

BIRKENHEAD CONSTITUENCY- POSITON STATEMENT	
TITLE	Rock Ferry River Wall and Esplanade and request for financial support for urgent repairs
TO	BIRKENHEAD CONSTITUENCY COMMITEE
FROM	Councillor Moira McLaughlin
DATE	27 th March 2014

Introduction

The River Wall and Esplanade are an important part of the Rock Park Conservation Area and form a vital part of the Mersey Coastal Park Strategy which seeks to open up public access to the waterfront from Rock Park to Eastham Country Park. This area provides an important and accessible leisure resource for the local community and is used regularly by walkers and cyclists as well as by those who visit the area. These activities also contribute to improving the health and well being of local people. The River Wall and Esplanade are listed structures and form an important part of Wirral's heritage along with the properties in Rock Park. The area was built between the 1830's and 1850's.

Current Position

The ownership of the River Wall is unknown and the Council is looking into this issue along with the Rock Park Estate Company and the local MP, Mr. Field. The Esplanade is owned by the Rock Park Estate Company. The River Wall is constructed of sandstone blocks and the Esplanade behind the wall is constructed of fill material topped by a surface that can be walked along.

Over the past few years, the River Wall has deteriorated as sandstone blocks have been washed onto the foreshore by high tides and winter storms and this has resulted in parts of the Esplanade showing signs of collapse. Although there have been some small scale repairs, the storms and high tides of Winter 2013/14 have seen a marked deterioration in the River Wall once again. Whilst, ownership of the River Wall structure is being explored there is an urgent need for further immediate repair work to improve the current condition. It is estimated that a sum of between £5,000 and £10,000 will enable the immediate repair works to be done to the River Wall and this will then give time for ownership to be established and for external funding opportunities to be explored once again. Some of this funding will also be used to repair the Esplanade as the Rock Park Estate Company does not have any funding for these repairs. Any works will need to be undertaken in consultation with the Council's Conservation Officers as the structure is listed.

A full refurbishment of the River Wall and Esplanade will cost approximately £2m and at the present time (and for the foreseeable future) external funding is extremely limited and very competitive when it is available.

Securing funding now is very important as it will enable a short term solution which will last for approximately five years. There are a number of significant benefits to the local community which include retention of an important coastal route used by walkers and cyclists thereby promoting health and recreation, the retention of an important local heritage asset and the opportunity of buying time to allow external funding sources to be explored to bring a permanent solution to this important waterfront area.

Recommendation to Birkenhead Constituency Committee

It is recommended that

- (1) The Birkenhead Constituency Committee gives £10,000 from the budget allocation in 2014/15 to fund the urgently needed repair works to the River Wall and Esplanade at Rock Park to maintain this asset for the benefit of local residents in terms of their recreation, health and heritage
- (2) The Council continues to work with the local MP and Rock Park Estate Company to establish ownership of the River Wall structure and
- (3) Whilst it is recognized that external funding is limited and very competitive every effort is made by Ward Councillors and Council Officers to identify and secure external resources to enable a long term refurbishment of the Esplanade