

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 23 September 2021

REPORT

SUBJECT: Bognor Regis Beach Access Options Appraisal

REPORT AUTHOR: Roger Spencer – Engineering Services Manager

DATE: August 2021

EXTN: 37812

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The report follows Cabinet's consideration, in November 2020, of a long-list of options available to achieve access to the beach in Bognor Regis for those with limited mobility, when the 8 presented options were short-listed to three.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Environment and Neighbourhood Services Committee:

1. Approves Option 4A as the preferred option
2. Authorises the Group Head of Technical Services in consultation with the Chair of Environment and Neighbourhood Services Committee and the Interim Group Head for Corporate Support to vary or adapt the proposal to reflect the outcome of consultation with stakeholders
3. Authorises any necessary approvals to be sought and procurement in line with Standing Orders to enable subject to funding and approvals, with the aim of operating from the Summer season of 2022.

Recommends to Corporate Policy and Performance Committee the £25,000 cost of the preferred option be included in the capital budget.

1. BACKGROUND:

- 1.1. The aim of the project is to address the calls for better access, not just for able bodied but also for the disabled, to the lower foreshore.
- 1.2. A Cabinet report in November 2020 provided a history to the subject and considered a long-list of eight potential options; this was reduced to an agreed short-list of three for further consideration (see Minute 284).
- 1.3. A table in the Cabinet report provided a brief description of the 8 options, together with indicative costs, constraints/opportunities and comments for each.
- 1.4. It is worth reiterating a brief description of the constraints, as whilst this project's aim is seemingly a simple one, the solution is not, nor is it one that has had

widespread provision/adoption by others around the country.

- High tidal range and potentially severe incident wave conditions,
- Natural upper beach of shingle, that is mobile and has an angle of repose of around 1 in 9. A sandy, shallow sloping lower foreshore underlain by clay extends seaward,
- West to east littoral drift (3,000 – 10,000m³ per annum),
- Provision should be Equalities compliant (max gradient vs slope lengths, handrails, edge/surface treatment etc.). Although not directly applicable, Part M of the Building Regulations relates to access and use of buildings. Guidance is available through good practice guides published by Central Government and this is seen as the best applicable in this situation.),
- Tides vary in height and time of day,
- Beach levels (and profile) vary on a daily basis – i.e. shingle and sand is mobile,
- All of Aldwick, Bognor Regis and Felpham is within a new Marine Special Protection Area, and west of the Pier is a Site of Special Scientific Interest,
- Need to consider capital and revenue costs.

1.5. It is also worth reiterating the potential adverse scenarios if the Council is to avoid considerable reputational risk / damage. Applies to all Options short-listed from the November 2020 Cabinet report.

In providing a public facility, it should be safe for all users.

- Little or no control of how users act on the foreshore with the risk of being cut-off by the tide, due to long groynes on an incoming tide,
- Ordinary wheelchairs would be very likely to become stuck (soft sand / underlying clay),
- The effects of sand and salt water on wheelchairs,
- it could become a focal point for all users, thus marginalising the 'target audience',
- Need to consider the whole-life aspects of such a facility,

1.6. The previous report outlined the potential (indicative) capital and revenue costs.

1.7. In bringing the eight options down to three, there was also discussion on the merits of including a fourth; the concrete ramp option at Rock Gardens (Option 6), for which some previous design work had been done by a third party in 2008.

1.8. Subsequent detailed work on this potential fourth option has borne out the concerns raised in the initial appraisal. The proposal, from 2008, does not fully address the need to either get over the shingle or down to sand level; the exit point is still above mean high water springs and it only reaches around 1/3 of the way to the current sand location.

1.9. Whilst the design is Equalities compliant, an assertion that the area is often devoid of shingle cannot be backed up by air photo evidence – looking over

recent images back to 2000, only in 2005 was there a reasonable amount of the concrete exposed.

1.10. There is then the unsuitability of putting a solid structure into the littoral system, at a point which is convex in the general beach plan-shape - doing so at that point (i.e. Rock Gardens) would probably be the most disruptive to the natural beach regime and would almost certainly have detrimental effects to the east, reducing the standard of defence and increasing Repairs and Maintenance requirements to the existing coastal assets.

1.11. The exclusion of Option 6 (Concrete Ramp at Rock Gardens) in the short-listing process is therefore considered justified.

1.12. Option 4 (provision of buggies – in combination with matting – not Equalities compliant)

1.12.1. This is envisaged to be an assisted service, provided on a seasonal basis, initially by the Foreshores Team. The Team would not be able to provide the service with the current staffing provision; however, the Team is recruited seasonally and so flexibility is possible. In future years the service may be provided by way of a concession.

1.12.2. As the times of High Water varies day to day, the provision would not be able to be 'rolled out' at the start of the day and left. The management of the proposed specialist chairs would require staffing thorough out the hours of operation and so the Team would probably operate a rota.

1.12.3. The buggies (example photos below) are most suited to a shallow sloping beach. The steepness of the shingle could be mitigated by the acquisition and use of a suitable tracked machine to grade the beach (probably on a daily basis) and a system of roll-up matting to enable wheelchairs to negotiate the shingle. This would not be fully Equalities compliant but with assistance, the buggies could reach the foreshore.

1.12.4. Examples of specialist buggies / chairs



Left - suitable for use in the sea



Right - similar to the type used by Brighton and Hove Council for their free service.

1.10.5. It should be noted that Brighton and Hove Council's free service requires that users do not attempt to negotiate the sloping part of the beach, to get

down to the foreshore; they must limit themselves to the flatter, top of the beach.

- 1.10.6. Chichester District Council does not operate a disabled access service but does provide a seasonal safety boat. This is launched with the aid of a tractor, the tractor also serving to help regulate the beach slope – this makes access to the beach easier for the less able; it is not Equalities compliant and users do so at their own risk.
- 1.10.7. Examples of roll out matting; these are not suitable for steeply sloping shingle but with shingle management, by a small tracked machine of a type shown, a localised and seasonal slope should be possible to maintain.



- 1.10.8. The matting shown above has a high plastic content which has the possibility of being abraded and releasing micro-plastics into the sea. It would therefore be preferable to use a natural material based system, such as timber slats linked by natural fibre rope. This would make it heavier but with the aid of the tracked machine this could be rolled out and recovered when required.
- 1.10.9. As noted above, tides occur at different times of the day and so the matting would not be left in place (i.e. over High Water or overnight) but made available for periods over low water during the daytime.
- 1.10.10. The location would be much more flexible than a fixed structure (i.e. Option 7) but once chosen for the season, it would need to remain in that location, as the regulation of the beach slope would encourage an element of beach stability, with reduced input on each tide to maintain the more gentle slope. Obviously, summer storms would undo some of this work but the 'desire ines' of usage would help regulate the beach profile.
- 1.10.11. Users, both able bodied and less able (probably assisted), could use the facility at will. It is not proposed that staff would normally be on hand to provide assistance but would be required to operate the machinery and manage the buggies.
- 1.10.12. The machine necessary regulate the beach slope could be hired (on a long-term basis) and would be available for other allied uses on the foreshore e.g. shingle clearance.
- 1.10.13. These machines predominantly diesel powered but there is a move to electric/hybrid or to hydrogen power. These newer fuel systems are still in development and their applicability is related to their proposed duty cycle – short intermitent use favours electric/hybrid, whilst long, high demand

seems to suit the emerging hydrogen systems. There are limitations with both (not least recharging/refuelling infrastructure provision). It is therefore suggested that biodiesel would be used during a trial phase. If a system emerges that has sustainable/sustainability benefits, then this should be adopted for the longer term solution.

1.10.14. Clearly, training and certification of staff in the use of such machines would be required but these machines are very much at the lower end of the competence requirement scale.

1.10.15. Storage for the chairs and the machinery would need to be provided nearby.

1.10.16. Costings

Staffing - £30k pa

Machinery £40k pa (hire or second-hand cost, plus fuel & maintenance)

Chairs £3k each – say 5 initially *

Matting £15k *

Chair and machinery storage close by £5k *

* initial cost – therefore circa £35k + £70k pa

1.11. Option 4A (Decking - extending close to the beach crest – Equalities compliant)

1.11.1. To provide a facility that caters for High Water and out of season provision, it is suggested that consideration be given to a further short-listed Option

1.11.2. This would involve revised and additional decking units being provided to supplement those already situated east of The Pier.

1.11.3. This additional Option would be low cost, with minimal ongoing cost liability and would enable access over the shingle to just short of the crest of beach. There are currently a number east of the Pier but they are limited in width. One or more could be extended to just short of the beach crest; thus enabling wheelchair users and others to gain a better view of the sea.

1.11.4. A similar, wider decking unit could also be provided west of the Pier where there is currently no provision; as with the suggestion in 1.11.3, this would extend further to seaward, thus providing a better seaside experience.

1.11.5. The capital cost of this additional option would be in the order of £25,000 with minimal revenue implication.

1.11.6. Experience gained from the existing decking provision is that they could be readily procured and constructed in time for the summer 2022 season; then would be available 24/7/365.

1.11.7. The benefits of this option are the low initial cost allied to the year-round availability, Equalities compliance and wider geographic provision together with minimal revenue implication.

1.12. Option 5 (Powered shuttle service – potentially Equalities compliant)

- 1.12.1. This would be a dedicated, larger tracked machine, able to take users ‘on board’ on a flat bedded adaptation, that stayed level during operation. The service could operate from almost any location but clear warning signage for other beach users would be required.
- 1.12.2. This type of machine is not readily available and would require working with suppliers to specify and manufacture the required system.
- 1.12.3. Accordingly, there would be a high capital cost (new machine) plus development time and costs; there would also be a higher requirement for safety certification, as it would in effect be carrying passengers.
- 1.12.4. There would be a need to specifically insure the machinery and allow for a servicing provision and storage when not in use.
- 1.12.5. The machine would be single-purpose and so not re-deployable for other duties. The machine and operator would be ‘standing ready’ at all times during the time of the service
- 1.12.6. The service would only operate during the Summer season and at periods around Low Water.
- 1.12.7. Fuelling considerations mentioned above (1.10.13) would apply.
- 1.12.8. If the machinery were to breakdown there would be a greater consequence than with Option 4; not only might users be stranded on the foreshore but the machine would too. There would in effect be no Plan B.
- 1.12.9. Costings – no in depth costings have been undertaken, as this is seen as the least preferable ‘service’ option but there would be very high capital cost (due to machinery purchase and development costs) as well as longer implementation time, skilled staffing and increased cost of safety and storage provision.

1.13. Option 7 (Fixed Timber Ramp - Equalities compliant)

- 1.13.1. In working up the initial design and cost estimate of £550,000 for the timber ramp structure (Option 7), schematics were produced and included in the Cabinet report.
 - 1.13.2. Costings have been re-visited, as many commodity prices have increased substantially in recent months. Unlike most softwoods and some hardwood species, the cost of Greenheart has not increased significantly, and is likely to increase only by around 5% - 10% in the near future. There will be an increase in construction costs (labour, plant, other materials, etc.) but the original estimate should be within acceptable bounds for the current considerations.
 - 1.13.3. The location for this structure would be as before, i.e. near to West Street, where the combination of beach crest width, shingle profile slope and stability make it the preferred location.
- 1.14. Consultation. Members of Cabinet were keen to see consultation with potential users and stakeholders. As there are still a number of options under consideration, this has not yet been done. Pending the identification of a preferred option, then consultation would be undertaken with a range of

stakeholders. Views would be sought around location, operating seasons and times plus the level of assistance and maintenance provision (depending upon which option was identified).

1.15. It is assumed that whichever option is preferred, it would be free to all users.

1.16. Design, permitting considerations and timescale to implementation

1.16.1. Options 4 and 4A would involve minimal design and procurement and could be achieved for 2022/23

1.16.2. Option 5 would involve inviting expressions of interest to develop the machinery and then time to develop it. It is unlikely that a service would be available for before Summer 2023

1.16.3. Option 7 (Timber Ramp) – this would entail detail design and procurement (tenders etc.) and would not be deliverable for 2022/23

1.16.4. All Options would involve a level of permitting, whether that was environmental or to meet the requirements of the Coast Protection Act 1949 or other legal requirements.

1.16.5. Arun District Council owns the area above High Water but it leases the Foreshore from the Crown. Permission would need to be sought from the Crown, either for a fixed structure or for an operation that is not included in the terms of the existing Regulating Lease (Clause 3.12 of the Lease limits the driving of mechanically propelled vehicles to Construction and Repairs & Maintenance and beach cleansing or removal of materials)

1.16.6. The substantial fixed structure of Option 7 would require Planning Permission – which could be an involved process, due to the environmental designations. Further guidance would be sought from safety experts such as RoSPA, although initial contact has been made. Option 4A may require Planning Permission).

1.17. Timescale of operation.

1.17.1. As noted above, Option 4A would be available 24/7/365

1.17.2. It is suggested that Options 4 and 5 would be provided during the same period for which seasonal staffing is provided from the Foreshore Office but there may be scope to varying this depending upon the outcome of consultation.

1.17.3. It is further suggested that if neither Option 4A or 7 is not the preferred Option, then any provision under Options 4 or 5 is made for a one-year trial period, with a report back to Committee with the results of the first year's operation and usage with consideration then given to continuing the service.

1.17.4. The benefit of Option 4, 4A & 5 is that there would be minimal decommissioning cost, although there could be extensive abortive costs in developing and disposing the machinery of Option 5

2. PROPOSAL(S):

That Environment and Neighbourhood Services Committee:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approves Option 4A as the preferred option 2. Authorises the Group Head of Technical Services in consultation with the Chair of Environment and Neighbourhood Services Committee and the Interim Group Head for Corporate Support to vary or adapt the proposal to reflect the outcome of consultation with stakeholders 3. Authorises any necessary approvals to be sought and procurement in line with Standing Orders to enable subject to funding and approvals, with the aim of operating from the Summer season of 2022. 4. Recommends to Corporate Policy and Performance Committee the £25,000 cost of the preferred option be included in the capital budget. 		
3. OPTIONS:		
Either of the other three short-listed options or no service provision		
4. CONSULTATION:		
Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		✓
Relevant District Ward Councillors		✓
Other groups/persons (please specify)	See Para 1.16	
5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial	✓	
Legal		✓
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment	EIA completed	
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		✓
Sustainability	✓	
Asset Management/Property/Land	✓	
Technology		✓
Other (please explain)		✓
6. IMPLICATIONS:		
Finance:		
Members should be aware that there is no budgetary provision for the facility in both the capital programme and revenue budget. Any scheme would therefore have to be considered as a growth bid, no doubt alongside other competing bids. The financial implications of the four options considered in this report are summarised in		

the table below.

	Option 4	Option 4A	Option 5	Option 7
Capital	£	£	£	£
Chairs	15,000		No costings provided for option 5. Assume no further action will be recommended for this option.	
Matting	15,000			
Storage Unit	5,000			
Decking		25,000		550,000
Total	35,000	25,000		550,000
Revenue				
Staff	30,000	No revenue costs expected		
Machinery (Leased)	40,000			
Maintenance				10,000
Total	70,000	0	10,000	

In considering what action, if any, to take Members will need to consider the financial implications of the options alongside the other matters outlined in the report. Clearly, if any of the three costed options is pursued, there will be an effect on the capital programme and revenue budget. The report states that if introduced, the facility will be free of charge, so there is no income generating potential. Members are reminded that the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan shows an ongoing significant revenue deficit and undertaking this scheme will increase the pressure on the Council's already difficult financial situation.

Human rights/ Equalities: No significant adverse impacts, as the provision is sought to increase accessibility

Sustainability: Proper consideration in the choice of materials

Asset Management/Property/Land: The new works are likely to be on or operate over land that Arun DC owns or leases from the Crown for which consent may be needed.

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:

To enable the Council to provide better access to the foreshore in Bognor Regis for those with limited accessibility

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Equalities Impact Assessment

Cabinet report in 16 November 2020 - [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 16/11/2020 17:00 \(arun.gov.uk\)](#) – Item 11