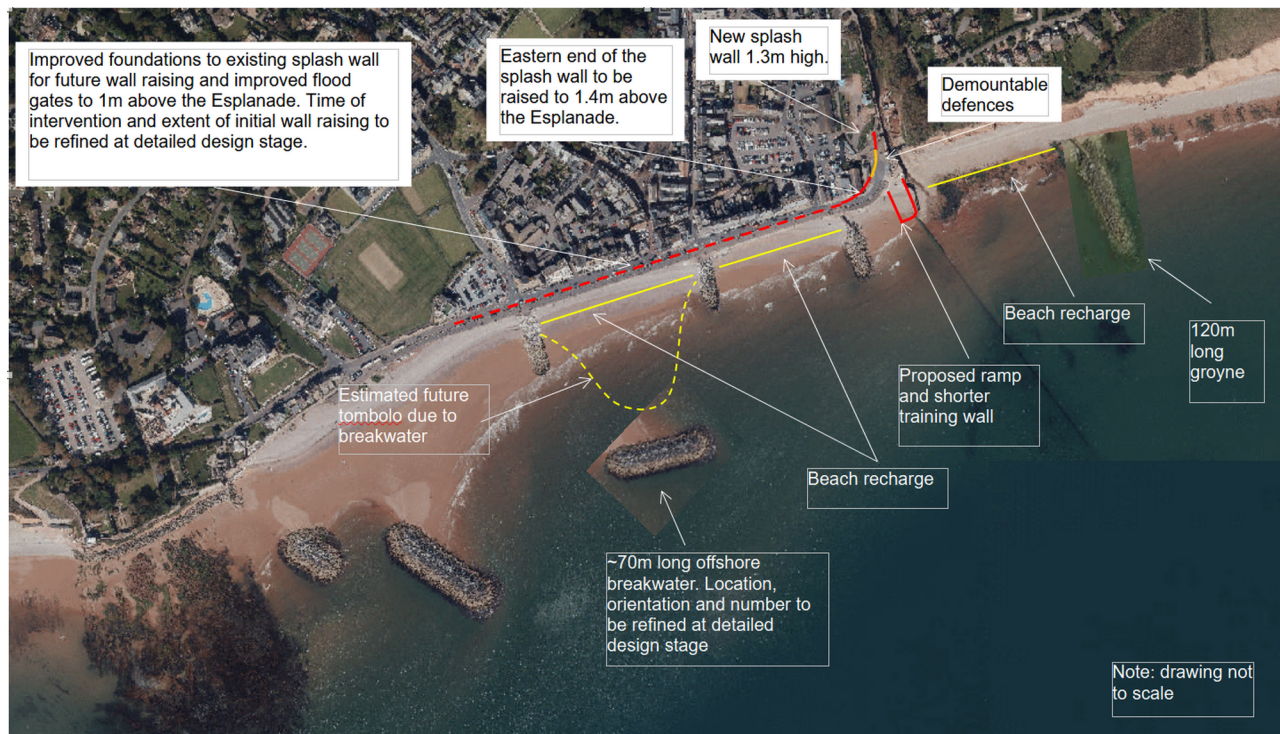
We then met Ebb Tides, the local firm who harvest seaweed, and heard about their aspirations to expand by creating a seaweed farm off East Beach, close to the river mouth area, but quite a way out to sea. This farm would include a biodegradable reef to farm bivalves and help create an area suitable for seagrass. They are hoping that if they can combine with the BMP work that the farm will find it easier to raise funding as the seaweed and reef combination they propose has been shown to reduce wave activity by 40%. I asked for clarity about what they mean by wave activity, is it wave height or wave strength or ... Unfortunately I was not able to understand the answer so I think I need to do some research! (Links to research at the end of this report). Atkins and Keir were both very keen to have further discussions about this as they have already begun exploring the use of such interventions.

Although Atkins + Keir are hoping to get their proposals to EDDC in March EDDC is not expecting to have another Advisory Group meeting until late summer. Although public consultations are being planned timings for these are not known at the moment, it may be that the information will be available in early summer.

To remind everyone of where we are now, we are currently working on option 6, which will henceforth be called the Preferred Option. This is of course not the Preferred Option we have all become used to since 2016, but a new Preferred Option with the same name. (Not at all confusing!)

We will have one or more rock island breakwaters off town beach and either a long rock groyne off east beach or perhaps some more islands. The final decision rests on what the modelling shows when they have constructed a facsimile of Sidmouth conditions in a water tank (tank testing) and have created lots of different wave conditions to physically see what happens. And of course on what can be afforded with the money we have been given to carry out the work.

They are trying to achieve the same sort of big beach which you can see has been created behind the two current islands. Such a beach would not only protect the town but would be an asset to tourism, as long as we didn't create problems for the Lifeboat, sea-based activities, or swimmers. Avoiding such problems is an important part of the design. The Lifeboat will have a new launch ramp at Port Royal, not shown.



Links about seaweed farms and their effects

<https://umaine.edu/aquaculture/project/attenuating-waves-kelp-farms/>

https://pure.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/41372580/Zhu_et_al._2020_Aquaculture_farms.pdf

This is a pre-publication document which hasn't been peer reviewed. Useful bits are pages 8-11 though it is all interesting
<https://umaine.edu/aquaculture/project/attenuating-waves-kelp-farms/>

Page 24 of https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/42642/seaweed_farming_climate.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

Concerning ability to withstand bad weather 'Cultivation structures must be able to withstand infrequent but intense weather events such as storms/cyclones and their associated high-energy waves, and strong currents ' <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1312/10/10/1447>

Other positives of seaweed farms <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780124080621000068>