

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Sidmouth and East Beach BMP Project Advisory Group held at online via zoom on 30 June 2022

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 9.30 am and ended at 11.11 am

36 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the group.

37 Notes from the previous meeting held on 25 October 2021

The notes of the previous meeting held on 25 October 2021 were agreed.

Tony Burch commented on his comments from the previous meeting, requesting that Natural England should advise the Group of their ability to attend meetings, as their involvement was key, particularly when discussions on the detailed design stage began. The Engineering Project Manager agreed to email Natural England to seek a statement about attendance.

38 Update on event since last Advisory Group meeting

The Engineering Project Manager gave the Group an update on events, including:

- Work had started on the updated OBC to new Hybrid Option
- A risk workshop had been held with contractors and designers on site
- Concerns now centred on large cost increases and more difficult working conditions
- Resulted in a repriced Hybrid Option and a repriced risk budget.

He highlighted to the Group, elements of construction cost increases, including:

- 50% increase in fuel costs, as red diesel was no longer permitted in construction
- Materials costs increased
- Construction inflation running above general inflation
- Reduced staff availability due to smaller labour pool availability
- Energy costs increased both prior to and since the start of the Ukraine war
- Increased difficulties in getting specialist equipment hire from Europe
- Increased difficulties in importing materials into the UK
- Ongoing Covid sickness impact.

The risk budget increases were due to:

- Increased risk to allow for further material staff increases
- Concern about working from and accessing East Beach, and potential damage to plant material and staff from cliff falls
- Concern over 24 hour working on beach recharge during the non winter months
- Risk over material availability.

Discussion from the Group included:

- Leaving the European Union, and considerable price rises, had led to impacts that were beyond the control of the Group;
- The Chair advised of competition for staff, as many were being attracted to the Hinkley Point project;
- Wholesale price for fuel had started to come down, but that reduction was yet to be passed on; and a rural fuel pricing deal may come to fruition that may help the project;

- Separating out the recharge element, if it is needed, may help reduce the cost, but would need to be examined under the detailed design stage; Previous contractor pricing had been based on information about the site; a site visit in person had caused contractors to revisit the risks and therefore increase the cost to cover those risks.

39 **Working being undertaken to get project back on track**

The Engineering Project Manager outlined the work undertaken to get the project back on track:

- Working on finding the optimum cost to benefit ratio
- Reduced standard of protection gave reduced costs, but also reduced the funding eligibility
- Consultants were engaged on this work currently to specifically look at:
 - Reducing/removing elements of the current scheme
 - The viability of reducing the volume of beach recharge, as this element had the largest cost
 - Reducing other elements of the scheme.

Discussions had also taken place with Simon Jupp MP, on the issue of funding from central government, because of the impact of increased costs on flood schemes nationally. He has taken the issue to DEFRA and the Treasury. Whilst some interim guidance had been released, it had not impacted on the funding needed for the scheme.

Many other coastal councils are in the same position for their schemes. The hope is that the funding calculator will eventually change, because the Government current target for homes protected will not be met.

All other funding opportunities were being explored, including an option of the District Council filling the funding gap, subject to caveats, and approval by Cabinet in September.

The Group were reminded of the dismissed options, and that the outline business case stage does not commit to build, it is to secure the funding.

Discussion by the Group included:

- Positive and negative implications of the Jurassic Coast status for the site;
- Duration of recharging works and how that would impact both local residents and tourists, particularly in respect of noise;
- EA funding was not time limited, but any application would be measured against the guidance in force at that time;
- The option of EDDC filling the funding gap was welcomed, but was subject to approval and support from the Council, so cross party support would be required.

40 **Revised project timeline**

The revised timeframe was set out as below:

- Late summer of 2022 – OBC submission
- Autumn 2022 – OBC approval
- Late autumn 2022 – ongoing scoping of detailed design stage with a sub group
- Early 2023 – Finalise detailed design scope
- Spring 2023 – Tender for consultant
- Summer 2023 – Award contract
- Summer 2023 – Autumn 2024 – Design, public engagement and planning process
- Autumn 2024 – Tender contractor

- Early 2025 – Award contractor
- Spring 2025 – Start construction

41 **An updated Joint Statement between EDDC, Natural England and Jurassic Coast Trust**

The Group had received an updated Joint Statement, between Natural England (NE), the Jurassic Coast Team (JCT) and the District Council.

The statement had been updated, as the previous version was very much out of date. The statement confirmed the position on the Hybrid option, but also outlined the desire for another option to be investigated.

Discussion on the updated Statement included:

- Whilst the main authors of the statement were Natural England and the Jurassic Coast Team, there were elements of the statement that needed clearer explanation. There were also contradictions that required clarification;
- A request for amendments on a factual basis could be requested, but the Statement was already in the public domain as part of the agenda papers;
- The Statement was helpful in clarifying the criteria; however there were also a number of risks apparent that would need further clarification, in order to avoid any problems with the project further into its run – clarification such as thresholds would be helpful;
- The series of conditions listed in the Statement contained some that appeared difficult, and expensive to achieve. Careful consultation with NE and JCT would be needed at the detailed design stage because of these conditions;
- Clarity on the red and amber status within the statement would be helpful;
- Whilst some objection to the hybrid solution was still in place, other Group members were in support and keen for progression.

42 **Q&A**

The Group discussed the importance of clear communications to the public about the project, in particular stressing those elements that were outside of the control of any of the authorities and bodies involved.

Historical information on past beach recharges was also requested.

The formalising of the Project Board was also underway, and would be in place at the required point in the project.

43 **Any other business**

There was no other business raised by the Group.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

Cllr Geoff Jung (Chair)
Cllr Cathy Gardner
Cllr Marianne Rixson

Also present (for some or all the meeting)

Martin Davies Environment Agency
Tony Burch, by invitation of the Chair
Paul Griew, Cliff Road Residents Association
Cllr Ian Barlow, Sidmouth Town Council
Ed Harrison, Sid Vale Association
Richard Eley, representing Sidmouth Chamber of Commerce
Cllr Chris Lockyear, Sidmouth Town Council
Robin Goodman, Surf Lifesaving Club
Mary Walden-Till, VGS

Officers in attendance:

John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Andrew Hancock, Service Lead StreetScene
Tom Buxton-Smith, Engineering Projects Manager
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor apologies:

S Hughes
D Bickley
J Loudoun

Chair

Date: