



BEACH HUTS AT MILFORD ON SEA (WESTOVER)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council licences beach huts at 4 locations along the coast line. These are situated at Calshot, Milford on Sea, Hordle Cliff and Barton on Sea. Prior to the storm on 14 February 2014 there were 118 concrete beach huts located on the lower promenade at Milford on Sea with the only wooden beach hut in this location having previously been destroyed in the January 2014 storms. These beach huts are located on a series of reinforced concrete slabs that run parallel with the seawall.
- 1.2 On 14 February 2014 this area of the coast line suffered significant damage due to unprecedented strong winds and high tides. An inspection on Saturday 15 February 2014 identified significant damage to the beach huts. This inspection and on-going inspections also identified the presence of blue and white asbestos within the construction of the majority of the beach huts.
- 1.3 This report updates Cabinet on work to date and considers the way forward.

2. ACTION FOLLOWING THE STORM

- 2.1 Due to concerns about the structural instability of the beach huts following the severe storm, the Council's Building Control Manager undertook an initial survey of the 118 huts on 17 February. This initial survey identified serious problems with a significant number of structures. The following actions were put in place:-
 - Security fencing was erected to prevent access to all the huts at Milford on Sea as visitors' safety could not be guaranteed.
 - An independent report was commissioned to assess the structural issues of the beach huts.
 - Ongoing meetings were arranged (and continue) with the Beach Hut Owners Association to keep them up to date with the situation.
 - Letters were written to all hut occupiers affected to make them aware of the situation.
- 2.2 Roughton, a consultant civil engineering firm, carried out the initial structural survey. The Council's own Property Services and Planning Teams also carried out inspections. The outcome of these surveys and inspections revealed that a significant number of huts were dangerous and as a consequence, action was taken under the Building Act 1984 to either completely remove or physically support (depending on the extent of the damage) the dangerous beach huts.
- 2.3 An analysis of the condition and action taken in respect of the 118 beach huts is set out below:-
 - 30 huts had to be completely demolished
 - 12 huts were propped up with temporary supports as they were structurally unstable

- 34 huts were boarded up as they were damaged significantly
- The remainder of the beach huts are secure but the Council has refused to allow access to these huts because of the concerns the Council has about their safety and condition.

2.4 A further report was commissioned by Roughton to look at latent defects which had been highlighted following initial inspections. Roughton confirmed that the huts in their current state are not fit for purpose and therefore the whole site has remained fenced off.

2.5 Roughton have concerns about the strength of the roof slab and the fact that the roof is not tied into the walls. There is also the issue of asbestos which was identified as being present within the structure of the beach huts when initial inspections were carried out. The condition of the timber purlins and front lintels is also a concern.

3. CONSIDERATION AS TO WAY FORWARD

3.1 The beach huts are situated on the lower promenade at Milford on Sea and as such, consideration needs to be given, in addition to hut occupiers, to the thousands of local residents and tourists who also use the promenade. The appearance of the beach huts and that of the promenade at Milford on Sea is an important factor when considering the tourism industry. The current situation where the huts are fenced off during the summer months could have a negative impact on tourism in the area.

3.2 When considering the future of the beach huts, 4 possible options were originally considered. These were:-

- Allowing individual hut owners access to their hut to repair it
- Postponing any repair or replacement of the beach huts until long term coastal protection works are carried out
- To demolish the remaining huts and permit their replacement
- To demolish all the remaining beach huts and not replace them

3.3 In terms of allowing hut owners to repair their individual huts (on an individual basis), this approach was discounted because it was not feasible or safe to allow individual hut owners to carry out repair works to a large number of terraced huts at the same time in a public space.

3.4 The Council considered that postponing any repair or replacement of the beach huts until long term coastal protection works were carried out would not resolve the current unsatisfactory situation within a reasonable timescale and so this option was also discounted.

3.5 That leaves two options remaining:-

- To either demolish all the remaining huts and allow their replacement

Or

- To demolish and not permit their replacement.

- 3.6 In terms of the option of demolishing the remaining beach huts and allowing their replacement, further work would be required to explore how best to do this including work undertaken on the type of replacement hut, materials to be used, design and whether there are any relevant planning considerations. Additionally, an assessment would need to be undertaken on the concrete slab upon which any replacement huts would be located to ensure that it has not been damaged by the adverse weather in February. Under this option, whilst the Council could consider meeting the cost of demolition of the remaining beach huts which is estimated to be £150,000, the purchase or construction of any replacement hut would fall to each individual owner, as would the maintenance responsibility and long term liability. In addition, the Council would need to erect railings on the lower and upper promenade at a cost of £50,000.
- 3.7 In terms of the other option of demolishing the remaining beach huts (at a cost of £150,000) and not permitting their replacement, this would mean the loss of a long standing facility used in the main by local residents, the loss of annual licence income and a likelihood of claims for compensation from beach hut occupiers faced with the loss of their site licence and what they perceive to be a valuable asset. In addition, railings (at a cost of £50,000) would need to be erected to protect the drop to and from the lower promenade.
- 3.8 As the decision on the future of the beach huts at Milford on Sea affects the wider community as well as the beach hut owners, it is proposed to hold discussions with Milford Parish Council as well as continuing discussions with the New Forest Beach Hut Owners Association (NFBHOA) on the two remaining options.

4. PROPOSED TIMETABLE

- Report to Cabinet 4 June 2014
- Discussions to be undertaken with Milford Parish Council and NFBHOA to discuss remaining options
- Report to Cabinet on 6 August 2014
- Agreed strategy following Cabinet decision in August 2014 to be implemented by Spring 2015

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The preliminary financial implications for the 2 remaining options are set out in section 3 of the report. These will be further evaluated as work is undertaken to further explore the feasibility of both options.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The current condition of the huts including the presence of asbestos is causing concern. The visual impact of the huts in their current condition has also a negative impact on the environment.
- 6.2 As part of any consideration to allow the replacement of new huts on the existing site, regard will have to be given to the environment on which they are to be located including the views of some households who have historically had a view of the Needles.

6.3 Clearing the site of beach huts may be viewed by some as a preferable approach from an environmental point of view. The options will be considered further following the discussions referred to in section 3.

7. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None

9. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS COMMENTS

9.1 I would like to express my thanks to Colin Read and his team for all their work in exploring the options set out in this report and confirm my support for the preferred option as set out in the recommendations. The preferred way forward, I believe, offers the fairest reasonable and affordable option to all parties balancing the interests of Beach hut owners, the residents of Milford on Sea and the wider Council Tax payers.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 The huts in their current condition are not fit for purpose. The most feasible options are explained above. A further detailed report will be brought back to Cabinet in August.

11. RECOMMENDATION

11.1 It is recommended that:-

- (i) The options to allow the repair of individual huts or to defer any action until long term coastal protection works are completed be discounted for the reasons explained in the report.
- (ii) The preferred way ahead is that which is set out in paragraph 3.6 of the report i.e. to demolish the remaining huts and allow beach hut owners to replace them.
- (iii) Following consultation with Milford Parish Council and the NFBHOA a further report be brought back to Cabinet in August 2014 detailing the way ahead.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Surveyor's Reports
Inspection Notes