



ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 30 November 2022

Report Title:	APPROVAL OF INITIAL HOYLAKE BEACH CONSULTATION REPORT AND APPROVAL OF BEACH MANAGEMENT OPTIONS FOR CONSULTATION
Report of:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides Members of the Committee with the results of the initial consultation exercise relating to Hoylake Beach Management and also proposes two beach management options, developed and informed by the initial consultation, for further consultation.

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 is recommended to:

1. Approve the Initial Consultation Report, included as Appendix A to this report
2. Approve consultation on the two beach management options developed following completion of the Initial Consultation.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 On 16 March 2021, the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee approved the Communications and Engagement Strategy, included as Appendix F, for the development of a beach management plan at Hoylake. Stage 4 of that strategy sets out requirement to undertake an initial consultation with the objective of gathering all views on Hoylake Beach so that a long list of management options could be developed.
- 1.2 The Communications and Engagement Strategy also identified that the initial consultation should identify the regulatory framework set out in the Discretionary Advice, included as Appendix E, procured from Natural England and also utilise the findings of the Ecology and Geomorphology Study (Appendix D) undertaken in the summer of 2021 and produced in 2022.
- 1.3 The initial consultation was undertaken from 29 June until 10 August and the Consultation Report, included as Appendix A, provides a factual summary of the results of the consultation.
- 1.4 Stages 5 and 6 of the Communications and Engagement Strategy relate to the development of objectives for future beach management and the testing of the long list of options developed following consultation against those objectives and assessment criteria to identify a short list of options for further consultation.
- 1.5 Following the end of the consultation in August 2022 the work on development of the long list, objectives and shortlisting has been undertaken and the report which sets these out is included as Appendix B. Six options for beach management have been shortlisted which meet the objectives for future beach management, align with the Discretionary Advice from Natural England and have been subject to further appraisal by Natural England. Of the six options appraised by Natural England four were found to be unlikely to receive assent under Section 28H of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The remaining two options brought forward for consultation present some challenges to Natural England but may be suitable as a final preferred option with some refinement.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 A standard form of options appraisal is to develop a long list of options and to use Objectives and Assessment Criteria to measure the benefits of each option thereby reducing the long list to a short list for further, more detailed consideration or consultation.
- 2.2 For the beach management area between Red Rocks and the RNLI Station a combination of areas were defined and five differing beach management approaches applied to these areas resulting in 23 long list options.
- 2.3 Measurement of each of the 23 options against the assessment criteria has resulted in the development of 6 options indicated above.
- 2.4 The full process and all options are included in the Royal HaskoningDHV Report - Identification of Short Listed Options included as Appendix B

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

INITIAL CONSULTATION SEEKING YOUR VIEWS

- 3.1 The first public consultation on the new Beach Management Plan for Hoylake Beach was undertaken from 29 June 2022 to 10 August 2022. Prior to this consultation a Have Your Say portal had been set up by Wirral Intelligence Service to start the engagement process and to act as a repository for a significant amount of information and data regarding Hoylake Beach to help inform those with an interest in participating in future consultations.
- 3.2 The Have Your Say portal also provided a series of Frequently Asked Questions and answers and also served to act as the repository for the Ecology and Geomorphology Study published in early 2022. The Study considered how Hoylake Beach had changed due to natural coastal processes in the preceding decades, measured the existing vegetation communities and made predictions regarding future evolution of the beach taking into account rising sea levels as a result of climate change. The Study measured the various impact under two scenarios “Do Nothing” and “Do Everything” on the premise that the future Hoylake Beach Management Plan would be fit between these two extremes.
- 3.3 The Initial Consultation was facilitated by a questionnaire developed to address the many points raised by residents during the engagement process. The purpose of the questionnaire was to measure how Hoylake Beach is used and enjoyed and to measure the variety of opinion on how Hoylake Beach could be managed in future. The outputs from the consultation were used to define the objectives for the Hoylake Beach Management Plan and to set assessment criteria for the development of management options.
- 3.4 The consultation and four in-person information sessions were promoted through a mix of print and digital channels to raise awareness and encourage participation in the online survey.
- 3.5 The launch of the consultation was pitched to local media and featured in print editions of the Wirral Globe and Liverpool Echo. The consultation was also included on the digital platforms for the Wirral Globe and Liverpool Echo as well as in local sites West Kirby Today, Birkenhead News, Wirral Family Guide and Cheshire Wildlife Trust. The consultation also featured on ITV Granada reports TV and website.
- 3.6 The consultation was published on the Council’s own digital channels to encourage digital click through to the Have Your Say website. This included social media channels, weekly residents e-newsletter, Wirral View website and targeted emails to those who had previously subscribed to receive updates about Hoylake beach management. The council’s social media posts were shared and featured on local interest groups and residents own social media accounts extending the reach both locally, regionally and nationally.
- 3.7 Outdoor media was used in Hoylake with banners along the beachfront and an ‘A’ board outside the information session venue to attract attention within the local community and people visiting the beach. Outdoor media also contained a QR code that linked through to the online survey.

- 3.8 Eventbrite was used to manage attendance at the information session in Hoylake with the public able to pre book a space; an allocation for walk in spaces was also made available.
- 3.9 Paper surveys were made available at local libraries and an Easy Read consultation paper also developed and shared with 14 local groups. A letter outlining the consultation was sent to care homes in Wirral to advise them on the consultation and the availability of paper surveys.
- 3.10 In addition to digital reminders a follow up print advert featured in the Wirral Globe to remind people to take part.
- 3.11 Following the information drop in events Community Connectors carried out three days of face to face engagement in the local community to continue to raise awareness and reach those who may not be able to access digital channels. 525 people were approached and of these 122 did not previously know about the consultation. As part of this work further paper copies, posters and leaflets were distributed.
- 3.12 The headline results of the consultation promotion were:
- 79k impressions (views) from 14 Wirral Council social media posts
 - 6,906 total engagements through Council's social media posts (likes, comments and shares)
 - 165 people prebooked a place through Eventbrite at the information session, 157 people attended
 - 1497 page views on Hoylake beach Wirral View story
 - 1193 residents clicked through Wirral View email to information on the consultation
 - 95 people subscribed to receive email updates on the consultation 75.8% of the emails were opened and click rate of 19.4% to the consultation portal
 - 62 scans of the QR code that was on outdoor media and flyers directing to the website
 - 91.9k potential reach based on print media circulation figures
 - Potential monthly reach of 397.5k Monthly unique browsers reach on Wirral Globe website
 - Potential daily reach of 970k on Liverpool Echo website

The Have Your Say (HYS) consultation page received:

- 21,468 views
- 13,780 referrals through to the HYS page came from social media
- 3975 direct visits to the HYS website
- 531 referrals from news sites to HYS
- 325 referred through email to website
- 722 arrived at the consultation page by searching online to access HYS website
- 244 referrals from through .gov website
- 18,109 users visited one page
- 8306 informed participants - performed a task, visited multiple pages
- 3176 completed the consultation
- No Easy Read surveys were received

- 3.12 The consultation questionnaire could be completed online via the Have Your Say portal or by submitting a paper questionnaire which were located at Hoylake and West Kirby libraries and distributed at the drop-in sessions and by Community Connectors. Paper copies were also available on request and could also be returned by post.
- 3.13 Following the conclusion of the consultation Wirral Intelligence Service analysed the responses and provided a Power BI report to allow interrogation of the data from different perspectives. The full Consultation Report, based on the outputs of the Power BI analysis is provided as Appendix A.
- 3.14 The headline outputs from the consultation are:
- 3176 responses were received
 - 64% of responses were from Wirral postcodes, 35% were from postcodes outside Wirral and 1% did not provide postcode data
 - Of the 2046 Wirral responses 54.5% were from Hoylake and Meols ward
 - Walking is the most popular use of Hoylake Beach when looking at Total Responses, Wirral Responses and Hoylake and Meols Responses. For responses outside of Wirral the most popular use of Hoylake Beach is as a place to be close to nature.
 - When looking at All Responses Hoylake Beach's importance as a natural asset was as a habitat for birds and other wildlife, however taking Wirral and Hoylake & Meols responses in isolation Hoylake Beach was seen as being most important as an open space for the community
 - Wirral Responses with regard to the presence of saltmarsh did not provide any strong indicators with those preferring saltmarsh approximately equal to those who do not support the presence of saltmarsh. Hoylake and Meols residents were more opposed to saltmarsh (45%) however 35% of Hoylake and Meols residents found some saltmarsh to be acceptable. Total Responses were more favourable towards the development of saltmarsh
 - The same level of response was measured regarding the acceptability of sand dunes with a slightly more favourable response to development of dunes
 - When looking at Wirral responses and Hoylake and Meols responses the same level of response was measured regarding how the beach should look, managed or natural. Total responses were more supportive of a natural beach irrespective of aesthetics.
 - When considering hazards within the natural environment the majority of both Total and Wirral responses felt that there was no need to manage natural hazards at Hoylake Beach any differently to other natural areas. Hoylake and Meols residents however expressed more concern about the development of hazards if the beach was left unmanaged. Hazards identified included:
 - Mosquitos
 - Vermin
 - Stagnant water
 - Slippery surfaces
 - The balance between the local ecology and the needs of the local business community was measured in Question 9. Total and Wirral Responses identified the local ecology to be the overriding priority (35%) however 22% of responses identified that a balance needed to be found between the needs of local businesses and the local ecology. Hoylake and Meols responses identified that Business & Tourism were their priorities and that a fully maintained beach would best serve these.
- 3.15 Questions 10 and 11 addressed how future management options for Hoylake Beach should be developed and how the cost and carbon associated with future management should influence the development of those options. The outputs from

these questions cannot be summarised easily. Pages 23 to 28 of the Appendix A Consultation Report provides the analysis of the responses.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE BEACH MANAGEMENT PLAN

3.16 A series of objectives have been developed for the future Hoylake Beach Management Plan which take account of the findings of the Hoylake Beach Geomorphology and Ecology Study, the views expressed on the management of the beach from the consultation exercise carried out in summer 2022 and consultation with Natural England.

The objectives of the Beach Management Plan are to:

- Not compromise or adversely impact on the integrity of designated sites.
- Promote biodiversity and contribution to mitigating climate change.
- Minimise disturbance to wildlife.
- Maintain and enhance the amenity benefit, wellbeing and health of the local community and visitors.
- Ensure the safety of users and access across the beach.
- Contribute to the reduction in the risk of flooding and/or erosion to local property and infrastructure.
- Provide recommendations on further studies and monitoring to inform future management.

3.17 In addition a series of assessment criteria were developed, based on the consultation outputs and the Ecology and Geomorphology Study to allow the identification, measurement and comparison of the potential environmental effects associated with the different management options.

3.18 A summary of the assessment criteria headings is given below

- Population and Human Health
- Critical Infrastructure and Material Assets
- Biodiversity
- Climatic Factors
- Water
- Landscape / Seascape

with full details of each categorisation given in Appendix B attached to this report.

LONG LIST OF OPTIONS FOR FUTURE BEACH MANAGEMENT

3.19 For the beach management area between Red Rocks and the RNLI Station four Beach Management Scenarios have been developed that divide the frontage up into different Management Areas (MAs), as follows:

- Scenario A
 - MA1a - Whole frontage
- Scenario B
 - MA1b - RNLI station to Alderley Road Slipway
 - MA2b - Alderley Road Slipway to Red Rocks
- Scenario C
 - MA1c - RNLI station to Alderley Road Slipway

- MA2c - Alderley Road Slipway to King's Gap
- MA3c - King's Gap to Red Rocks
- Scenario D
 - MA1d - RNLI station to King's Gap
 - MA2d - King's Gap to Red Rocks

3.20 Five differing beach management approaches were applied to these areas

- Do Nothing - Hoylake Beach develops naturally with no management.
- Maintain and Remove - the current extent of vegetation on Hoylake Beach is maintained and its seaward expansion is prevented using mechanical means.
- Do Everything – continued removal of all vegetation using mechanical means.
- Do Everything (strip) – continued removal of a strip of vegetation immediately seaward of the seawall by mechanical means. This option would form part of either the Do Nothing or Maintain options.
- Beach Nourishment - placement of appropriately sized sand to a specified thickness on top of the existing vegetation. This would create a sandy beach at a higher elevation than the current vegetated beach. Vegetation would be continually removed, on the nourished area and in-front, using mechanical means, if required.

3.21 The combination of management areas and approaches resulted in a long list of 23 management options.

SHORTLISTING

3.22 Shortlisting of the 23 management options has been undertaken by determining whether there is a beneficial or adverse effect on the assessment criteria and also by measuring the strength of that effect.

3.23 The full results of the shortlisting and the rationale behind the determination of beneficial or adverse effect are captured in the matrices contained in the Hoylake Beach Management Plan – Identification of Short Listed Options Report, reproduced in Appendix B.

3.24 The six short listed options are:

- Option 1** MA1b (RNLI Station - Alderley Road) Maintain and Remove
MA2b (Alderley Road - Red Rocks) Do Nothing
- Option 3** MA1b (RNLI Station - Alderley Rd) Do Everything
MA2b (Alderley Rd - Red Rocks) Do Nothing
- Option 5** MA1b (RNLI Station - Alderley Rd) Beach Nourishment
MA2b (Alderley Rd - Red Rocks) Do Nothing
- Option 9** MA1b (RNLI Station - Alderley Rd) Do Nothing / Do Everything (strip)
MA2b (Alderley Rd - Red Rocks) Do Nothing
- Option 15** MA1d (RNLI Station - King's Gap) Maintain and Remove
MA2d Do Nothing (King's Gap - Red Rocks) Do Nothing
- Option 23** MA1d (RNLI Station - Kings Gap) Do Nothing / Do Everything (Strip)
MA2d (Kings Gap - Red Rocks) Do Nothing

- 3.25 Whichever beach management option is identified as the preferred option for the Hoylake Beach Management Plan it will be subject to a Habitat Regulations Assessment and will require assent from Natural England under Section 28H of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- 3.26 In order to ensure Natural England would support all options proposed for consultation further engagement has been undertaken with Natural England to allow them to screen the options development through the long listing approach and the selection of the short list of options following appraisal against the beach management plan objectives and selection criteria.
- 3.27 Natural England provided a response to this request on 01 November 2022 which is included as Appendix C to this report. In their response Natural England state that Options 3, 5, 9 and 23 above could result in significant habitat loss and would therefore be difficult for them to provide assent to Wirral Council to undertake the operations required if they were chosen, through consultation, as the preferred beach management option. Without assent Wirral Council cannot act legally in implementing the beach management plan. These four options are therefore no longer proposed as short listed options.
- 3.28 Natural England also state that the remaining two options (Options 1 and 15) may require further refinement before they are able to assent any supporting Habitat Regulations Assessment. Natural England recommend ongoing discussions regarding the refinements of both the removal of vegetation from the frontal (seaward) zone of the existing vegetated area and also the requirements around RNLI access.
- 3.29 It is therefore proposed to seek approval from the Committee to consult on Options 1 and 15 as set out above and in more detail in Appendix B and to continue discussion with Natural England regarding refinements to these options.
- 3.30 Maps of Options 1 and 15 are included in Appendix G. Maps of all options are included as an appendix to Appendix B Identification of Short Listed Options.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 An economic appraisal exercise to provide a scale of likely costs has been undertaken. The appraisal is a qualitative assessment which provides a sliding scale of £ (least expensive - £0 to £10,000 per annum) through to £££££ (most expensive - £100,001 to £200,000 per annum). The scale of costs can be seen against each option in the report in Appendix B.
- 4.2 The following assessment applies to the two options (subject to refinement) most likely to receive assent from Natural England:

Option 1 MA1b (RNLI Station - Alderley Rd) Maintain and Remove
 MA2b (Alderley Rd - Red Rocks) Do Nothing
 ££ (£10,001 to £20,000 per annum)

Option 15 MA1d (RNLI Station - King's Gap) Maintain and Remove
 MA2d Do Nothing (King's Gap - Red Rocks) Do Nothing
 ££ (£10,001 to £20,000 per annum)

The costs of raking the beach under either option would be met from the existing Parks and Countryside budget. If further works were required additional funds would need to be identified.

- 4.3 The cost of developing the Hoylake Beach Management Options Report is £20,887 and this has been met from Climate Emergency Budget.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Hoylake Beach forms part of North Wirral Foreshore Site of Special Scientific Interest, Dee Estuary Special Area of Conservation, Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore Special Protection Area / RAMSAR site. Assessment of the preferred beach management option following consultation will be undertaken as assent is required from Natural England under Section 28H of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) to allow Wirral Council to legally implement the beach management plan.
- 5.2 Both options proposed for consultation include the maintenance of the current extent of vegetation and seaward expansion of vegetation is prevented using mechanical means. Depending on the position of Mean High Water Spring Tides, which defines the seabed, a licence under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 may be required if the operation to prevent expansion of vegetation results in the removal of any substance or object from the seabed when using a vehicle.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 Existing resources have been used to develop the Have Your Say questionnaire, undertake analysis and produce the Consultation Report. Similarly existing resources have been used to promote the consultation, provide staff for drop-in sessions and also promote the consultation via Community Connectors.
- 6.2 Existing resources will also be used to undertake the proposed consultation on beach management options using similar methods as those for the initial consultation.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Natural England have highlighted the risks against four of the six short listed options and the recommendation of this report is to not to proceed with further consultation on those options as they are unlikely to receive assent under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.
- 7.2 The two remaining options may still not receive assent in their present form and further refinement may be required prior and during the associated Habitat Regulations Assessment to ensure the preferred option from consultation receives assent from Natural England.
- 7.3 The initial consultation in summer 2022 highlighted the perceived hazards associated with all management options. Some hazards are identified in 3.8 above however the Consultation Report in Appendix A gives full details of hazards identified by consultees during the initial consultation.

7.4 Whichever management options are taken forward for consultation there will be some element of natural environmental hazards associated. The consultation process will ensure all hazards associated with each option for consultation are clearly identified.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 The Background Section 3.0 to this report and supporting Appendix A detail the engagement and consultation undertaken to date.

8.2 Detail is also provided regarding the continuing engagement with Natural England during the long listing and short listing of options. Two options are proposed for further consultation following that process.

8.3 The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transportation Committee are requested to approve the two options presented for further consultation. The form, methods and duration of the second consultation to mirror the initial consultation with the start of the six week consultation process in December 2022 and conclusion in January 2023.

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 selecting a future sustainable beach management at Hoylake. The Ecology and Geomorphology Study identifies 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 Ecology and Geomorphology Study also predicts that accretion, or increases beach level, will outpace increases in sea level, based on 50 percentile medium emissions scenario.

10.2 The beach management options short listed for further consultation align with this prediction and would result in positive benefits with regard to management of flood and coastal erosion risks and also carbon sequestration.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 A key consideration of the initial consultation was the balance between the importance of the local ecology and the needs of business and tourism. 35% of respondents felt that the local ecology was their priority, followed by the desire for a balance between the needs of the local business community and the developing natural environment at 22%.

11.2 14% of respondents identified business and tourism as their priority and that this would be achieved with a maintained beach, whilst 12% felt that while business and tourism was their priority people visit Hoylake Beach for differing reasons.

11.3 8% of respondents felt that a naturally developing beach would be beneficial to business and tourism.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A	draft Consultation Report (Initial Consultation – Seeking Your Views on Hoylake Beach)
Appendix B	Report – Hoylake Beach Management Plan – Identification of Short Listed Options (Royal HaskoningDHV)
Appendix C	Letter, Natural England 01 November 2022
Appendix D	Ecology and Geomorphology Study, date, Royal HaskoningDHV
Appendix E	Natural England advice to Wirral Council regarding beach management – Natural England March 2020
Appendix F	Hoylake Beach Management Communications and Engagement Strategy
Appendix G	Maps of Options for Consultation

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Hoylake Beach Management Update

Hoylake Beach Working Group – Final Report

Call-in Hoylake Beach

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in accordance with Sections (a) and (e) of its Terms of Reference:

The Committee is charged by full Council to undertake responsibility for the Council's role and functions:-

- (a) in co-ordinating the response to cross-cutting sustainability issues such as reducing carbon emissions, air quality issues, climate change response, improving resource efficiency and developing sustainable energy;
- (e) in respect of parks, open spaces, countryside management, allotments, playgrounds and cemeteries, including arboricultural, gardening and warden services;

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee	16 March 2021
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