

**THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY**

**(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)**

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting
<b>Subject:</b>	Seafront Accessibility
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	10 February 2023
<b>Report by:</b>	Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services
<b>Wards affected:</b>	St Thomas, St Judes, Eastney & Craneswater

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**1. Requested by**

1.1 Cabinet member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development

**2. Purpose**

2.1 To update the Cabinet member on the work to make the seafront as accessible as possible so as many people can access and enjoy the area.

**3. Information Required**

3.1 Officers have continued to explore a wide number of options to increase accessibility across the seafront both in regards to supporting the public with mobility difficulties gain access to the shingle as well as our longer term goals of support people with disabilities gain access in and out of the sea.

3.2 We continue to be in regular contact with other local authorities where they face similar issues, in particular Brighton & Hove, where they have a similar moving shingle beach frontage which presents particular difficulties in seeking longer term solutions.

3.3 Since 2020 we have continued to maintain the rubber track matting which is in situ at two points across the shingle between St George's Road and Henderson Road. Access has been further supported with the installation of identified disabled parking spaces and a dropped kerb in order to support access to these.

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- 3.4 We are however aware that the rubber matting is under constant pressure from the moving shingle and that the harsh salt laden environment also results in the rubber perishing faster than it might do in other situations. The seafront technicians monitor the state of the matting and replace sections when they are no longer viable but the constant erosion is shortening their anticipated lifespan.
- 3.5 In summer 2021 we trialled a new wooden ramp which we had made specifically for our shingle beach. The ramp was constructed in short sections which allowed the pathway to flex as the height of the shingle varied through the course of a summer season. Initially our hope had been to have this in situ to support access into the sea however it became clear during the trial period that the panels closest to the water became unsafe for use as the wave motion from the sea washed away the shingle under the panel.
- 3.6 Following feedback from disabled users we repositioned some of the lower sections of the ramp to form several spurs off the main pathway to enable people to sit and spend a longer time on the beach where their families could be on the adjacent shingle so supporting a longer visit.
- 3.7 The feedback from the trial period was very positive and as a result the panels, which were brought off the beach during the autumn/winter period, were put out again through summer 2022. The annual location of these panels will vary according to the height of the shingle and the need to ensure that users can safely access the pathway from the main promenade. To date they have been in a location between the Pyramids and Speakers Corner. This location has also enabled us to have additional support available to help any individuals who might get stuck for any reason on the ramp from either the Portsmouth & Southsea Volunteer Lifeguards or during the high summer season from the RNLI both of whom were operating in close proximity to the ramp.
- 3.8 Our understanding of the coastal defence works leads us to believe it will be possible to position the ramp in this area for summer 2023 but the exact location will be identified nearer the end of March in order to access what has happened to the shingle over the winter. This positioning is also supported with disabled parking available in the Pyramids car park.
- 3.9 Officers are currently exploring if there is another part of the seafront which might benefit from a wooden ramp as this has been such a successful model and clearly used by many different residents including those with push chairs and older members of the public who find the unevenness of the shingle challenging.
- 3.10 The longer-term desire to be able to support disabled swimmers in the sea remains unresolved to date. Trials of the floating wheelchair demonstrated the ease of getting the chair across the shingle or down the ramp and into the sea where it

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worked well. However with the significant gradient of the beach it has not been possible to find a safe solution to support users getting out of the sea. The trial illustrated clearly that even with very supportive volunteers getting the chair out and up the gradient was very difficult and therefore it is currently not safe enough for the general public to use.

- 3.11 We have continued to link up the Coastal Partners team with the findings of both our developments and also those from other local authorities where they have similar beach conditions to ensure there is a shared knowledge. We have requested consideration within the design to support disabled swimming access which we understand is also being supported by Members in their conversations with the Coastal Partners team.
- 3.12 We anticipate offering some form of hire system for the floating beach wheelchair which we believe, with appropriate support and in an appropriate location on the seafront, could be used during the months when the water is at a suitable temperature, to support children and young people accessing the sea in a supported way. The practicalities of such a scheme are currently under development.
- 3.13 Going forwards we will continue to liaise with other local authorities to see what solutions can be found and to understand how trials of other all-terrain vehicles work on the differing beach environments but very much hope that the coastal defence scheme will be able to design in a permanent appropriate solution.

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Signed by  
**Stephen Baily**  
**Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services**

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**Appendices:** None

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>