

# Brighton & Hove Local Access Forum Meeting – Minutes 11-07-24

## Attendees:

Luke Burstow (LB) *Chair*

Dave Brookshaw (DB)

Andrew Coleman (AC)

Ali Polawski (AP)

Liz Symes (LS)

John Funnell (JF)

Chantelle Hoppé (CH) – BHCC Rights of Way Officer (*minutes*)

Toni Manuel – BHCC Seafront Development Officer

## Apologies:

Pete Hodd (PH)

David Taylor (DT)

### 1. Welcome & Introductions

Welcome to Toni Manuel – Seafront Development Officer – to talk about accessibility on Brighton & Hove Seafront, beach and sea

TM acts as landowner for the seafront from Hove Lagoon to Saltdean – all land south of the A25 excluding the highways and cycle path. The seafront officers report to TM. Responsible for the Volks Railway, input into major projects along the seafront (Black Rock, Madiera Terraces, Hove Beach Park, coastal engineering projects). Liaise with Cityclean on toilet cleansing and Cityparks on Hove Lawns / Beach Park. Infrastructure includes beach railings. Involved in discussions around water quality. Wide remit.

Talk this evening will cover:

- Work carried out to date on accessibility – particularly for mobility issues
- Challenges
- Next steps

Trying to improve access over the years has proved very difficult due to the shingle nature of the beach. It is difficult to walk on and is constantly shifting and moving to create steep banks that makes access to the sea for disabled users incredibly challenging.

BHCC has worked with other authorities to see what has worked and not worked and looked at various different solutions – not one size fits all in terms of interventions – using different bits of kit and strategies to try and improve the experience for as wide a range of users as possible.

Beach wheelchairs are located at the Seafront Office. Normal wheelchair cannot traverse the shingle as they sink. These beach wheelchairs have balloon tyres to get over this issue. However, they are limited in that they must be pushed by a carer / family member – they are not self-propelled. They are not great for independent access but more

for family situations. However, they are very difficult to get back up the steep shingle bank once down at the water's edge.

One of the most challenging aspects is that the shingle is not stable – it is constantly moving with the tide. Here we have a very wide tidal range (in comparison to somewhere like the Mediterranean where the tidal range is almost unnoticeable). The tides create burms (the bumpy sections) which prevent ramps being used in the tidal range – as they would quickly get covered in shingle and become a trip hazard. A long enough ramp to get into the sea would have to be very heavily engineered – with enough dimension and robust enough to withstand the tides – with handrails etc. There is the challenge of then exiting the ramp safely into the water.

John Orall (structural engineer) wrote his dissertation on this issue – no suitable solution has so far been found – he has now retired. TM has been with the council 14 years - they have been looking at this issue and not found a solution to date.

Other solutions have included constructing solid beach decks that protrude onto the beach. These must be above the high tide line, but provide the ability to be on the beach.

Recent developments have included changing facilities located along the beach front at various locations – ensuring that people do not need to leave the beach if changes are needed: Hove Beach, Rockwater, Sealanes, Collonade toilets.

Trials have been carried out on powered Beach Wheelchairs – with the Beach Access Team. They work well on the flat but still struggle with the steep sections. They will probably be located in flatter areas like Hove Beach or at Sealanes where there is a Mobi-mat for access and the beach is longer and less steep. This will happen in the spring when servicing has been carried out and the various health and safety checks.

The Boardwalk was put in from Volks Railway (Banjo groyne) to Black Rock. This is suitable for wheelchairs and the ambulant disabled as it provides more comfortable walking on the beach.

In the future it would be good to provide more boardwalks and beach decks.

Hove Beach Park has been created with a new linear accessible path – making the new park and associated sports facilities as accessible as possible (exception is Rockwater sunken garden). There are changing facilities on the ground floor of the new sports building.

In the future (2026) a new groyne field is planned for the area of the beach near Morocco's. Currently talking to engineers about creating another beach deck as part of that development. Also looking into the possibility of using one of the groynes as protection for a potential ramp. This is a long way off, but looking at solutions to stop shingle covering the ramp when the tide comes in.

### **Questions:**

LS – is the mobi-mat designed for wheelchairs? TM – yes it is designed for wheelchairs, however, its predominant use is in Europe on flat sandy beaches. LS – agrees it is very difficult to use and it would be better if it was closer to the sea. TM – unfortunately can't be lower than the high water mark (which is getting ever higher) due to the problem of tidal shifts in the shingle. There was an experiment with a metal articulated ramp that was rolled out and then rolled up at the end of the day by the lifeguards. However, the sharp metal edges and shingle that became embedded in it made it not a good solution.

LS – it is very interesting to hear about the challenges and understand a bit more (haven't been able to access the sea for 8 years). Would a jetty over the water be any better – with Roman steps? Many wheelchair users are partially ambulant. TM – the issue there would be the major engineering needed to create a safe jetty and how people would safely enter and exit deep water.

LS – in some places like Barcelona there are assisted bathing services. Is this something that could be offered – to help people get in and out of the water. This is a major barrier to access, aside from the shingle / steep beach. Especially as Brighton beach has a steep drop off.

LB – need the old bathing machines that were winched up and down the beach – provided changing facilities and access into the water! (CH – note – you're not the only one with this idea: [Seaside bathing machines for people with disabilities](#))

AC – many thanks to Toni for coming to the meeting and talking to the LAF. There is certainly a lot more going on than we were aware of. This came up from a walk along the seafront and wondering about access for disabled people and looking at what is on offer abroad (admittedly in the Mediterranean!). The new development at Hove Beach Park – are the changing facilities accessible from the promenade / beach side? TM – yes, they are on the ground floor of the new sports pavilion with a door on to the prom. (public toilets with changing facilities – replacing western esplanade toilets).

AC – thinking about the relationship between disabled parking and the disabled access facilities at the Seafront Office. Surely it would be better to have these facilities located in Hove near the King Alfred where there are a lot of disabled parking bays close by? TM – when consultation was carried out the feedback from disabled users was split 50/50 between those that wanted to be in the centre in the thick of things and those that wanted to be at the quieter Hove end. In the end the central location was chosen. However, the new disabled access facilities will be provided in the west where the beach is flatter and there are more blue badge parking bays. Aspiration for a disabled hub near Lex's café. It would be good to provide another boardwalk. A small boardwalk area was created at Saltdean, but in Hove it would be good to provide a solid beach deck more akin to what is in central Brighton. At the sports hub a room was designed in as a 'disability hub' where powered wheelchairs could be stored and people could charge their own wheelchairs.

AC – the idea of the ramp protected by the groyne in the new groyne field is a really good one. Would like to respond to the planning application. Went to a public meeting but didn't get much feedback on accessibility issues. TM – the coastal engineering team are very supportive of improve accessibility on the beach. The first priority for the project is as sea defences / prevention of long shore drift, but if accessibility facilities can be planned in they will be – adds great social value. AC – will respond to the planning application on behalf of Surfers Against Sewage

LB – perhaps AC and LS could work together on a LAF response to the planning application for the groyne field? This may add more weight to it. They have the closest interest and expertise.

AC – assisted bathing – the Wave Project that operates near Carat's Café is a great resource to help young people get in the sea and surf. They would be a good source of expertise. TM – this is a good idea. Lifeguards do assist where and when they can. However, it is not a reliable source of assistance as they can be called out on an emergency.

LS – are the changing facilities accessible with a radar key or do you have to call for assistance? TM – the ones near Shelter Hall were originally designed with radar key access. However, this was being abused so a combination lock was installed with a number to call to get the code. (Initially it was though there would be a permanent attendant but due to budget restrictions this was changes to mobile cleansing). TM believes the ones in west Hove will be radar key locked as it is anticipated that there won't be so much anti-social behaviour here?

DB – would like to focus on the undercliff path. This is a very important leisure and commuter route all the way from Saltdean to the Marina. It is constantly affected by shingle covering the path (affecting wheelchair users) and the area behind the Marina is often flooded as the drainage holes are blocked. Martin Aede used to take care of the undercliff but it seems neglected since he left? TM – Steven Parker is the new Martin Aede – responsible for the groyne field and the undercliff. The undercliff walk is primarily a sea defence (DB – but the PRow that sits on it is very well established and well used). The main issues are the overtopping of shingle from the beach and wash off of chalk from the cliffs which is both slippery and blocks the drainage holes. Due to budget constraints have to take a pragmatic approach – there is a spring clean of the shingle once the worst of the winter storms are over. The drainage holes are jetted occasionally when they become very blocked and flooding becomes an issue. DB questioned whether they had been jetted at all in the last 2 years. TM assured that they had been. CH conformed seeing the work order to Cityclean to have them jetted.

LB – thanked TM for attending the meeting and providing such an interesting discussion on accessibility issues and facilities on the seafront. It was very much appreciated

**Action – AC and LS to draft a response to the Groynes Field planning application – to be sent by the LAF**

**2. Minutes of the Last Meeting**

LAF Members agreed the minutes of the last meeting

Actions:

**3. Discussion Items (Standing items)**

**Access for All Project (CH) –**

**City Downland Estate Plan (CDEP):**

**Transport Partnership**

Consultation on A23 North cycle improvements. LB commented that the northern section near the old Youth Hostel – it would be good to divert the cycle path on the quieter parallel road, rather than have a cycle path shared with a bus lane. LS concurred that this feels scary.

**4. Reports**

**Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)**

**Actions:**

**Maintenance & Management**

Gate Repairs	
Gate Replacements	
Stile Replacement / Repair	
Waymark installation	
Vegetation Clearance (from public requests)	
Surface Improvements	
Obstruction	

**Actions:**

## **Legal Rights of Way Work**

### ***Actions:***

#### **5. Missing Links / Lost Ways / Unrecorded Paths**

As above – Longridge Avenue

Missing Link 52 (Pickershill Farm)

#### **6. Any Other Business**

### ***Actions:***

#### **Dates of Meeting 2025: (Thursdays 6-8pm)**

23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025 (AGM)