

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Sidmouth and East Beach BMP Project Steering Group held on 3 December 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.40 pm

Chair introductions

- 1 The Chair welcomed new members from the Vison Group Sidmouth; Mary Walden-Till and Jeremy Woodward, who would attend the Steering Group between them. The Chair took the opportunity to send his best wishes to Robert Crick, who had previously represented the VGS, commenting on his wonderful representation for the people of Sidmouth.

2 Notes from the previous meeting held on 6 October 2020

The notes from the previous meeting were agreed as a true record, subject to clarification on comment made by Chris Lockyear in respect of overtopping of water over the splash wall.

This was clarified as a question he asked in regard to splash wall water that overtops, to establish where it goes, as some returns to the sea through surface drains and some remains in streets. The Engineer clarified that modelling assumes that overtopping all goes down the streets, not down drains. Cllr Lockyear stated that he had requested at that meeting that further work on modelling of this aspect would be undertaken. The Engineer stated that it was not best practice for modelling to include road drains, as it was assumed that, during a storm, surface drains would become blocked with debris. He also outlined the difficulties in modelling at this small level on highways drainage and SWW combined sewer, with high cost to undertake the modelling that did not reflect the value back as a result.

Cllr Lockyear did not recall conversation during the meeting in respect of a pumping station being over and above cost of project – The Engineer clarified that he had commented at the last meeting that the cost could be, and he had further detail to discuss with the Group later in the current meeting.

Tony Burch also wished to add comment in respect of the presentation made at the previous meeting, in that it reflected that raising the splash wall was part of the preferred option and going forward to the BMP. He commented that this wasn't correct and he did not raise it at the time, hence why it is not reflected in the minutes, but wished to clarify it at this point in the meeting. It was confirmed that raising the splash wall was not part of the preferred option.

3 Project aims and objectives

The Project aims and objectives were set out as a reminder, and as background for the next item, the revised Terms of Reference of the Group.

Questions raised at this point included:

- The wording of the project aims did not clearly indicate that the aim was to protect the town from flooding, so clarification was sought. In response, the aims were explained to indeed indicate that the purpose was to protect against flooding but was also a wider remit to maintain the existing coastal defence scheme.

- The aims had already been agreed and carried forward for ratification by the Council; therefore it was suggested that an additional note be made as way of explanation of the aims, in that the aim 1 which reads as “Maintain the 1990’s Sidmouth Coastal Defence Scheme Standard of Service” also includes to protect the town from flooding with a standard of service of 1 year in 50, and seeks to achieve a standard of service towards 1 year in 200.

4 **Terms of reference**

The terms of reference had been reviewed and revised by a sub group of the Steering Group. A flow chart of how ideas, proposals and risks would be considered was also produced, although still at a draft stage for further refinement.

The Chair highlighted some specific changes to the terms of reference, including the inclusion of Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce, and the meetings being open to the public unless otherwise stated.

The Group were content that, subject to some minor changes, and further work to ensure that they did not conflict with East Devon District Council’s constitution, the revised Terms of Reference were acceptable.

The minor changes discussed were:

- Changing the name from Steering to Advisory, as that better reflected the role of the group;
- Amending the community groups listing of Sidmouth Yacht Club to Sidmouth Sailing Club;
- Adding in a requirement for the Project Board, once operational again, to respond to the Advisory Group on any decision they made following receipt of the view of the Advisory Group.

AGREED the revised Terms of Reference, subject to minor amendments and further checks against EDDC’s constitution, with final agreement with the Chair prior to the next scheduled meeting.

5 **CCMA and its effect on the BMP**

The Engineer outlined to the Group how the CCMA impacted on the BMP:

- The CCMA has no effect on funding the BMP;
- The Environment Agency do not currently recognise it as a sufficient study to justify a coastal scheme;
- The CCMA does not look at historical rates of erosion, and uses generalised geology data;
- If the CCMA could be used for the BMP, it would identify an additional 56 homes at risk, with “Rough Funding” eligibility calculations result in between £500K to £750K, which is not insignificant but not considerable either.

Comments from the Group covered:

- That the CCMA study doesn’t take into account that the erosion rate is likely to drop, and the study was on wider coastal erosion, not specific to the area of the BMP;
- It was key not to dismiss the study even if it was not currently recognised by the EA; the study showed 2017 erosion data that demonstrated that erosion is accelerating;

- The study was further evidence of the urgent need to deliver the BMP and not delay;
- Need to communicate clearly how the BMP would be delivered to help assure local residents of the protection it would offer.

6 **Likely Programme**

The programme for delivery, once the updated business case was received (awaiting on economic update) was as follows:

- Environment Agency Approval via National Project Assurance Service in January 2021;
- Decision by February
- Appoint Engineering Construction Contract Project Manager in March/April;
- Tender for and appoint Consultant/design build over summer
- Planning process winter 2021/22
- Start construction 2022.

Discussion by the Group covered:

- Listed building status did not attract additional funding – the Chair confirmed that there was no protection for heritage assets, only some funding if the asset got damaged, as he had checked with Historic England. The Engineer confirmed he would seek clarity from the EA on the costings for listed buildings;
- Concern about securing funding from the EA if the data supplied has changed; in response, Martin Davies from the EA reminded the Group of the assurance process, based on the business case and the credible source of data, of which the Royal Haskoning is; he also reiterated that if the business case changed significantly, then the EA may choose to revisit assurance.
- In response to a question, the business case does include a hybrid wall option which would be subject to planning consent, but more likely to receive consent than a solid wall structure; but there was still further work to be done on the alternative options and the detail would follow in due course.

7 **Revised Economics**

The Group were informed that the business case update was not yet complete; pending completion there would be an idea of the “float” above the existing scheme, in terms of what amount of funding was over and above the existing scheme that could be utilised. Until that figure was known, it could not be discussed on how to utilise that “float” funding.

8 **Wall option investigations**

The Group were shown further images of barrier options, including a raising barrier. Further investigation was required as the raising barrier option had not been tested in a seaside location. In response to a question about locating directly next to railings, the raising barrier would not be directly against railings.

The Group were also shown further illustrations of the folding barrier/bench option and the Teignmouth extreme top up wall.

9 **Alternate options (still in keeping with BMP)**

The Engineering Projects Manager outlined to the Group the alternative options that had come forward to him, through members of the Group or other representatives of Sidmouth.

Recurve wall

The Group were informed that this alternative suggestion had not been modelled, but could be explored. It was likely, in the Engineer's opinion, that the height of the recurve wall in order to work effectively, would be such a height as to obscure the view and therefore may not be acceptable as an alternative.

Sandsaver

This alternative suggestion was brought forward by Mary Walden-Till from VGS. The plastic mould modules could be filled with either concrete or sand and strapped together to form a barrier; the design having hole that then trapped pebbles and sand, thus retaining them. The Group were shown images of the solution.

The Engineering Project Manager made clear that the sandsaver looked promising, but there were a number of factors that needed exploring, including:

- Whilst the solution buries itself, only evidence of partial burial had been seen so far; how such a barrier would impact beach users, including the Lifeboat, needed exploring;
- Unlikely to be visually acceptable if they remain fully or partially uncovered;
- The product was a plastic mould, so reassurances on durability were needed to prevent further plastic dispersal in sea water;
- Explore if a free or funded trial was possible, perhaps at Exmouth as a good trial location.

Offshore geotextile underwater breakwater

This suggestion had also been put forward from VGS, presented as tubing with a scour apron that could be installed below the surface of the water, and therefore a more attractive option. Such technology is in place at Dawlish Warren above sea level, but has been prone to vandalism by being punctured by knives. The cost was significantly cheaper than a rock island, with an estimate of £600K for the whole front with navigational elements. It may also help towards ongoing maintenance costs of existing structures.

Progress on it – within coastal fund, so hoping modelling and short term installation to test will be funded, as not been used in UK

May factor in reduce or remove splash wall, more attractive and cost effective than rock island.

Pumping flood water out

SWW consulted; £3 - £4m ; 100 year water pump out requires a £10m station. Therefore cost well outside of funding limit, and asset not used enough – not sustainable enough for the town.

Offshore Rock Island

The Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce had provided an alternate cost option for an offshore rock island. This submission had led to a challenge to the original quote from the framework contractor, who had now apologised and submitted a revised figure; however this was still unaffordable. The Chamber of Commerce alternative was encouraging in price, but if one rock island was built, that left no remaining funds to carry out other work necessary for the scheme. 2 smaller islands option was unproven and not modelled. Expected modelling to examine the number and scale of rock islands

would be in the region of £50K which may only prove that the alternative solution is not affordable.

Concern was raised by the Group that further modelling on options already dismissed would only delay again the delivery of the BMP.

Chair responded that the widely publicised alternative put forward by the Chamber of Commerce had to be explored but he agreed that any delay was not acceptable.

10 **Procurement options**

The Engineering Projects Manager outlined the options to consider for procurement, stressing that the project was not yet at the stage to go out to market, but careful consideration was needed of the option to deploy.

He outlined the positives and negatives between “design and build” contractor, and traditional separate design consultant. There was also a debate to be had in either going to the whole market, or using other government frameworks.

As there was further work to undertake on the procurement options, the Chair confirmed that this issue would come before the Group at their next scheduled meeting.

11 **AOB - Date of next meeting**

Discussion took place over the formulation of Project Board, which had not been in use or constituted for some time because of the project not being at a stage of funding in place to proceed. The Project Board sits above the Project Manager, with the Group being consulted and giving advice to the Project Manager.

The Project Board could be established again, and the Group agreed that some discussion on the membership and practical issues could take place with a sub group of the Group, as had taken place on the Terms of Reference – namely the Chair, Cllr Lockyear, Tony Burch and appropriate officers. The sub group would meet before the next scheduled meeting date of the Group.

The next meeting of the Group was scheduled to take place on the 9 February 2020 starting at 10am.

Attendance List

Councillor Geoff Jung – Chair, EDDC
Councillor E Rylance, EDDC
Councillor J Loudoun, EDDC
Councillor Paul Arnott, EDDC
Councillor I Barlow, Sidmouth Town Council
Councillor C Lockyear, Sidmouth Town Council
J Radford, Cliff Road Residents Association
Paul Griew, Cliff Road Residents Association
Rob Skinner, National Trust
Sara Hook, representing Sidmouth Hotels

Tony Burch, by invitation of the Chair
Ed Harrison, Sid Vale Association
Martin Davies, Environment Agency
Oliver Salter, Sailing and Sea Angling Club
Mary Walden-Till, VGS
Jeremy Woodward, VGS
Tom Buxton-Smith, EDDC
Darren Roberts, EDDC
John Golding, EDDC
Peter Blyth, EDDC
Anita Williams, EDDC
Vicky Pyle, EDDC

Apologies

Councillor M Rixson, EDDC
Councillor S Hughes, EDDC
Christopher Holland, Clerk Sidmouth Town Council
Andrew Hancock, EDDC
Chris Rose, EDDC
Lucia Stothert
Nick Jennings
Richard Behan, SWW
Thomas Aldridge