

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**  
**SCRUTINY PANEL ON SEAFRONT INFRASTRUCTURE**

**2.00pm 18 MARCH 2014**

**COMMITTEE ROOM 1, BRIGHTON TOWN HALL**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillor Mitchell (Chair)

**Also in attendance:** Councillor Brown and Davey,

**Apologies:** Angela Benson

**PART ONE**

**1. CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION**

The Chair welcomed everybody to the first public meeting of the seafront scrutiny panel. There would also be a wider evidence gathering process, including a drop-in event at Alfresco and using the council website to seek the views of stakeholders. The panel had already held two internal meetings with council officers to understand the technical and financial issues facing the seafront, which had fed into the Draft Seafront Strategy.

The findings of this panel will be used to inform a future version of the Seafront Strategy and the issues they were looking at would include:

- Challenges facing the seafront
- Budgets for the seafront
- Other possible funding solutions
- The seafront as an income generator
- How is the seafront valued and how to take care of it
- Other suggestions to tackle the issues.

**2. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

- Declarations of substitutes – There were none but Angela Benson, Angela Dymott and Cllr Anthony Delow sent their apologies for this meeting
- Declarations of party whip – none
- Declarations of interest – none
- Exclusion of press & public – none.

### 3. WITNESSES

**A. Mark Jones (MJ), deputising for the Chief Executive of the Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership and the Chair of the Brighton & Hove Hotels Association** began by telling the panel that the seafront had a unique role in the tourism offer. It meant so many things to so many people. The reasons why it was so important included was its role in:

- The Tourism Economy
- Experiential
- Well being and happiness making.

The tourist sector brought £732m to Brighton and Hove each year and provided 17,500 jobs (14% of the total). The seafront was something which we could build a lot more on and the city may not be as wonderful without it. But there is also a value less easy to quantify.

Every tourist would visit the seafront many times. All would experience it, use it and probably love it. So it was vital to continue to invest in this centrepiece of the tourist offer. Hotel visitors and conference delegates valued the seafront, while not all of these people threw pots of money into the town, many did. The 1.2m visitors who stayed over night put a lot of money into Brighton. Twenty percent of visitors were from overseas and 16% were escaping from London. The seafront was a jewel which we can't afford to take our eye off. It seemed that the enhancements to it came in jumps or fire-fights, such as the £500,000 to paint the railings.

He welcomed this scrutiny as a chance to look at how to:

- Maintain the seafront on an ongoing basis
- Retain the income from the seafront in order to maintain it.

MJ believed that there was still plenty of revenue generating potential on the seafront, but was concerned that this income was probably going into a black hole of council money. He had read the draft Seafront Strategy and was glad that areas were being promoted as good for particular things, rather than the seafront being viewed as a homogenous mass. He felt it was a start and agreed with the Strategy that there are further opportunities to enhance the seafront for residents and visitors.

He felt that the big challenge was to do the right things in the right areas. Examples included:

- Increasing rental incomes by creating new streams
- Using the revenue from parking to spend on highways
- Using development to increase the number of rentals
- Increasing the filming potential, which was gaining momentum but could be taken further
- Gaining revenue/compensation from the E.ON wind farms.

The tourism sector thrived on what is happening in the city. Brighton & Hove did well because events and recreational activities were organised and the majority took place on the seafront. If these events did not take place, tourism would decline and the city would go downhill.

**Question from Panel: Do you agree with the character areas identified in the Seafront Strategy?**

MJ told the panel that he felt that the Strategy should not preclude mixes of activities, even if some areas were predominantly one activity. So for example it would be a mistake to have only one sports area and then stop sports happening in other areas, or one arts area but no art anywhere else.

**Q: What are your views on the uses and potential of Madeira Drive?**

The Brighton & Hove Hotels Association (BHHA) has often talked to VisitBrighton about the inherited events in this area. While some such as the vintage car rallies attract visitors they do not directly generate money, for businesses such as hotels, but may increase income in the area for other businesses, e.g. that offer refreshments. It was hard to work out which events added value, except for bigger events such as the marathon which made a phenomenal contribution. The half marathon for example was a great use of us using our seafront well and it took place off season in February.

**Q: Could more events be held in the winter months?**

MJ gave the example of Blackpool who as visitor numbers dropped took to putting its illuminations on earlier and extending the season. Brighton may have to give harder thought to how to achieve similar.

**Q: What impact does the deterioration of structures have, such as Madeira Terraces?**

Such places would still be visited, even if they look down-at-heel. But if a location looks terrible then less visitors will recommend them to others, and indeed more 'reviewers' will happily report a bad experience. Every enhancement to a structure means that people will keep returning and tell more other people that it was a place worth visiting.

**Q: We have heard that at least £70-80m is needed to repair and maintain the infrastructure. What opportunities do you think there are for generating income? What criteria do you think that the council should use to increase income while maintaining the character of the seafront?**

MJ replied that large developments were constantly on the agenda, such as the King Alfred and Ice Area, which could generate a significant increase in revenue. Brighton needed to head towards building world beating developments, which was why the i360 as a unique and iconic project, was so exciting. If Black Rock was to be turned into an Ice Area then it needed to be world class. The King Alfred needed to be something that made people look at over and over again, and the same for the Brighton Centre.

MJ would like to see a greater use of the beach. While recognising the concerns there had been since the first Fat Boy Slim event, such attractions on the beach could raise a significant income. There could be a reconsideration of beach parties. The Marathon uses the space well, as does the summer film season. It was important to have a mix, so Brighton & Hove was not like all other seafront resorts. For example he thought Concorde 2 was a great example of a venue in a great site.

**B. Cllr Geoffrey Bowden (GB), Chair of the Economic Development & Culture Committee** told the panel he felt the key challenge for the seafront was the amount of investment needed after years of piecemeal, or under, investment. At least £70m was needed, as well as the money for Madeira Terrace. To make a business case for the Terraces, one needed to be able to show a revenue stream.

The seafront was both a key driver for the visitor economy and an asset for residents. There could be a tension between attracting visitors and making the area accessible to residents. Currently they were looking at the Peter Pan site to work out how to draw visitors to the East of the city. In his role as the Chair of the King Alfred Project Board, GB understood that the most likely revenue from this project would be the business rates. It would take £36m to develop this first class centre and the council's contribution would be the land.

Black Rock could be developed to provide a conference centre, or there could be a package of developments such as a conference centre and housing. The council gained revenue from the properties it leased, with £1.2m rental income and some income from events which primarily covered the cost of the Events Team (with around £60,000 remaining). This income was not a huge amount compared to the £70-80m needed to repair the structures. One could expect £1m per annum income from the i360, but this needed to be used very strategically. For example £100,000 was needed each year to prop up a certain site, which was a drain on precious resources. A recent study by the Tourism Alliance found that visitors tended to crowd towards Palace Pier and there was a need to draw these people out to other areas. This was an important feature of the draft seafront strategy.

The seafront provided a great contribution to the visitor economy. However we are not just a seaside town, Brighton & Hove had reinvented itself so there was plenty of other attractions for residents and visitors throughout the year.

**Q: What is the council doing to attract additional sources of finance for the seafront?**

GB felt there was a need to find other revenue streams. The Arches to the west of Palace Pier had been in receipt of some European funding. The i360 would be a trigger for a lot of public realm improvement, as well as acting as a trigger for the regeneration of Preston Street. The European team needed a business case to enable them to look for extra funding.

**Q: Was Local Economic Partnership funding available for the Riptide Gym structure?**

The government was recycling money and our projects were in competition with many other schemes. For example the Pavilion was competing for funding with Canterbury Cathedral, so the whole process was highly competitive and even the strongest cases could get knocked back.

**Q: One could see that funding has been made available for highways structures. The Arches is a fantastic project but extremely expensive at a cost of around £5m. Where structures - such as Madeira Terrace - cannot secure highways funding, would you support the ring fencing of income generated to the seafront to be spent on repairing or renovating such seafront structures?**

GB told the panel that if the £1.2m income from the seafront went back to the seafront, then that money would need to be replaced in the general fund – in other words, as long as it was

realised this approach had the potential to deprive other equally important schemes in the city of funding. It might be an approach that would be welcomed by champions of the seafront and condemned by others interested in other priorities for the city. The panel would need to decide whether the income it wished to ring fence included rental, a proportion of the business rates retained by the Council and parking revenue. The latter could have difficult knock on implications for the funding of free travel for pensioners for instance.

**Q: The seafront structures are classed as a ‘risk’ but there is no funding for the project, so don’t you think that ringfencing resources for the seafront needs to be a consideration?**

This issue needed to be looked at and assessed how it will impact on the city. The ‘graph of doom’ has shown that soon there will be no central government funding for local authorities. Perhaps sponsorship could be an option, to stop our major asset crumbling.

An economic impact assessment was needed to see the knock on effect - or ripple effect – of the seafront structures failing and in the end the administration of the day would need to prioritise how it spent a diminishing pot of money and that might mean judging whether to invest in services for the vulnerable or the seafront. There would be no easy choices.

**Q: What economic impact do the events held there have on the city?**

GB told the panel that the speed trials brought a fairly low income. The Marathon though has a very significant economic impact and has generated many other events. Around £4.5m is generated from those coming to watch other people run. A formula may be found to work out the income generated by events, but for such to be robust does cost money.

**Q: Have we moved too far from being a seaside town, it is now sometimes marketed as a place to shop?**

The cultural offer of the town is year long which helps to draw people in and makes the city a great place to live in. The cultural offer is cited on the Economic Partnership inward investment website as being a key element of what makes the city a great place to live and work. In this respect it particularly references the role of the seafront. We see the seafront as a key driver - a lot of people have moved to live here because they like the seafront. Being a centre for shopping is equally important – particularly our reputation for independent shops – is also an important driver for attracting people into the city, some of whom will also visit the seafront as part of their day in Brighton & Hove. It is wrong to think of these elements in isolation or attempting to grade one as more important than the other. We need to look at these aspects of the city holistically.

**C. Martin Hilson (MH), Building Surveying and Maintenance Manager, BHCC** began by sending apologies from Angela Dymott. He explained that he managed the Corporate Planned Maintenance Programme budget for civic, operational and historic buildings, which included:

- Water management, Mechanical, Electrical and Lift statutory compliance and service contracts
- Royal Pavilion
- Town Halls
- Parks buildings

- Community centres
- Some seafront buildings.

This £3.3m budget covers a wide range of buildings and was spread thinly, but allocated fairly, using the Asset Management Plan's Building Maintenance Strategy. Each building was given a strategic rating which coupled to prioritised condition surveys determined the amount given for repairs and maintenance, to maintain assets as well as can be achieved. However the council does not have a separate capital investment programme budget.

The key part of the budget allocation process was prioritising work and Madeira Terrace was seen as a significant risk. If a building was at risk they would try to allocate as much money as possible. Over the last 5 years the seafront had received between £320,000 - £439,000 per annum. Out of the £439,000 allocated for 2014/15, £250,000 is allocated to Madeira Terrace.

What the Corporate Planned Maintenance budget did not cover was:

- Reactive maintenance repairs (this budget was held by Toni Manuel, the Seafront Manager)
- Planned maintenance of Highways structures e.g. railings adjoining the highway & structures supporting the highway such as the arches, retaining walls, etc.

What the Corporate Planned Maintenance budget does cover along the seafront is:

- Non-Highway railings e.g. Hove seafront
- Madeira Terrace and Lift- a lot of work had been done to Madeira Terrace lift to make it more reliable and recover the copped clad roof. These structures were Grade 2 Listed
- Volks railway
- Brick and concrete chalets
- Bandstand
- Seafront Office
- Numerous shelters, some of which were Grade 2 Listed.

The buildings were given a strategic rating under the Building Maintenance Strategy, the buildings of the seafront generally do not get a high strategic rating but those that are listed would get a higher rating. Also if the building did not present a significant health and safety risk it would get a lower priority allocation rating. With no major capital investment programme budget, using this planned maintenance budget to repair Madeira Terrace took funding away from carrying out more routine repair tasks such as regular repairs and painting which can make the whole seafront look much better.

Madreia Terraces presented particular challenges because it was not income generating. We believe that it had been constructed in two stages in around 1890. The first stage was to the East of the lift and the later to the West. The Eastern side was faring better, perhaps because it had been better built. The Terraces have always been monitored and inspected annually, but in recent years hidden problems had been found that elevated concerns. This included problems relating to the corrosion of internal supporting beams and bolted connections within the concrete infill deck: a lot of the cast iron beams and the connections cannot be reached without opening up. They have identified the more corroded areas, but are finding increasing

levels of substantial decay. This area is like a very long bridge, with 865m of raised walkway. The Terraces are iconic for the city and great for events so are worth preserving. To repair the historic structures they need to be very carefully unpicked to avoid damaging fragile cast iron sections. The Terraces are listed and any planned work will need to be undertaken with Conservation Planning and with English Heritage approval. The proposal is to use hydro-demolition to carefully remove the old concrete as the cast iron is very brittle.

**Q: Is the £0.5m set aside for the Terraces, for the trial bays?**

MH told the panel that £250,000 had been set aside within each of 2013/14 and 2014/15 planned maintenance allocations. This will start by funding two trial bays to be undertaken by the Highways framework contractor who has provided competitive costings but it was likely to find out that more work will need to be done for the ongoing rolling refurbishment programme.

**Q: How can the funding be identified for the rest of the Terraces and what is the timescale for the works?**

According to MH the work was due to start in March but they were waiting for a letter from English Heritage confirming their requirements. After the two test bays are completed it will be known how much will needed to be spent on the remaining bays.

**Q: Are we ready to repair the other bays, once the trial bays have been repaired?**

It was expected that within a few months, the council would have a good understanding of the scale of the issue and the works needed. It may make sense to treat the East and West sites differently.

**Q: How would it be different if the council had a capital investment programme?**

Then there would be a separate pot of cash to provide a capital injection into the capital replacement needed. For example the Volks Railway shed had been temporarily propped up 11 years ago, but capital funds had not been found to rebuild the life expired sheds.

**Q: There is a lot of interest from residents in why the Terraces are closed off. Will information be made publically available about the work being carried out to the bays?**

MH confirmed that information would be put up about the work.

**D. Toni Manuel (TM) Seafront Development Manager and Jane Pinnock (JP), Seafront Estates Surveyor** were welcomed by the Chair and thanked for the very useful site visit to the seafront on the 17<sup>th</sup> April. TM explained that as the Seafront Development Manager, she was responsible for 13km of the seafront which included the management of over 300 premises. These included:

- Bars
- Cafes/Restaurants
- Sports clubs
- Artist units
- Storage.

The seafront budget was under her remit, she is responsible for all seafront maintenance, manages the seafront team and the Volks Railway. TM was one of the lead officers on the Seafront Strategy. JP explained that she was responsible for the day to day management of the premises including these income related side of the budget:

- New lettings
- Lease renewals
- Rent reviews.

It was important to get the right balance between generating income and getting a vibrant tenant mix: striking a balance between the artist quarter and the bars, cafes and sports activities.

**Q: Is there a vision for the work being done to the West Pier site?**

TM told the panel that the Arches were being built from scratch, led by the Highways Team. Their service has been involved in designing spaces within them to let: ensuring that the spaces are flexible and adaptable while supporting the A259. The units will have a long term future with a life of around 120 years. The Arches will be used for a 'creative quarter' made up of:

- Retail
- Artists.

The units will not offer any further catering but provide a hive of activity which would complement the i360.

JP told the panel that the council had received expressions of interest in the new units in the Arches, from over 140 parties without any marketing. The marketing would begin in April, but letting and the management of the arches will need to consider the construction of the i360.

She informed them that on the eastern side, the work on the Arches was at an early stage and the new units would be beach chalets and a few businesses. These units are likely to be let both on a short and long term basis.

**Q: How much influence does the council have to ensure a good mix of retail outlets and discourage 'national' businesses?**

JP told the panel that the council was being assisted by an external agent and would be looking for a market rent, but will be looking for a specific use. TM confirmed that the size and the seasonal nature of the premises would put off nationals, whereas local businesses can be more flexible and react quickly to capitalise on good weather. There would be tight user clauses that could dictate to a degree the type of business that the unit could be let to.

**Q: Would like to see some of the further spaces to the west of the Pier being used as retail, particularly if there was an attraction built down there to draw them in.**

TM said that the council was fairly at capacity with the units, not many were vacant and there was a very high demand. However there were pockets of spaces with the potential for change of use, she gave the example of how the closed toilets under the Bandstand provided a great



opportunity and were turned into a café. The west of Hove also had pockets of space but needed to be able to attract a critical mass of visitors.

**Q: Would it be possible to hold more events at Madeira Drive or extend the season for events?**

TM told the panel that the Events Team were good at attracting new events and had lengthened the season to September/October which was drawing in visitors after the end of the summer. While they were limited by the 28 days limit on events at the Terraces, more events would always be welcomed such as the Marathon which is amazing.

**Q: Could the limit on the number of days for events be extended?**

TM said that yes the number of days could be extended for example in March, as sunny days in this month. The council were encouraging businesses to stay open all year, and more events would be good for those with indoor seating. It had always been the intention to extend the season. The conferences also mean that there are a lot of reasons to extend the season.

**E. Helmut Lusser (HL), Chair of the Hove Civic Society and Juliette Hunting (JH), Brunswick & Adelaide Residents Group.** HL told the panel they had a difficult task ahead and the Hove Civic Society (HCS) were acutely aware of the squeeze on council resources. He thought that the panel should consider the buildings behind the seafront. While these properties were connected to the seafront, there was a genteel decline from Kemptown to the Hove Lagoon, due to huge underinvestment. The resources had declined since the research in 'Public Spaces, Public Places' <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/parking-and-travel/travel-transport-and-road-safety/public-life-public-space>

HL thought a plan was needed for how people come and go from the seafront because 'we need to polish the pearls'. The city needed to make the most of the architecture. The key structures were; the Palace Pier, Peace statue, Victoria statue and Madeira Terraces. He welcomed the i360 because it was a structure that could generate income.

HL said that it took two weeks of not collecting waste, to make this city a dump. But using a relatively small amount of money could halt the decline of the seafront structures. The view of Hove Lawns from Embassy Court was an iconic sight. There were areas of dire need, such as the Volks Railway which only had a temporary shed. It looks 'so-so' and needs a shed in a Victorian style, rather than a cardboard box. The seafront structures needed good and regular maintenance to prevent deterioration.

The HCS welcomed the works to the Arches on either side of the Pier. The Conservation Advisory Group (CAG) were concerned about being able to see a concrete lintel above the pavement level and felt that the works had not been looked at completely from a conservation view. There was concern that the paving had been replaced by tarmac. He suggested that when important changes were made to structures, that the council should ask people including CAG. It was felt that the works to the Arches were great at sea level, but there were concerns about when looking at them from above. Eighty percent of the seafront was in a Conservation area. There were around 15,000 listed buildings in the city. This project needed to be planned, to see how public places connect with the seafront.

The seafront was a key feature of the city, so although pressure would increase to cut resources this should not result in reduced spending on the seafront. When new developments were built, such as the conference centre, parts of the seafront should be maintained or improved, for example through S106 payments. The council needed to progress these large schemes, as they are needed to generate income. It should operate on the 20:80 principle that if it a project was nearly there, one should go for it. There was a need for a comprehensive enhancement and improvement strategy which could be used to negotiate with developers. For example this could be used to secure funds for general improvements to the public realm including tree planting and road closures. The council needed to move from doing piecemeal work to planning positively and gaining from developments.

An idea from abroad was that the council could introduce a hotel tax to be used towards the maintenance of the seafront. Or it could ask for voluntary contributions from residents. The restoration of Budapest underground line 1 to its original state might trigger some ideas about how one could also upgrade and extend the Volks railway into a commuter line to generate income.

JH told the panel that the Residents Associations in Brunswick Town, Hove consider the Lawns as iconic. People came to Brighton & Hove for the sea and as soon as the sun came out the Esplanade was full. The Lawns were used by certain groups who paid a monthly fee, and others who paid nothing but the damage did not seem to be repaired. Hove Lawns should be a special case and not treated/maintained as a park. If they were lost, they would be gone forever. The Associations would welcome a declaration of intent that the Lawns between the Peace Statue and Courteney Gate were not available for commercial activities. The Lawns could be designated by, and placed on English Heritage Parks and Gardens list. Such designation would give opportunities for funding.

The Lawns are the setting for the magnificent grade 1, 2\* & 2 listed buildings. This Brunswick Town Conservation area should be kept to the same standard as their equivalents, Bath or Venice. If they were lost, they would be gone forever.

**Q: What do you think would be the response to a public subscription scheme for the Terraces?**

HL felt that most people did not know how dire the financial situation was for local authorities. There were loads of people who could afford to contribute. They could be asked to 'help preserve something we all love', but would need an explanation of the situation facing the Terraces. By 2018/19 there could be no government grant, but the majority were not aware of this. If the local authority promotes this message it could seem self promoting, but this needed to be done before the situation became dire.

Gill Mitchell (GM) observed that the Bathing Hospital had been kickstarted by public subscription.

HL told the panel that planning permission had been agreed, as well as a licence, for the Plinth which would help bring activities to the West of the seafront. Ideally they would like to have funding in place by the end of the financial year.

Ian Davey (ID) agreed about the need to recognise the connections between the seafront and the town, including East Street.

HL also reminded the panel about connecting the seafront to the Downs and restoring the street tree heritage. There were preparations being made now for planting in Medina Villas. Trees and planting made a big difference and were not very expensive. Improving the wider street scene was more difficult, but it would make a huge difference if the council had clear rules about highway management. Money was not always needed to make a difference, one also needed to look at:

- Street lighting
- Car parking
- Treatment of kerbs and pavements and the retention of traditional materials.

This was why it was necessary for the council to have a detailed and comprehensive enhancement plan for the seafront and its immediate hinterland. For example projects such as the Hippodrome, with an expected cost of £100m, could generate enough funds to make a difference. At the moment the improvements were stop-start, but it was important to set a bottom line and develop a plan to continuously improve that the council made a commitment to.

**F. Cllr John Bryant (JB), Rottingdean Parish Council (RPC) and James Simister, Clerk to RPC.** JB informed the panel that Rottingdean was an important centre for the surrounding community as well as a destination for tourists. It comprises a substantial village which, despite suburban development on its fringe, remains a distinct settlement separate from the urban conurbation of Brighton and Hove. It has a population of 2,906 with 50% aged over 50. *The Village* contributes around £3m in council tax and supports a number of shops, restaurants and public houses in its economy.

The seafront is an important asset to the village; providing public space, contributing to the thriving culture, bringing together the community and helping social cohesion. RPC supported the vision and objectives in the draft Seafront Strategy. The RPC had sought to work with Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) to improve facilities and felt that the Seafront Team had been *very* supportive. What follows should not be seen as critical, of them.

The terraces at Rottingdean had for a time fallen into disuse and attracted some poor behaviour. Rottingdean Arts acted as a catalyst and had seen the opportunity to develop the stage area and to hold concerts and an increasing number of events have taken place. The cost of improving terraces, included groundwork, new benches, the stage area painting and provision of power had been funded from a number of local charities as well as B&H CC.

- £14,500 from the RPC
- £20,000 raised by Rottingdean Arts
- Contributions also came from Rottingdean Trade, Business and Professional Association, Play areas for Rottingdean Children.

The terraces were a success story of cooperation, the seafront toilets were a different story and a sorry saga.

The toilets are owned by BHCC but had not been maintained for a number of years and had become derelict. This led to the need for portable toilets to be supplied in the summer and for events. BHCC were not prepared to fund the repairs required.

The RPC, under pressure from residents and visitors became determined to re-establish the toilets. After further discussions with BHCC, the RPC decided to assist with funds. These resources had to be found from the reserves set aside for another development. The RPC are still negotiating with BHCC about a share of future revenue from the cafe.

Now there were new public toilets and a cafe, and the RPC share of the costs was £86,500. This development was opened in spring 2013.

The RPC were looking for a ramp to enable access to the auditorium and a planning application was underway. They have asked BHCC for a £4,000 contribution to the £12,000 cost of the project, which is going to the Policy and Resources Committee soon. The RPC would also like to see the main slope with a gentler gradient.

The RPC is also supporting a PARC initiative to develop a multipurpose games area on the seafront where the old outdoor swimming pool used to be. PARC, have raised £75,000 through public contributions. Other schemes supported by RPC include providing extra benches.

The RPC is working closely with Seafront Service and BHCC and would wish to see an even greater flow of information and communication. An example of what the RPC wished to prevent was a recently built fuse box built on the Lower High Street (a photograph was shown to the Panel).

The key issues they felt were faced by Brighton & Hove as whole included:

- Sea defences, including the protection of the A259 which is very close to the sea. It could drop into the sea. However if this happened it would cut out 13,000 traffic movements to Rottingdean!
- Improved connections. Those from Saltdean to the Marina were good, however from the Marina into central Brighton needed to be improved. Perhaps there could be an elevated train link from Brighton to Rottingdean.

The RPC did understand the funding problems faced by the City Council.

JS told the panel that the improvement works mentioned were well supported by residents and had played a part in the events programme of Brighton & Hove.

**Q: Was the flood defence work OK?**

JB told the panel that luckily the defences were holding up, but in recent storms the walkway had been a foot under water driven by winds and tide. There was a concern about how to clear this up.

ID agreed that the under cliff was an important connection between the Marina and the centre of town, but JB said that there were times when it could be dangerous in bad weather because large stones could be blown onto the walkway. He was concerned that at the Marina you used

to be able to walk down past Asda, but this was not now possible due to a cliff fall. Toni Manuel clarified that this path was only periodically closed.

**G.** The Chair of the panel introduced **Paula Murray** as having responsibility for arts, culture and events as part of her role as **Assistant Chief Executive**.

PM began by paying tribute to the local activism of Rottingdean Parish Council in terms of their successful fundraising and improvements.

The city had a tourism offer for both national and international visitors and the draws were shopping in the centre, then the downs and the seafront. Out of this mix, the seafront was the most important; what the city is known for and the biggest draw. The importance of the seafront cannot be overstated, both in terms of tourism and attracting inward investment. It was a very photogenic location, despite the problems faced by the seafront structures, and there were plans to make more of this area.

She believed that there was something for everyone at the seafront and one needed to keep this balance. There was the need to keep a mix of facilities and provision on the seafront, while engineering more revenue funding. There was a good mix now and it needed to be preserved. Changes would happen as different developments were built, but the good balance of retail, heritage, cafes, bars, sports facilities was important to retain.

On the whole there was a good balance between meeting the needs of visitors and residents. There were between 8-9m visitors to the city each year and at least 6m of these visited the seafront. Perhaps visitors may be more forgiving about the condition of the seafront than surveyors.

There were clear priorities for the seafront structures:

- The Arches
- Shelter Hall
- More work on the west side of the seafront.

A number of new developments would have a significant impact:

- i360
- King Alfred – which could attract visitors to the west of the seafront
- Black Rock – to provide a balance as this was in the middle of the seafront.

The seafront was important to the emotional wellbeing of those who visit it, which is not often taken into account. She would be keen to know if one could quantify the mental and physical wellbeing from the seafront, for example developing marked walks and increasing the number of sports played there. There was the need to clock these benefits in a more specific way.

As part of a south of England coastal strip, our seafront was part of a complementary range of seafronts; Eastbourne and Worthing seafronts being more traditional for example with traditional planting and lighting. This delivered a compelling coastal offer when taken all together.

**Q: The panel members saw some big cracks in some of the seafront structures on their site visit, especially going into the Shelter Hall site which was propped up. It became clear why this has been identified as a corporate risk. It seems to be an issue that there is no project board to oversee this issue and no identified budget, although Shelter Hall has been identified as a project except the £100,000 scaffolding and the LEP bid. Do you see the need to identify the seafront as a project and identify a budget?**

PM agreed that there was the need to prioritise the seafront works. There was an officer group running in parallel which had led to the request for Scrutiny and that range of officers were supporting the Scrutiny led work. The issue of the seafront was also on the Corporate Risk Register. She would ask the scrutiny panel to leave no stone unturned when considering the funding options for the seafront. For example, LTP bids and the bid for the Volks Railway. The council was assessing all the developments in terms of what they could give back. She also hoped that Scrutiny would give this issue a higher profile.

GM asked PM if she could receive copies of any minutes of the officer group meetings.

ID explained that funding bids had been put in for Valley Gardens, Shelter Hall and Intelligent Transport Systems to the Coast to Capital Local Transport Boards (LTB). Valley Gardens had been successful and a business case was being developed to secure this funding. In the next round they would be trying again to bid for funds for Shelter Hall.

**Q: There was a need for more revenue funding, could one trademark the beach?**

PM told the panel that we did not do badly for film income, but could potentially earn more if we could resource a more proactive approach, she gave the example of the film office in Liverpool. The council was working in partnership with Brighton University to promote Brighton & Hove as a film city. The Events Team had a zero based budget, but there was the need to strike a balance between the events which pay and do not pay.

**Q: Was the 28 days limit on events fixed in stone?**

PM said that there was a process you could go through to extend the number of days, but raised the issue that some city centre traders and the bus company may not be happy if the number of days events could be held was increased, because some of these events can cause a level of disruption.

VB wondered if there were there more opportunities going westwards on the seafront, such as creating more space for beach huts – especially as there is such a long waiting list for huts. With a lot of the supporting walls one could see movement, on top of the major issues faced such as Shelter Hall.

**F. Dr John Hastie of the Fed Centre** outlined to the panel the key issues relating to the accessibility of the seafront:

- a. The accessible beach platform at the bottom of Hove Street; a wooden platform which led one onto the shingle and gave you a nice view of the sea. It was great but was quite limited by its small platform. There was a much longer platform on Shoreham beach. It would be great to have a much longer beach platform or several platforms. Such structures could get covered by shingles and so needed to be regularly maintained.

- b. Beach wheelchairs; 2 of which were stored by the seafront office and there was a plan to put one in the Hove Office, which could enable people to get into the water. It was a challenge to push people up and down the beach. This wheelchair may be more suitable for kids, but there was no hoist to safely transfer the person into the beach wheelchair. Would it be possible to have a hoist or a portable hoist?
- c. The Changing Place Toilet: this facility in Madeira Drive was excellent and he would commend the facilities. There was a danger that it was assumed that disabled people would remain in that area. A similar toilet in Hove would be useful.
- d. The surface of the seafront was very variable. The wooden boards outside the Seafront Office were very hard and arranged in a higgledy piggledy manner. There was poor access to the Terraces Bar and this facility was very difficult to use when accessing it via the ramp from Madeira Drive. The surfaces needed to be better maintained.
- e. Finding accessible parking is a problem because the area is so busy. Some of the parking spaces are only useful for those trying to get out of the passenger seat. It was also a problem to find spaces next to dropped kerbs.
- f. A lot of disabled people would like to get closer to the sea, which was a challenge on a shingle beach. Matting had been put down, but it had worn out after a year and the seafront staff had needed to put it down. Would it be possible to develop a more durable matting, one could set this as a challenge for engineering students. TM said that this was a national problem for shingle beaches, it would be difficult to come up with a matting which was portable for staff to move but durable.
- g. Connectivity: if one wanted to park and get changed one had to go to Madeira Terrace, however if one needed a beach wheelchair one had to go to the Seafront Office. Then the platform was in Hove. One would have to travel 4.5 miles to use all the facilities for disabled people, rather than making sure that these connected up. The sea was a free resource for all to use, which was especially important for disabled people: many of whom were on lower incomes. As budgets were being cut, such as for their support, then disabled people could not get out to use the seafront.

ID agreed that there was a need to join things up.

**Q: Was it possible to use the seafront to buy tea? Are there any no go areas?**

JH told the panel that he avoided the Brighton seafront due to the uncomfortable wooden slats. TM replied that while some of the slats had been replaced with hard tiles, other slats remained. She realised that this was not ideal for people with mobility issues. JH had been working with Rottingdean Parish Council on installing two ramps to the beach. One side is treacherous and there was no warning that one should not use it if in a wheelchair. The other one was safer, but the gradient has been improved and information has been put up on how to navigate this area. He may avoid events on Hove Lawns as sometimes the organisers do not think of the needs of those navigating wheelchairs. It was an issue that event organisers needed to take into account. It would also be useful to put up clear signs for disabled people, where there are new developments.

**Q: What is good signage?**

JH told the panel that good signage needed to be:

- Clear
- Colourful

- Large print.

He felt the current signs used by the council were good.

**4. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair reminded everyone that the date of the next meeting was the 25<sup>th</sup> March in Committee Room 1, Hove Town Hall.

The

**5. A.O.B**

The meeting concluded at 5.00pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of