

OUTLINE BRIEF FOR LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY PHD STUDENTS

2019 is to be a “Year of Action on The Environment 2019” for the Liverpool City Region. It is hoped that this project can be considered a helpful and positive contribution to that programme.

In 2000, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council commissioned a report entitled “*The Beaches at West Kirby and Hoylake: Options for Managing Wind Blown Sand and Habitat Change*”.

In its executive summary, the document concluded “the rising beaches in this part of Wirral are part of the natural evolution of the coast. As beaches get higher and the coast becomes more sheltered from wave action, there will be a natural succession of habitats including the formation of salt marshes and sand hills... the existing approach to managing rising beach levels and the wind-blown sand problem is not sustainable in the long term.”

The report recommended a series of actions, including data gathering and reversible field trials in segments of the North Wirral Foreshore.

Since the report, however, no further data has been recorded and no trials have taken place. However in the intervening years the beach level has continued to rise and other aspects of the habitat have changed, whilst the average rate of sea level rise has doubled in just 25 years.

It is therefore likely that some aspects of the report and its recommendations may no longer be relevant or appropriate.

This new report should aim to identify what new research needs to be done in the current context to ensure recommendations are up to date and ensure any future actions are appropriate.

Current beach management consists primarily of

- spraying herbicides (Roundup) on invasive Spartina and other grasses which continue to establish in clumps along the beach each year, and
- raking the foreshore in order to maintain an amenity beach.

The former activity appears to work only in part, reportedly due to ineffective application techniques. Even with correct application it is likely that Spartina will continue to return, although its suppression in some areas has been known to last for two or more seasons.

The latter activity, raking, is controversial insofar as it appears to spread Spartina rhizomes and other grasses, exacerbating the problem.

Other techniques such as digging and roto-burying have not been consented by Natural England as they have been deemed ineffective.

Since the North Wirral foreshore is protected at the highest levels with Natura 2000 protections (SSSI, pSAP, SAC and RAMSAR) any such activity requires licensed consent.

The herbicide Roundup BioActive Gold (Glyphosate) is licensed by The Environment Agency and its application consented by Natural England under strict guidelines.

The areas beyond the lifeboat station and adjacent to the walls by Red Rocks are not managed and early establishment of saltmarsh can clearly be seen there, as predicted in the above report, however these are not formally designated as “trial” areas.

As a consequence there is no data being recorded that might inform future management of this area over the long term and there are related concerns over its current and future development.

In considering whether to extend the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) boundary to include the beach area, we feel it necessary to first revisit the issues of beach management and the earlier report and its recommendations.

The absence of any meaningful research since 2000, alongside the failure to adopt successful beach management processes that are intended to preserve the amenity beach area, give rise to a range of concerns from local residents and visitors.

Whilst, anecdotally, a significant number of people support the evolution of a 'natural' saltmarsh and dune system, it is also clear that a majority of residents would wish to retain an amenity beach along the promenade and for everything possible to be done to delay or reverse the development of saltmarsh and dunes. This includes the continued application of herbicides but importantly in a more effective manner.

Opinions within the community over the short, medium and long term future of the beach are polarised with differences of opinion among residents and other key stakeholders.

There is also, on both 'sides', a lack of reliable information combined with a good deal of misinformation circulating about historic and current beach management techniques; the efficacy and risks associated with the chemicals used; coastal processes and habitat evolution.

The short, medium and long-term approaches to coastal defence are under ongoing review in the North West Shoreline Management Plan (SMP2), which recognises that "justification and sustainability of continuing to hold the present defence line for the whole frontage will require more detailed investigations and consideration of combinations of front line and secondary defences".

It is widely accepted that there will be a greater rise in sea level over the next six years than during the whole of the last century, and that this acceleration is continuing.

The Shoreline Management Plan will inevitably include considerations of whether hard (eg concrete) or soft (dunes and wetland / saltmarsh) defences are most appropriate.

The report we aim to commission will revisit the 2000 report and make updated recommendations for further research to take place.

In the meantime the NDP Non-land use priority states "**The Council's Beach Management Plan should be supported and followed, with a regular review of practices for monitoring development.**"

This refers to the *2010-2015 Beach Management Plan*, which includes measures to retain the amenity beach using current techniques, including application of herbicides.

However this plan has also not been subsequently updated and is therefore expired; WMBC are therefore applying for consent for individual activities.

It is clear in the NDP and is the view of the Forum Management group that continued support of this approach should be dependent on the responsible Local Authority (Wirral Council) taking a **regular review of practices for monitoring development** – i.e. gathering data and evidence to inform current and future beach management.

Further, the consent to apply herbicides granted by Natural England also states: "Natural England also brings to your attention that, as a S28G body of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), you are required to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of your functions to further the conservation and enhancement of the SSSI."

This report should provide the Forum with a set of recommendations with which to approach WMBC in order to ensure that its stated NDP priority on the beach is satisfied and that the council's responsibilities under the Wildlife & Countryside Act are acted upon.

This report will therefore act as an addendum to the 2000 report and propose frameworks for taking any recommended actions, including possible field trials.

It will necessarily include consultation with the following key stakeholders:

- Hoylake Community Planning Forum membership
- Ward Councillors
- WMBC Officers
- Wirral Parks Service

- The Friends of Hoylake Beach action group
- Hoylake Sailing Club
- RNLi
- Hoylake In Bloom
- Beach user groups (eg sandyacht/kitebuggy club)
- National environmental agencies:
 - Natural England
 - The Environment Agency
 - DEFRA
- Local environmental groups:
 - Wirral Environmental Network
 - Wirral Wildlife
 - RSPB
 - Dee Estuary Conservation Group
 - Transition Town
 - Friends of the Earth
- Alan Jemmett, Chair of MEAS and author of the original report.
- It will also require site visits and desk work for background research.