

CABINET

12 NOVEMBER 2021

REFERENCE REPORT FROM THE RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A.2 SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL'S SEAFRONT SERVICES

(Report prepared by Keith Durran)

BACKGROUND

At its meeting held on 20 September 2021 (Minute 23 refers), the Resources and Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee ("the Committee") scrutinised the Council's Seafronts Services.

The Committee heard how in 2014 the Council had instigated a £36 million coastal defence project stretching from Clacton Pier to Holland-on-Sea in partnership with the Environment Agency. Not only had that protected the coastline, it had led to the creation of 23 new sand beaches which had provided a major opportunity for tourism development.

The Committee also heard that in 2016 the pre-construction phase had started to stabilise the cliff between Hazelmere Road and Queensway. This phase had consisted of ground investigations, numerous surveys, obtaining planning permission, producing detailed designs, producing tender documents, obtaining tenders, and appointing a contractor in line with the Council's procurement policy. The construction of the project had commenced on 28 August 2018 and had been completed on 28 June 2019 at a cost of £4.3 million. The project had stabilised a 500m length of coastal slopes by temporarily removing 83 beach huts, excavating to construct a new piled slope retaining wall and new steel piled retaining wall at the base of the slope to provide a stable shelf for the beach huts to be returned. The scheme had also included new drainage and a Equality Act compliant ramp from the top promenade to the lower promenade.

The scheme had been first identified in the Clacton & Holland Geomorphological Assessment and Conceptual report 2015 produced by Mott MacDonald. The report had identified the areas that were most at risk of failure between Clacton Pier and Holland Haven. The report had also suggested a detailed slope stability study of the cliffs to be carried out at a cost of £225,000. Based on that estimate the suggested cost to carry out detailed slope stability studies on all of the cliffs the Council was responsible for would be approximately £700,000.

With the assistance of the Assistant Director (Building & Public Realm) and Mr David Clarke of Hestur Limited (the Council's contractor for the current cliff stabilisation works), the Committee considered the risk factors for the cliffs in the area and the measures to reduce the risks and otherwise undertake works to stabilise the cliffs for the future. The aim would be to achieve cliffs with a sustainable factor of safety of 1.0. Mr Hestor advised that neighbouring cliffs to those currently being stabilised could fail with a marginal deterioration of the factor of safety.

The works being undertaken used techniques to reduce vibration and therefore did not themselves cause the factor of safety to deteriorate in those neighbouring cliffs. He also advised that the current stabilisation works could be completed by December 2021 (although it had provided for them to be completed by March 2022 to allow for adverse weather impacts). The Assistant Director (Building & Public Realm) referred to an initial visual overview of the slopes from the Pier to Holland Haven that had confirmed that some

were at more risk of failure and the bowed railings and cracked promenade in places were some of the indicators of this. He further advised that the original pitch-fibre drainage system was still in place in the cliffs although its effectiveness had likely deteriorated.

RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

After a detailed discussion the Committee had **RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet that:

- a) where observation reveals cliff slippages, all communication with Beach Hut Licensees in respect of Cliff Stabilisation and safety, is consistently shared with the relevant District Ward Councillors; and
- b) the undertaking of a survey of cliff vulnerability across the 26 kilometres of coast line for which this Council is responsible and beach levels in the 23 bays created in 2013/14 in the Clacton-on-Sea and Holland-on-Sea areas be undertaken as an imperative piece of work in the next few months and thereby address the concerns raised by the Committee on 22 June 2020 (Minute 62 refers) and on 21 September 2020 (Minute 85 refers).

PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENT(S) AND RECOMMENDATION(S) TO CABINET

Portfolio Holder's Comments

"I would like to thank the Committee for their comments. To reply specifically to the points made:

1. *I entirely agree with the idea of keeping ward councillors fully involved. I know that the officers involved in the beach huts service specifically already seek to keep ward councillors involved in decisions. I have asked that they redouble their efforts in this regard and hope that there are even fewer exceptions to this good practice in the future.*
2. *Past studies on the Holland on Sea cliffs have been carried out at some expense by a large engineering company. It's unrealistic to expect to be able to completely predict the location and extent of future cliff failures. That's because the cliffs tend to have naturally formed with a limited factor of safety and failures caused by changing factors outside of the Council's, or anyone's, control. I don't think that it is viable to commission further surveys of this kind. However, the Coastal Manager is working with a local engineer with regard to the conduct of a series of visual inspections and some analysis that will give us greater insight into the stability of the main cliffs in the District, at a cost that can be accommodated. I have asked that the findings are reported back to me when completed.*
3. *The District Council has funded and begun a significant cliff stabilisation project at Holland on Sea this year. The work will be completed during the winter, in time for next year's season. This project has significantly affected the Council's reserves. It is my view that the Council cannot itself afford to address future*

cliff issues in isolation. I have requested further investigations and advice on the Council's liability for cliff work and the extent to which external funding can be called upon to assist."

Recommendations to Cabinet:

That the recommendations made by the Resources and Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee be noted and that the responses of the Portfolio Holder thereto be endorsed.