



ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 3 December 2020

REPORT TITLE:	HOYLAK BEACH MANAGEMENT
REPORT OF:	NICOLA BUTTERWORTH DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report sets out the progress in delivering the recommendations of the Executive Member Decision of 13 March 2020 to determine a long-term management strategy for Hoylake beach.

The future management of Hoylake beach strategically aligns with both the Sustainable Environment and Safe and Pleasant Communities themes of the Wirral Plan 2025.

This report affects Hoylake & Meols ward.

It is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee are recommended to :-

1. note the progress in developing a specification for an ecological and geomorphological survey and, subject to a suitable budget being identified, to agree to the procurement of a study as a scientific evidence base upon which to develop future management options for Hoylake beach.
2. agree that the Director of Neighbourhoods produces a Communications and Engagement Strategy for the development of the beach management plan for Hoylake in engagement / consultation with a Working Group of the Chair and Spokespersons.
3. approve the submission of an extension request for assent to Natural England for the continuation of non-vegetation management activities at Hoylake beach which were not subject to cessation as a result of the Cabinet Member decision of 13 March 2020.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The procurement of an Ecological and Geomorphological study will provide a scientific evidence base upon which to develop future management options for Hoylake beach. The future beach management plan will require assent from Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 via a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). The findings of the survey will be used to support the HRA for the beach management plan.
- 1.2 The Cabinet Member Decision of 13 March 2020 requested stakeholder engagement and ongoing dialogue with local stakeholders and statutory bodies in the development of future beach management at Hoylake. Given the significant public interest shown in the future of the management of Hoylake Beach the development of a Communications and Engagement Strategy in consultation / engagement with a Working Group formed of the Chair and Spokespersons would ensure that the range of stakeholders for future engagement is agreed. The Communications and Engagement Strategy will identify all relevant stakeholders and also set out how and when engagement on the development of the beach management plan will be undertaken.
- 1.3 The assent for all management activities at Hoylake beach expires at the end of March 2021. Some limited interventions to manage windblown sand and provide free outfalls to drainage systems are still currently undertaken. Without continuation of assent the council would be in breach of the Wildlife and Countryside Act if it were to undertake these activities after March 2021. The sand clearance activities, combined with ongoing gulley cleansing, are primarily undertaken to manage flood risk on the adjacent highway and also to ensure sand does not blow onto the highway and cause hazardous driving conditions. These operations will be required to be undertaken after March 2021. Furthermore from time to time community based activities at and adjacent to Hoylake beach will require assent and the application for continuation for assent will also include these activities.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Separate ecological and geomorphological studies were considered however by combining both requirements into a single study it is thought that added value can be achieved. Furthermore geomorphology (change in beach form) is influenced by ecological and vegetation processes and therefore by undertaking separate studies there may be a loss in value of the final study if one is not informed by the other.
- 2.2 An option to proceed without a communication and engagement strategy has been considered however this would not result in a clear and transparent process for the development of a beach management plan.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Prior to the Cabinet Member Decision of 13 March 2020 the HRA setting out the beach management activities at Hoylake had received assent from Natural England

under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. The assented activities to control vegetation comprised:

- Annual herbicide spraying using Glyphosate
- Mechanical raking of defined areas of foreshore three times per week between April and September

The assent for these activities was received in March 2016 and expires on 31st March 2021.

- 3.2 The Cabinet Member Decision of 13 March 2020 considered the public concern regarding the use of Glyphosate; the Council's declaration of a Environment and Climate Emergency and approved motion of 'Glyphosate Free Wirral' and also that the management practices in place were working against natural coastal evolution which could better protect the Hoylake area from the impacts of sea level rise.
- 3.3 Vegetation management at Hoylake beach was consequently paused and recommendations approved to develop ecological and geomorphological studies which will inform any future beach management options which are to be developed.

ECOLOGICAL AND GEOMORPHOLOGICAL STUDY

- 3.4 The extent, diversity and concentration of vegetation on the foreshore has to date not been fully surveyed. The proposed ecological study will include a National Vegetation Classification Survey of the inter tidal zone during a growing season. The information collected will provide sufficient data to support the development of an HRA Screening Report for future beach management. The inter tidal foreshore also provides habitat for non-breeding water birds. The study will review existing data on these birds and assess any potential impacts of the proposed management options.
- 3.5 Using existing available data a geomorphological study will consider historical changes in beach evolution and, informed by the ecological study, provide predictions of future change under a range of climate change scenarios.
- 3.6 The joint study will also consider present and future flood risk at Hoylake under various beach management scenarios.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

- 3.7 The Cabinet Member Decision calls for stakeholder engagement during the development of an Ecological and Geomorphological Study. Furthermore the decision approved ongoing dialogue and engagement with local stakeholders and Natural England. The methodology for this dialogue and engagement has not yet been defined. The production of a Communication and Engagement Strategy, in consultation / engagement with a Working Group formed of the Chair and Spokespersons, will help define the objectives of that engagement and set out the relevant stakeholders, gateways and methods for engagement.

CONTINUATION OF ASSENT

- 3.8 Natural England have provided assent in their notice of March 2016 for “the removal of windblown sand from the sea wall as and when it accumulates”. This management activity is required for the safe management of traffic on the adjacent highway and also, when combined with ongoing gully cleansing, to allow for drainage of the highway to manage flood risk.
- 3.9 The requirements to manage the highway in a safe manner will still exist after expiration of the assent in March 2021. For Wirral Council to be able to undertake the above operation legally beyond March 2021 an application will need to be submitted to Natural England for continuation of the assent.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 A soft-market testing exercise has been undertaken with appropriate consultants to identify an approximate cost for the production of an Ecological and Geomorphological Study. The study is not eligible for capital funding. A fee of approximately £30,000 has been identified and relevant budgets are currently being explored to determine whether this can be met within existing resources.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The foreshore at Hoylake is included in the following statutory sites: North Wirral Foreshore Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore Special Protection Area /Ramsar site and Dee Estuary Special Area of Conservation.
- 5.2 North Wirral Foreshore SSSI is designated for the following features: aggregations of nonbreeding water birds and especially bar-tailed godwit, dunlin, knot and turnstone, intertidal sediments and saltmarshes.
- 5.3 Under the European Directive 92/43/EEC (The Habitats Directive), Wirral Council is required to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to ascertain whether beach management operations at Hoylake have the potential to result in likely significant effects on the interest features of these reserves.
- 5.4 The council also require assent under S28H of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to carry out beach management operations within the North Wirral Foreshore SSSI.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The production of an Ecological and Geomorphological Study requires the specialist knowledge and expertise of a suitably qualified consultancy. The fee estimate of approximately £30,000. Existing relevant budgets are being explored to determine whether this can be met from existing resources.
- 6.2 Production of a Communications and Engagement Strategy and application for continuation of assent for limited beach management activities can be undertaken by

utilising existing staff and resources within the Parks and Environment service area with support from the wider Neighbourhood Directorate resources.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The advice received from Natural England in March 2019 recommended both an ecological survey and a review of geomorphological processes. If this work is not undertaken then there would be no evidence to support any beach management options put forward to Natural England and a risk that assent would not be granted.
- 7.2 Hoylake beach management has recently been subject to press and social media attention. Without an approved Communications and Engagement Strategy there is a risk that the decision making process for any future beach management will not be seen to have been made based on scientific evidence and the views of all stakeholders. By approving the production of a Communication and Engagement Strategy, a clear strategy for a transparent and open process can be determined.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 This report recommends the production of a Communication and Engagement Strategy which will set out the relevant stakeholders, the gateways and methods for engagement and the objectives of that engagement.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no implications for equalities at this stage, however any associated actions will have an Equalities Impact Assessment where appropriate from this report.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Climate Change is a key driver in delivering future sustainable beach management at Hoylake. There is currently a trend of accretion in foreshore volumes across the Hoylake frontage, with sediment fed into the area by easterly littoral drift and onshore movement from Liverpool Bay. The mean high water spring tide mark is located some 100 metres from the sea wall.
- 10.2 Future behaviour depends on the relative change in the rate of beach accretion and the rise in mean sea level, which current best estimates, based on 95%ile medium emissions scenario, suggest will be 250mm higher than present by the middle of the century and 700mm higher than present by the end of the century. Increases in sea levels will impact on foreshore evolution and future flood risk.
- 10.3 The proposed study will provide predictions of future foreshore change based on assessment of future climate change scenarios including predicted changes in areas of habitat; potential for development of other habitats; potential changes in bird feeding/roosting areas; etc, all of which are required to inform appraisal of a range of potential beach management actions/options and to evaluate the impacts on flood risk across the frontage.

10.4 Undertaking the proposed study will have no impact on emissions of Greenhouse Gases.

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APPENDICES

Geomorphology and Ecology Study Specification Initial Draft

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Habitats Regulations Screening Assessment & Application for SSSI Assent Relating to Beach Management Operations at Wirral Beaches – AECOM March 2016

UK Climate Projections User Interface. (2019). Retrieved from <https://ukclimateprojections-ui.metoffice.gov.uk/products>

Natural England advice to Wirral Council regarding beach management – Natural England March 2020

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Special Meeting - Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee Call-in Hoylake Beach Management	21 August 2020
Executive Member Decision Hoylake Beach Management	13 March 2020