

Arun District Council

REPORT TO:	Environment Committee
SUBJECT:	Update on Beach Access for All - Bognor Regis
LEAD OFFICER:	Karl McLaughlin, Senior Coastal Engineer Joe Russell-Wells, Group Head of Environment and Climate Change
LEAD MEMBER:	Cllr Sue Wallsgrove
WARDS:	Felpham West, Hotham, Marine
CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION: Council Vision aims: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote and support a multi-agency response to tackle the causes of health inequality in Arun's areas of greatest deprivation.• Champion leisure, culture and the Arts in Arun and encourage our community to embrace healthy and active lifestyles.• Work with partners to provide advice, support and activities that promote community wellbeing where it will have the greatest impact.• Encourage the development of the district as a key tourist destination, supporting and enabling improvements and activities to increase visitor spend.• Make best use of our natural assets to help drive the economy.	
DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT: Response to Environment Committee request to facilitate Beach Access Working Party for Bognor Regis	
FINANCIAL SUMMARY: No funding has been set aside for this project. The work has been undertaken by the Senior Coastal Engineer following the retirement of the Engineering service manager.	

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks to update the Committee on the desk study and survey agreed in the Environment Committee on 27th February 2023 together with actions taken this year to improve access to the beach in Bognor Regis.
- 1.2 The project is still ongoing and the outcomes from this piece of work can be applied to access across all of Arun's beaches.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 As this report is an information paper, there are no recommendations for the Committee to consider. This report is to be taken as read only with Members having the opportunity to ask questions at the meeting.

3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report summarises the activities agreed at the Environment Committee meeting on 27th February 2023 where the recommendations of the Bognor Regis Beach Access Working Party (BRBAWP) were reported. It presents the findings of the desk study and site surveys conducted by the Coastal Engineers and Flood Prevention team and updates on actions taken this year to improve access to the beach.

4 DETAIL

4.1 Background

A report setting out recommendations to improve access to the beach for all was approved in February 2023. The report followed the conclusion of the Bognor Regis Beach Access Working Party (BRBAWP) and recommendations which came from this work. The report set out objectives and short, medium and longer-term actions. The report can be found at the link under the background documents at the end of this report.

4.2 Beach Access Objectives

The following table sets out the objectives agreed in February this year.

1	Establish and engage with a user / stakeholder group for ongoing dialogue.
2	Apply the latest national guidance for equality of access to the natural environment.
3	Establish a vision statement and clear project critical success factors / objectives such as <i>what does success look like?</i>
4	Review seafront amenities and access in conjunction with the solution, such as disabled parking, toilet and changing facilities.
5	Utilise existing assets where possible coupled with a combination of smaller interventions for 'least restrictive access'.

This report sets out the progress with these objectives and the actions which were identified.

4.3 Beach Access update

The following 5 points provide an update against the objectives set out in the table above.

1. Stakeholder engagement has begun with preliminary discussion having taken place with some users who have direct experience of difficulty accessing the beach, however additional engagement is planned. We are working to investigate both local and national stakeholders and an initial list of groups is shown below. The stakeholder engagement work is an evolving picture and the list shown below is an incomplete list – further work is being carried out to complete a final list.
 - Scope
 - West Sussex County Council, WSCC
 - Bognor Regis Town Council
 - Bognor Regis Regeneration board
 - Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester, VAAC
 - Chichester University
2. The latest national guidance, which was referred to in the Feb 2023 report is being applied to beach access as work progresses. By way of a reminder the following sets out how this is applied:
 - Design standards help us see the levels of accessibility that are acceptable for all, including those 'people with health conditions or impairments'.
 - The character and topography of the natural environment exists without reference to the needs of visitors.
 - We can use the least restrictive access approach so that where levels of access are not as good as the standard, they are as good as they can be for as many people as possible.
 - Most people accept that not all areas of the natural environment can be made fully accessible.
3. A draft vision statement is set out below. In drafting the vision statement it will be important to ensure that users / stakeholders 'own' the statement and agree with '*what success will look like*'. It is therefore planned that as stakeholders are engaged the draft statement will be developed together with what the stakeholders see as the critical success factors. As a result, the vision will be amended to fully ensure that it reflects what is understood to be what success will look like for all.

Draft Vision Statement

Improve access to the beach giving everyone who chooses to access the beach the opportunity to do so. This to include the provision of all facilities to make a visit the best experience they could expect, having access to parking, toilet provision and changing facilities where possible.

4. A review of the seafront amenities has been carried out together with the review of the existing assets. This is set out below.
5. A review of the existing assets or beach access ramps has also been completed together with the seafront amenities and is set out below.

4.4 A review of seafront amenities and existing beach access ramps

This review is set out in the attached report entitled the *Foreshore Ramp Site Investigations* report which can be seen at Appendix B. The report provides an overview of the work carried out over the summer 2023 to assess the ramps and their potential use to enable access for all to the beach. As set out in the report a methodology was used to assess the ramps to select those most suitable for use and for potential future investment to further improve access arrangements.

The conclusion of the detailed evaluation of the existing infrastructure found that of the existing ramps, two are the most suitable for access to the beach for most users. Full details are set out in the appended report and are briefly set out below:

- The ramp at **Blakes Road** is the most suitable. The ramp is generally naturally kept clear of shingle with direct access to the lower foreshore and benefits from accessible parking, toilets, and a café all within a 75m radius.
- The ramp at **Gloucester Road** is also suitable but consideration will need to be given to managing the potential 'mixed use' of the ramp – i.e. users other than pedestrians using the ramp particularly due to the narrow nature of the ramp. Additionally, the ramp is likely to require more frequent clearance of shingle than that of Blakes Road. The ramp also benefits from nearby facilities.

The ramps at Gloucester Road and Blakes Road were cleared of shingle, though little clearance was needed at Blakes Road during June. Following the original clearance some minor clearance was needed at the Gloucester Rd ramp, but this was not significant and followed the unusual storm event in August (high winds and spring tides) which resulted in the requirement of clearance of shingle from the promenade.

To facilitate access at the Gloucester Road ramp the gated entrance was removed and a pedestrian barrier system was erected. The barrier system is a temporary measure to prevent the unmanaged launching of Personal Watercraft (PWC), such as jet skis, which has caused potentially dangerous incidents between users, pedestrians and cyclists all using the promenade.

The use of the two ramps were monitored by the Foreshore team over the summer period. The information relating to this is included in the appended report and demonstrates that a variety of users were accessing the ramps including people using mobility aids, older adults, water sports users and families with pushchairs.

Promotion of access to the beach was made through the council's communication team and through social media at the end of August and September.

4.5 Opportunities for improvements to ramps

Improvements such as handrails, resting platforms and possible resurfacing are set out in the report at Appendix B under section 6.2.

Discussions with members, neighbouring authorities and residents have identified additional funding and engagement opportunities. Funding opportunities that require further consideration include;

- West Sussex County Council Partnership Funding
- Bognor Regis Town Council Partnership Funding
- Local Businesses
- Sport England – Small Grants Programme
- National Lottery Awards for All – England
- Veolia Environmental Trust
- United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund, UKSPF
- Community Infrastructure Levy, CIL

This is an incomplete list and the Lead officer welcomes suggestions.

4.6 Feedback from other local authorities

As was established by the BRBAWP the council is not alone in its objective to improve access for all to beaches. There are several authorities who are working towards improvements. As part of the next steps identified in the February 2023 report officers were tasked to seek feedback from other working examples to learn of good practice so as to ensure the best practice is introduced to the council's beaches.

The introduction of beach access wheelchairs has been of significant interest, particularly due to the challenges presented to those wanting to access the beach using these wheelchairs.

The following has been provided by officers at Worthing following their trial over the summer.

Beach Access Wheelchairs – Worthing Borough Council

During the summer of 2023, Worthing Coastal Office have been trialling a pilot scheme with three various wheeled beach access aids. These consisted of one adult and child beach wheelchair along with a wheeled frame, all of which were locally donated to the Council.

Initial challenges were around the physicality required to traverse a shingle gradient, even with two adults pushing. Training exercises were also held with

WSFR in preparation for an emergency extraction, should a hirer be unable to get back up the beach.

During 2023, the chairs were only permitted to be used on the shingle berm and not to be taken down into the intertidal area. However, during the summer, the hire process was suspended due to isolated incidents breaching the booking disclaimer.

The Coastal Office team also received feedback around the facilities the hirers felt they still needed, such as a static hoist and separate changing room.

During the winter of 2023, Worthing Borough Council will be looking to create a revised model, which, where possible, takes into account the feedback received from users and to further increase safety when hiring a beach access wheelchair on Worthing Seafront.

The evidence collected through consultation with neighbouring authorities demonstrates that the coastline presents a unique set of challenges for which appropriate consideration must be given before actioning improvements.

It is imperative that the council consults a range of stakeholders, particularly those who are direct beneficiaries, to ensure that a collaborative vision statement is developed and fit-for-purpose improvements are delivered.

4.7 Medium / long term steps

The work to improve access will be ongoing and the delivery of several small actions to help as many people as possible access the beach will begin to make a difference. These actions started over this year's summer season and data of those using the ramps can be seen in the attached report, *Visual Survey Results* (Appendix C). There will be further examples of initiatives and experiences that Arun District Council can draw on to continue to develop its facilities. This will include continuing to work with other local authorities and organisations such as Coastal Partners sharing knowledge, experience and best practice on access projects. In addition, the work carried out as part of this project can be applied to other beaches along our coastline.

It is envisaged that a further report will be returned to the Environment Committee together with any further recommendations and request for approval.

5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 No further consultation has taken place at this stage. Further consultation is anticipated with the development of a stakeholder group as resources allow.

6 OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

As this report is an information paper, there are no options / alternatives for the Committee to consider.

7 COMMENTS BY THE GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 7.1 There will be no additional financial impact as shingle clearance will be funded through existing budgets.

8 RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Risk Assessments have not been produced at this stage of the project.

9 COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER

- 9.1 The report is in accordance with the terms of reference and there are no additional legal implications.

10 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 10.1 None at present. Capacity to deliver the remaining outcomes will be dependent on successful recruitment within the Coastal Engineers and Flood Prevention team.

11 HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT

- 11.1 Health and Safety impacts will be assessed within the design phase of any project. There will also be ongoing health and safety management responsibilities such as risk assessment, inspection and maintenance that will need to be considered and appropriately resourced.

12 PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT

- 12.1 Delivery of improvements to the Gloucester Road ramp will require alterations to general promenade access and negotiation with the affected concessionaires.

13 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE

- 13.1 The overall objectives of the Working Party is to improve the equalities opportunities and social value as a result of the recommendations. An EIA is attached to this report.

14 CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE

14.1 This has not been produced at this stage of the project.

15 CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

15.1 This has not been produced at this stage of the project.

16 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

16.1 It is not anticipated there will be any impact.

17 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

17.1 Sensitive data will be handled in accordance with the GDPR.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Environment Committee report 27 Feb 2023

Beach Access for All, Bognor Regis – Bognor Regis Beach Access Working Party

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Environment Committee, 27/02/2023 18:00 \(arun.gov.uk\)](#)