

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Sidmouth and East Beach BMP Project Advisory Group held online via zoom on 25 October 2021

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 9.30 am and ended at 11.40 am

27 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the group.

Tony Burch was unable to make the meeting, but had provided the following statement which the Chair read out on his behalf:

“During my 40 years with the Environment Agency and its predecessors I've worked with Natural England and its predecessor English Nature at local, regional and national levels.

In my experience they are very good at their job, which is..... *"to help conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations"*

In my view NE should not be criticised for doing their job.

It is for others... *to help conserve and enhance the social, the built and the economic environments for the benefit of present and future generations*

If the others don't agree with the advice NE give, then in my experience the best way to challenge them is to seek their clarification about the advice they have given, and then if they still don't agree, to discuss the disagreement with NE using evidence and reasoned arguments.

Consequently the Terms of Reference of this Advisory Group explains one of its purposes is to provide a forum for discussion of issues across the different project stakeholders, and Members are expected to be actively involved in meetings.

Hence Natural England's decision not to attend this meeting for such a discussion, without giving a reason for not doing so after its date was changed so they could attend, is in my view serious. It is serious because it signals they do not want to engage with the Advisory Group and most importantly with it's representatives from the local community.

I hope I am wrong and therefore I urge NE to clarify their involvement with this project and how they want to engage with this Advisory Group and the community, and help to implement the Shoreline Management Plan policy of 'managed realignment' at East Beach.

I also urge members of this Advisory Group to treat NE's decision with respect and composure.”

28 Notes from the previous meeting held on 25 February 2021

The notes of the previous minutes were agreed, subject to an amendment to minute 21 Analysis of the Sidmouth BMP's Aims and Objectives – a framework compiled by the

Vision Group for Sidmouth: the detailed report presented to the group had been prepared by Jeremy Woodward of the Vision Group for Sidmouth.

29 **Notes from informal briefing held on 15 July 2021**

The informal notes of the meeting held on the 15 July 2021 were agreed subject to the correction of typographical errors. The correspondence between Natural England and the Jurassic Coast Trust, following their viewing of the informal meeting, was also included for information.

30 **East Beach - why is it so important**

The Engineering Project Manager reminded the Group of the importance of the East Beach stretch, including the designations for that area:

- Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, which created the foundation of the MMO (Marine Management Organisation) on 1st April 2010.
- Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site (December 2001.) World Heritage Sites are an International Designations Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site
- The cliffs make up an area off the Sidmouth to West Bay SAC (Special Area of Conservation) (1st April 2005) SAC's are a European Designation.
- Sidmouth to Beer Coast was designated a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) on 9th August 1985) SSSI's are a National Designation. SSSI detail (naturalengland.org.uk)
- The regulations concerning designated areas were further strengthened as part of the 'Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

The risks in a scheme that includes work to the East Beach are:

- Natural England as a statutory consultee will make a recommendation in the planning process. Should it be to be refuse, it is unlikely that planning permission would be granted.
- Due to this, the EA will only support a scheme which NE are unlikely to recommend for refusal.
- Therefore if Natural England advised to refuse, this would mean no central government funding for scheme.
- Vital a compromise scheme is pushed forward which won't be recommended for refusal.

31 **Current scheme proposal at East Beach**

The group were reminded of the current scheme proposal at East Beach with a diagram that set out the structure:

- Keep 120m long groyne structure
- Initial beach recharge still required
- Ongoing recycling (of scheme) reduced – Town beach should keep more sand behind new rock island(s)
- Less construction plant on East Beach in future recycling beach material
- Compromised solution at East Beach - Rock Revetment unacceptable with environmental designations. Offshore Rock islands unaffordable, and may not keep enough beach material in the system.

During debate, the following issues were raised:

- Evidence behind assumption of a lower level of ongoing recycling not clear;
- Suggestion to relocate one of the town beach islands to east beach and reduce the length of the supergroyne;
- Concern that any proposal for works on East Beach may not get agreement from Natural England, and therefore there would be little point in pursuing it further.

32 **Update on the pause process**

An update was provided on the other options investigated during the pause period, but discounted, which included:

- Town based supergroyne
- Submerged breakwaters
- Geo tubes

The options for island variations were also set out with the positive and negative elements of each option:

- Large islands
- Small inland islands
- Intermediate islands
- Town island(s) and east beach groyne

Consultants have costed the various options by means of costing the elements of the component parts – such as the splash wall, recharge of beach. Rock islands were also costed, including different rock cores and volumes for those islands. These marine consultants, with their understanding of how structures are constructed, are experienced in this level of detail.

Additional modelling has not been undertaken – sediment models for ongoing maintenance, orientation and numeration of rock islands – because of both cost and the delay that this would add to the project. The level of detail known now however is enough to deliver an outline business case on which the funding is based – once the OBC is signed off, such detailed modelling will be the next stage.

33 **Outlining the current alternative option (B)**

Following consideration and deliberation of the pause stage and the various options, work had been undertaken with the sub-group to arrive at a preferred alternative option on the basis of the scheme consisting of town island(s) and a groyne at East Beach.

The Group were shown an image of what such a scheme could look like, with the caveat that the number of town islands, and their orientation, was yet to be determined.

This scheme was the same as the original preferred option but with the following differences:

- Splash wall will be built with a small raise, with allowance for future raising. The Ham end would still require a higher splash wall to defend from easterlies;
- Addition of one or two new offshore rock islands.

The rock island(s) should create and retain a healthy beach at its lee; which in turn will reduce the wave energy hitting the sea wall. This means that, with less wave energy, a smaller splash wall is required.

This alternative preferred option was seen as the best compromise based on the funding available to the scheme.

In discussion with the group:

- Continued concern of agreement of Natural England for this compromised scheme;
- Fewer rock islands mean less visual impact;
- Groyne on East Beach best protection for that section and allows material to build up that can be used to recharge the town beach as required
- Explore, once outline business case agreed, the merits and negatives of a groyne at East Beach versus an offshore rock island;
- Need for future modelling to take into account the impact on currents, as that was a concern for local users of the beach;
- Need to avoid further delay, for both preventing flooding to the town but also to help protect the Cliff Road residents;
- Alternative preferred option best compromise and should go forward to Cabinet for agreement;
- Further delay will also impact on construction costs, which would only increase and lengthy delay may mean that the scheme would be too expensive for the funding allocated.

34 **Update on EA funding**

Funding had been allocated from the Environment Agency (subject to further funding approvals), but the Group were advised that this funding had been assigned as at risk of not being spent in the timeframe. This meant that aside from the environmental time pressure to deliver the project, the risk of loss of funding was also a key factor in moving forward to deliver the project.

The Engineering Projects Manager explained the EA funding cycles of six years – the risk was that this project could slip into the next six year programme, which had unknown levels of funding and the scheme would have to bid again. This was unacceptable risk to the scheme. In order to retain the funding, commissioning the detailed design stage would spend some of the allocation which would help secure the overall fund; it also has an opportunity to expedite works on East Beach to allow the Environment Agency's money to be spent sooner.

35 **Seeking advice of which option to take - A,B or C**

The Group were asked to express their preference for the next steps of the project, following their discussion on the three possible options – continue with the preferred option; progress an alternative hybrid option; or take no action currently.

The Group were in agreement that the alternative hybrid option should be pursued and requested that the Engineering Projects Manager progresses the project under that option.

Attendance List: Advisory Group Members

Councillor Geoff Jung – Chair, EDDC
Councillor J Loudoun, EDDC

Councillor M Rixson, EDDC
Councillor D Bickley, 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
Sara Hook, representing Sidmouth Hotels
Martin Davies, Environment Agency
Mary Walden-Till, VGS
Sam Scriven, Jurassic Coast
Phil Sheppard, Sidmouth Lifeboat
Richard Eley, representing Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce

Tom Buxton-Smith, EDDC
Andrew Hancock, EDDC
John Golding, EDDC
Peter Blyth, EDDC
Debbie Meakin, EDDC

Apologies

Tony Burch, by invitation of the Chair
Ed Harrison, Sid Vale Association
Councillor S Hughes, EDDC