

### **Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee**

**Subject:** Beach Access Update 2022

**Date of meeting:** 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022

**Report of:** Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture

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**Ward(s) affected:** All

**For general release**

#### **1. Purpose of the report and policy context**

- 1.1 Since January 2019, members of the community group Beach Access Team, Brighton and Hove (BAT), originally supported by disability charity Scope and officers from the council's Seafront Team have established a Beach Accessibility Working Group (BAWG). This is an Officer working group which elected members are welcome to attend if this is of interest to them.
- 1.2 At the meeting of the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee in March 2020, a report was presented which detailed the actions already undertaken by BAWG to improve beach access in Brighton & Hove and to set out the longer-term aspirations for the group.
- 1.3 This report is a further update on the beach access improvements which have been made since the previous report and details of future priorities and plans.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the progress made towards improving beach access in Brighton & Hove.
- 2.2 That the Committee supports the continuation of improvements to beach and seafront access in Brighton & Hove.

- 2.3 That the Committee acknowledges the particular constraints in providing safe and independent access for wheelchair users and people with mobility impairments over the shingle beaches and down to the shoreline.

### **3. Context and background information**

- 3.1 Shortly after the TECC Committee in March 2020 the country went into lockdown as the global Covid pandemic spread. This suspended many of the usual council activities and required a change of focus for officers. This was particularly significant for the Seafront Team which continued to operate on the front line as the city's seafront became one of the few places where residents could legitimately spend time.

- 3.2 Despite the constraints, improvements have been made to beach access since the last update. Further improvements are in the pipeline, as described below. BAWG have not had the opportunity to develop a large number of projects but access improvements are advancing.

- 3.3 The following points list access improvements that have been made across the 13km stretch of the city's seafront.

#### **3.4 Recognised Consultee**

Since the previous update the Beach Access Team, Brighton and Hove (BAT) have been established as a key consultee for all seafront infrastructure and redevelopment projects. Representatives from BAT have been involved in planning and design discussions for Black Rock Rejuvenation, Sea Lanes, and Kingsway to the Sea projects.

#### **3.5 Seasonal beach pathway**

A trial was undertaken during 2021 which involved using lengths of industrial conveyor belt fixed to timber sleepers to create a temporary pathway from the promenade down to the high-water mark. The trial did not prove to be successful for a number of reasons. Firstly, the width and design of the pathway could not accommodate all types of wheelchairs. Despite the matting being made of rubber it became slippery when wet. At one of the trial locations the gradient of the beach was very steep which made it difficult for self-propelled wheelchair users to get back up the path unaided. The pathways were used by pedestrians which caused shingle to be dragged onto the pathway creating the need for regular sweeping by the Lifeguards.

#### **3.6 Black Rock Boardwalk**

A new decked area and boardwalk has been built on the beach by Madeira Drive. The new boardwalk provides stable and fully level access and stretches east/west across the beach from the Volk's Railway Station at Black Rock to the Volk's Workshop at the bottom of Dukes Mound. This facility has proven to be extremely popular with residents and provides a much needed opportunity for those with mobility impairments to get onto the

beach rather than be confined to the pavement or promenade— see Appendix 1, 2, 3.

### 3.7 Changing Places

The newly opened public toilets at Shelter Hall includes a ‘Changing Places’ facility. This is larger accessible toilet for disabled people with equipment such as hoists, curtains, adult-sized changing benches and space for carers. The addition of facilities like this on the seafront enable disabled people to spend more time at the beach or out and about without the having to return home to use bespoke facilities.

### 3.8 Accessible Beach Deck

In central Brighton a new wheelchair accessible beach deck has been built which projects out onto the beach. Accessible picnic tables and sunshades have been provided to create an accessible seating area with priority to disabled people enabling residents and visitors to spend time with friends and family on the beach – see Appendix 4 & 5.

### 3.9 Beach Wheelchairs

Close to the new beach deck is the Brighton Seafront Office where there are now 3 beach wheelchairs available to hire (at no charge) by the public. The chairs range in size and style and all come with balloon wheels which allow them to be used on the shingle beaches – see Appendix 6, 7, 8. The chairs are extremely popular with users and several community groups are seeking advice from the Seafront Team to determine which chairs are best suited to our beaches with a view to potentially purchasing similar chairs.

3.10 A new all-terrain electric wheelchair has recently been added to the collection available for hire at no charge. This has been designed specifically to cope with the steeply shelving shingle beaches which are a common feature of our coastline. Further trials and training are required before the chair will be available for public use but it is expected to be a popular and beneficial addition to the seafront access facilities – see Appendix 9 & 10.

### 3.11 Blue Badge Parking Bays

In 2021 a new road layout introduced on Madeira Drive almost doubled provision of Blue Badge parking bays from 14 to 27 bays with increased widths in-line with updated access guidance. Additional Blue Badge Bays are also planned to be introduced next year along the seafront near the King Alfred Leisure Centre. These bays assist in connecting the accessible seafront facilities together thereby improving the visitor experience for disabled people and their families.

## **Upcoming Projects And Future Plans**

### **Saltdean Beach Pathway**

- 3.12 A new beach pathway in Saltdean is scheduled to be installed in November 2022. The pathway will extend southwards from the edge of the Undercliff (west of the subway) to the crown of the beach. It will be made from the same decking material as the Black Rock boardwalk and will provide a wheelchair accessible pathway to a small viewing/sitting area. This location was chosen by the BAWG because is least likely to be at risk of overtopping and therefore damage from winter storms and has level access from the car park through the subway.

### **Communications**

- 3.13 Work is underway to update the existing council website and provide a dedicated 'Seafront Access' page providing detailed information on all the accessible facilities available across the seafront. A video showing the facilities in use is also planned to be filmed in the Spring and will be available to view online.

### **Accessible Safe Hub**

- 3.14 This is an idea to emerge from research and user-consultation undertaken by the BAT. The details of exactly what the Safe Hub will provide and how it will function are still to be confirmed but a space for this has been earmarked within the new Outdoor Sports Hub building which forms part of the Kingsway to the Sea project on West Hove Seafront.

### **Kingsway to the Sea**

- 3.15 The Kingsway to the Sea project aims to create a new linear park with modern outdoor sports facilities on the coastal stretch from the King Alfred to Hove Lagoon. Many of the spaces are currently inaccessible to wheelchair users and those with mobility impairments. One of the key priorities of the project is to provide accessible pathways which run throughout the park and its facilities. A new building will accommodate new public toilets which will include accessible toilets and a Changing Places facility. There is also a proposal for a new Changing Places facility to be located next to the existing public toilets at Hove Lagoon which will also be refurbished and improved.

### **Hove Beach Deck**

- 3.16 Beach access is currently very restricted in Hove due to the topography of the beach and presence of steps, railings, groynes and walls which provide essential sea defence. However, the BAWG has identified a location to the west of Hove Street South which would be suitable for an accessible beach deck similar to that in Brighton. The site has good access to blue badge parking and is close to where the new public toilets, Changing Place facility and Accessible Safe Hub will be located if the Kingsway to the Sea project is approved at Planning. It is close to the Lifeguard post and café facilities and

would provide an excellent view of the sea and beach. Unfortunately, there is no funding identified for this project at this time.

### Access Into The Sea

- 3.17 One of the ultimate goals of the BAWG is to facilitate safe and independent access for disabled people into and out of the sea. However, despite various engineers, architects, disabled users and council officers looking at options it has not yet been possible to find a viable solution. Access requirements vary considerably so it has been the approach of the BAWG to provide a number of different interventions and facilities to try to assist as many people as possible to gain access to the seafront and beaches, rather than wait to provide sea access only. The BAWG is committed to the continuing efforts to overcome the challenges faced by disabled people when visiting the seafront. The proposed developments contained in a previous update are still planned.

## **4. Community engagement and consultation**

- 4.1 Consultation with BAT is on-going as part of the BAWG. In addition, over the last few years, BAT has sought to collate a significant evidence-base from those living with, or whose lives are impacted by, disability and additional needs. Various methods have been employed, all of which have sought to answer fundamental questions concerning the access issues experienced by disabled people or those with access needs in Brighton & Hove. BAT has held two public consultation events (May 2018, August 2019) and also held stalls at Disability Pride (2018 & 2019). Large scale in-person consultation has not been possible again due to Covid-19. From these events, and from interactions across various social media platforms, a significant body of evidence has been collated to begin to answer these questions, and to work out the most appropriate steps forward. BAT and BAWG is committed to ensuring all changes are informed by user-feedback, and user-led.

## **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 The terrain of the Brighton & Hove seafront presents particular challenges to improved accessibility. However, by working with interested local parties it has been possible to identify a range of improvements that are being progressed and which have proven to have beneficial outcomes for users

## **6. Financial implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Upcoming Projects and Future Plans will either be funded from existing capital and revenue resources or will require approved capital schemes before commencing.

Name of finance officer consulted: John Lack Date consulted: 20/10/22

## **7. Legal implications**

- 7.1 The BAWG is an officer working group; members may be invited to events in the future but the intention is not to establish a member working group. There are no other legal implications arising from this report.

Name of lawyer consulted: Alice Rowland Date consulted:14/10/22

## **8. Equalities implications**

- 8.1 The beach access improvement made so far have been well received by disabled users, particular the Black Rock Beach Boardwalk and updated beach wheelchairs. Feedback regarding the boardwalk suggests that users would like to see more of this type of intervention in other locations along the city's beaches. Further work is planned to further promote the accessible features on the seafront such as the Brighton beach deck and new electric wheelchair to maximise the use of these facilities.
- 8.2 As part of the development of the council's Accessible City Strategy each directorate within the council is undertaking action planning with the council's Equality Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Team. Focusing on the directorate's EDI challenges and pressures, the directorate will identify and prioritize their critical actions under the emerging strategic themes of the strategy: engagement, data, policy, and leadership.

## **9. Sustainability implications**

- 9.1 The sustainability of proposed improvements has been a key issue, particularly to seek sustainable improvements that are able to withstand the harsh seafront environment.

## **Supporting Documentation**

### **1. Appendices**

- 1, 2, 3. Black Rock Boardwalk - photos
- 4 & 5. Accessible Beach Deck & Picnic Tables - photos
- 6, 7, 8. Beach Wheelchairs - photos
- 9 & 10. Electric All-Terrain Wheelchair - photos