

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 16 March 2021

REPORT TITLE:	HOYLAKE BEACH MANAGEMENT UPDATE
REPORT OF:	NICOLA BUTTERWORTH DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides Members of the Committee with an update on the recommendations from the meeting of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee of 3rd December 2020 to:

- Procure an independent study as a scientific evidence base upon which to develop future management options for Hoylake beach.
- Produce a Communications Strategy for the development of the beach management plan for Hoylake in consultation with a politically proportionate Working Group.
- Produce a specification for a request for assent of non-vegetation management activities.

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. Approve the procurement brief and specification for an ecological and geomorphological study, as set out in Appendix A to this report, and to agree to the procurement of a study as a scientific evidence base upon which to develop future management options for Hoylake beach.
2. Approve the draft Communications and Engagement Strategy for the development of the Hoylake Beach Management Plan as set out in Appendix B to this report.
3. Approve the specification for the continuation of non-vegetation management activities at Hoylake beach, as set out in Appendix C to this report, and submission to Natural England with an appropriate Habitat Regulations Assessment for assent.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The procurement of an Ecological and Geomorphological Study (EGS) 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 recommendation from 3rd December 2020 required that a Communications and Engagement Strategy be produced in consultation with a politically proportionate Working Group. The Working Group met on 22nd February 2021 and the draft Communication and Engagement Strategy presented here for approval as Appendix B is based on the outputs of that Working Group.
- 1.3 The recommendation from 3rd December 2020 required that the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee agree the specification for continued assent for non-vegetation management at Hoylake beach. The specification is attached as Appendix C.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Committee recommended the production of a procurement brief and specification for an Ecology and Geomorphology Study. The document at Appendix A has been developed in response to that recommendation and no other option has been considered. The Committee also recommended identification of a suitable budget to fund the Study. No other funding sources, other than the Climate Emergency Funding have been identified.
- 2.2 The draft Communications and Engagement Strategy has been developed in consultation with the Working Group. The Working Group considered options regarding the stages and timings at which consultation with the public should take place. The majority consensus of the Working Group was that a Project Site be established to facilitate engagement with the public whilst the Ecology and Geomorphology Study is undertaken. Once the Study is complete and its findings published on the Project Site public consultation can take place.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Assent from Natural England for all beach management activities expires on 31st March 2021. In order to determine appropriate future beach management options for Hoylake an improved understanding of the ecology of the area combined with a study which considers how Hoylake beach has changed and is likely to change under a range of climate change scenarios is required.

- 3.2 There is significant public interest in the management of Hoylake beach. Engagement with the public and consultation on options to manage Hoylake beach are required. A Communications and Engagement Strategy is required to effectively manage the engagement and consultation process.

ECOLOGICAL AND GEOMORPHOLOGICAL STUDY

- 3.3 The extent, diversity and concentration of vegetation at Hoylake beach 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.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 The joint study will also consider present and future flood risk at Hoylake under various beach management scenarios.
- 3.6 The brief and specification setting out the requirements for the EGS is attached as Appendix A. The procurement process will be undertaken via the procurement portal, The Chest. The Study requires the ecological survey to be undertaken over a growing season so the contract with the successful consultant has an anticipated start date of 4th May 2021. The consultant is expected to conclude the Study in October 2021.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

- 3.7 A politically proportionate Working Group has been established to assist in the production of a Communication and Engagement Strategy. The Working Group met on 22nd February 2021 and agreed that an effective Strategy requires the establishment of:
- Web-based Project Site to allow for dissemination of information available to date such as Natural England's Discretionary Advice, flood risk data and sea level rise predictions and also in future (such as the EGS), timelines for each stage of the development of the Hoylake Beach Management Plan and engagement and future consultation on development of the options for the Hoylake Beach Management Plan.
 - Steering Group of officers to ensure service objectives are fully considered during the development of the Hoylake Beach Management Plan. The Steering Group will work with the :
 - Working Group, on all aspects of future engagement and consultation.
- 3.8 The Working Group considered whether an initial phase of consultation could be undertaken during the production of the EGS, however the majority consensus concluded that the evidence base of the EGS, along with the regulatory requirements set out in Natural England's Discretionary Advice should help manage expectations of future management of Hoylake Beach and that consultation should not be undertaken until after delivery of the EGS. There was also majority consensus that the Project Site should be established in order to start engagement with the

public during the production of the EGS with the site being used to inform, map out timescales and receive comments.

- 3.9 The Working Group agreed that the Project Site should allow full access to all scientific and evidential data and that non-technical summaries also be made available. The brief and specification for the EGS requires the production of a non-technical executive summary.
- 3.10 A minority of Councillors on the Working Group believed that residents and those living closest to the beach should have a greater say than those living in other parts of Hoylake and elsewhere.
- 3.11 The draft Communications and Engagement Strategy identifies an 18 month period from the completion of the EGS in October 2021 for the implementation of a Hoylake Beach Management Plan based on:
- Initial consultation
 - Definition of Objectives
 - Short Listing of Options
 - Consultation on Options
 - Approval of Preferred Option
 - Habitat Regulation Assessment screening
 - Application for assent to Natural England
- This would result in the implementation of a Hoylake Beach Management Plan from April 2023.
- 3.11 The draft Communications and Engagement Strategy at Appendix B has been produced to reflect the majority consensus of the Working Group.

ASSENT FOR NON-VEGETATION BEACH MANAGEMENT

- 3.12 The removal of windblown sand from the sea wall as and when it accumulates is required for the safe management of traffic on the adjacent highway. Hazardous driving conditions can be caused either through wind-blown sand or through standing water which collects when the highway drainage system's outfalls are blocked by sand.
- 3.13 The requirements to manage the highway in a safe manner will still exist after the expiry of the existing assent in March 2021.
- 3.14 The specification for the assent application is included as Appendix C. The specification identifies locations for removal and deposit of accumulated sand on the foreshore. The specification also provides information about the timing, routes to be utilised and method of depositing sand. Natural England have advised that the Habitat Regulations Assessment that supported beach management operations in 2016 to 2021, requires revision to incorporate any updated data with regard to North Wirral Foreshore Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 3.15 The identified location for deposition of accumulated sand is below the Mean High Water Spring Tides (MHWST) level. Works below MHWST ordinarily require a Marine Licence from the Marine Management Organisation under the Marine and Coastal Access Act, however an exemption exists relating to works undertaken by a Coast Protection Authority in relation to beach re-profiling.

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. The fee for the Study can be met by the Climate Emergency Budget.
- 4.2 The revision of the Habitat Regulations Assessment to support the assent application for non-vegetation beach management has not been costed but is likely to be in the region of £1,000. The fee can be met through existing budgets in Parks and Countryside.

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, 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 post EU withdrawal agreement Wirral Council is required to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) under the European Directive 92/43/EEC (The Habitats Directive), 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 application for assent for limited beach management activities can be undertaken by utilising existing staff and resources within the Parks and Environment service area.
- 6.2 The delivery of the Communications and Engagement Strategy, including establishing the Project Site can be undertaken by utilising existing staff and resources within the Parks and Environment service area with support from the wider Neighbourhoods Directorate and other Council resources.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The Discretionary 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 approval of the draft Communication and Engagement Strategy which sets out the timescales, objectives and methods for undertaking engagement and consultation.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The potential impact of the proposals contained within this report have been reviewed and the impact review is attached – <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Climate Change is a key factor in influencing 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 percentile 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 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. It will assist in enabling the Council to consider risks and adaptations from a changing climate

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Ecological & Geomorphological Study Brief & Specification

Appendix B – draft Communications and Engagement Strategy

Appendix C – Specification for Application for Assent for Non-Vegetation Management

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://ukclimateprojectionsui.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
Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee	03 December 2020
Special Meeting - Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee Call-in Hoylake Beach Management	21 August 2020
Executive Member Decision Hoylake Beach Management	13 March 2020