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Subject to approval at the next Bognor Regis Beach Access Working Party meeting

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## BOGNOR REGIS BEACH ACCESS WORKING PARTY

16 January 2023 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillors Worne (Chair), Mrs Staniforth (Vice-Chair), Brooks, Edwards and Warr (Substitute for Needs)

Phillip King (nominated representative from the Bognor Regis Town Council Access Group) was also in attendance

[Note: Councillor Worne was absent from the meeting during discussion of Agenda Items 1-3]

### 9. WELCOME

The Vice Chair in the Chair, Councillor Staniforth, opened the meeting and welcomed those in attendance to what was the third meeting of the Bognor Regis Beach Access Working Party.

### 10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Chace and Needs, and from Marion Wells (nominated representative from the Bognor Regis Town Council Access Group).

### 11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Brooks declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 4 as he had put forward various ideas for beach access schemes to Arun District Council in past years.

### 12. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 06 July 2022 were approved by the Working Party. These would be signed after the meeting.

### 13. BEACH ACCESS FOR ALL, BOGNOR REGIS - AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PRESENTATION DUE ON 16 JANUARY 2023

The Vice-Chair in the Chair handed over to the Chair, Councillor Worne.

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Group Head of Environment and Climate Change presented the report to the Working Party. He then introduced Rupert

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Teasdale, Project Manager for Coastal Partners, who delivered the presentation as summarised below.

The Project Manager for Coastal Partners introduced himself and gave an overview of Coastal Partners, explaining that they were also in the process of reviewing access solutions for other locations. He explained the challenges associated with beach access, such as that any permanent structure would need to withstand a wave height of 4 metres at Bognor Regis. National guidance regarding the least restrictive access to the outdoors was highlighted, and it was explained that there was a shift away from adhering to Building Regulations requirements as a way of demonstrating compliance with the Disability and Discrimination Act (DDA), now the Equality Act 2010, with regard to the natural environment, and instead a focus on the quality of experience and equality of access to the countryside for people of all ages, circumstances and backgrounds. He explained the necessity for achieving the balance between catering for everyone whilst preserving and enhancing the natural environment.

The Access Chain was then explained, which was a chain of events that led from a person's decision to visit, through the journey, arrival and visit of the site, then the journey home. It was important no links in this chain were broken. He then went into detail about what this meant in practice.

A review of all the options looked at so far was then provided. These included permanent structures – concrete/timber ramp or walkway; repurposing existing structures such as the ramps already in place for other uses; semi-permanent structures including decking; adaptable/seasonal structures including matting, boards and retractable platforms; mechanical; expanding the offer – alternatives to beach access and seafront experiences such as a hub for beach wheelchairs to be kept. Each category was then expanded upon, highlighting capital cost; operation and maintenance costs; access extent; timeframe to deliver; and other factors to consider.

The Project Manager for Coastal Partners then explained their recommendations which were to establish and engage with a user/stakeholder group; to apply the latest national guidance for equality of access to the natural environment; to establish a vision statement and clear project critical success factors/objectives such as what does success would look like; to review seafront amenities and access in conjunction with the solution, such as disabled parking, toilet and changing facilities; to utilise existing assets where possible coupled with a combination of smaller interventions for 'least restrictive access'.

The short term steps suggested were to undertake asset inspections and carry out a survey of existing structures suitable for repurposing; to review amenities and access in conjunction with the solution such as disabled parking, toilet and changing facilities; review and work with the latest national guidance for equality of access to the natural environment; establish and engage with a stakeholder/user group, including the nearest disability forum, local groups and individuals; establish a vision statement and clear project critical success factors/objectives; to seek feedback and visit working examples of good practice; to clear identified ramps ready for the summer season; review potential funding sources to inform budget/match-funding requirements.

The medium term steps suggested were to continue engagement through stakeholder/user groups; to deliver a matting and decking solution; adapt/repurpose an existing ramp and implement any amenity modifications such as disabled parking bays; undertake a Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) / Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) safety audit on modified assets if required; monitor the use of existing ramps over the 2023 summer season; identify funding sources for a capital project and draft a supporting Business Case; launch a capital project to deliver beach access.

The long term steps suggested were the implementation and delivery of capital project; a monitoring plan.

The Project Manager from Coastal Partners then handed over to Arun's Senior Coastal Engineer, who introduced himself and provided an update on information he had gained from Brighton & Hove Council, who had set up a Working Group regarding beach access in 2018. Brighton & Hove were in a similar position to Arun, although further forward. They had carried out extensive engagement with a user group, from which they had found that most people wanted independent access to the beach. Brighton & Hove experienced similar challenges to Arun, and also had a steep shingle beach. They had been trying to deliver lots of small actions to help as many people as possible access the beach. They had manual all-terrain wheelchairs, beach matting, they had carried out some foreshore profiling and had recently taken delivery of an electric wheelchair. Use of the manual all-terrain wheelchairs was operated by the Foreshores Officers on a 'use at your own risk' approach, for which there was no waiver to sign. The Foreshores Officers gave a brief introduction to users regarding how best to use the wheelchairs and how to find the most negotiable section of beach. One challenge faced with the beach wheelchairs was that a lot of users found they were unable to get back up to the top of the shingle unassisted, and lifeguards usually stepped in to assist with helping people get back up. The matting they used was made from old conveyor belts that had been upcycled. Feedback on this was neither overwhelmingly positive nor overwhelmingly negative as some people chose to use it, others did not. The electric wheelchair, which cost in the region of £10,000, had so far only been tested by staff, but they were pleased with this.

Members then took part in a discussion, where the following points were raised:

- If shifting away from DDA compliance, could this leave the Council exposed to legal action? The Project Manager for Coastal Partners did not think this would be the case, however agreed to explore this matter further.
- It was asked whether ramps had already been discounted due to the timeframes that they would actually allow users to access to the beach each day. The Chair explained that some wheelchair users could access the foreshore with the ramps already in existence, and if these could be resurfaced and repurposed it would make it accessible for more people.

- Would access to ramps used by other groups cause a conflict of access time? It was felt by some Members that if an agreement could be made with other user groups, this may result in positive benefits such as a combined financial pool, and management of shingle.
- The shingle on existing ramps was a problem, however if when repurposing a ramp, consideration was given to the track size of a vehicle to remove the shingle, this would make it a much quicker issue to resolve each time.
- It was asked whether all shingle could be removed, or a barrier of rocks put out at sea. The Project Manager for Coastal Partners explained that littoral drift had to be considered and that Arun was lucky to have the shingle as a sea defence, which was something that other areas had to import in at vast expense. Building hard structures was no longer favourable and would likely cost tens of millions to implement. It was also probable that Arun would not be successful in obtaining a licence for this as there was no justification to necessitate it.
- It was felt that using a ramp would be much easier if using a beach wheelchair, rather than the users own wheelchair.
- Some years ago a rubber track was put down at Arun which was found to be very useful and allowed some wheelchair users to access the upper shore.
- One Member asked if an area of shingle could be cleared to find out what the effects of this would be, and to inspect the ramps and steps underneath. Other Members felt this would be costly and time-consuming.
- It was felt the ramp by the Boat House, which had a nearby accessible toilet, would be a good ramp to clear initially.
- There was concern from both a welfare and also a litigation perspective about people using ramps to get onto the beach, and then not being able to get back up again. The Senior Coastal Engineer explained that people were expected to undertake their own dynamic risk assessment as to what they could/could not do.
- If some existing ramps were cleared, this may also help people with pushchairs wanting to access the beach.
- Members confirmed that the Working Party were open to all beach access opportunities possible.
- The beach wheelchairs required regular hosing down and maintenance, which would need to be factored in to any plans.
- In Greece there were small vehicles on rails to assist users directly into the water and it was asked whether something like this could be considered. The Project Manager for Coastal Partners explained that these types of vehicles were only suitable for less steep beaches with less of a tidal range.
- It was asked whether the foreshores tractor could be utilised to move shingle. The Group Head of Environment and Climate Change explained a more powerful vehicle would probably be required.

The Group Head of Environment and Climate Change explained that he would bring a report to the next meeting of the Working Party, containing recommendations as suggested during the presentation from Coastal Partners. If the Working Party agreed with these recommendations, they would be presented as recommendations from the Working Party to the Environment Committee at its Special meeting on 27 February 2023.

The Working Party noted the report and also the presentation delivered by the Project Manager from Coastal Partners.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

One Member informed the Working Party that he had spoken to two business people, both of whom had expressed an interest in being part of a beach access scheme, which he felt may provide a source of potential funding.

Members were of the view that there should be no charge to users of any beach access schemes implemented.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Bognor Regis Beach Access Working Party would take place at 9.30am on 06 February 2023.

(The meeting concluded at 11.42 am)

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