

# CABINET

Report subject	<b>Revised BCP Seafront Strategy</b>
Meeting date	17 July 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The BCP seafront is highly valued by residents and visitors and provides a diverse range of internationally important natural habitats, geology and archaeology. It also sits at the heart of our local tourism industry and generates significant revenue to the Council, helping to fund wider services for the community.</p> <p>A review of the Seafront Strategy has been undertaken to assess progress to date and refresh priorities in light of significant organisational changes, new pressures and opportunities.</p> <p>This report sets out a revised BCP Seafront Strategy, updating the vision, key objectives, investment criteria and delivery priorities. It builds on the original strategy adopted in April 2022, by reflecting new priorities such as the removal of barriers to community access, wellbeing, and delivering environmental net gains across biodiversity and carbon reduction. It also strengthens the focus on working with commercial operators to enable regeneration and secure external investment in infrastructure.</p> <p>The Strategy provides a framework for investment over the next 20 years, along with priorities for the short to medium term.</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Approves the BCP Seafront Strategy 2024.</b></li> <li><b>Delegates authority to the Chief Operations Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Connected Communities, to identify specific events zones within the Seafront Strategy character areas (see 4.3)</b></li> </ol>
Reason for recommendations	<p><b>Supports the Corporate Plan priorities for:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our green spaces flourish and support the wellbeing of both people and nature</li> <li>Climate change is tackled through sustainable policies and practice</li> <li>Our communities have pride in our streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces</li> <li>People and places are connected by sustainable and modern infrastructure</li> <li>Working together, everyone feels safe and secure</li> <li>Our inclusive, vibrant and sustainable economy supports our communities to thrive</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revitalised high streets and regenerated key sites create new opportunities</li> <li>• Employment is available for everyone and helps create value in our communities</li> <li>• Local communities shape the services that matter to them</li> <li>• High quality of life for all, where people can be active, healthy and independent</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a clear vision to guide attracting external investment in infrastructure, public spaces, health and well-being, the environment, and places to eat, drink and stay within the context of the Council's limited scope for direct investment</li> <li>• Provides a projects prioritisation framework to support investment to grow and diversify the offer and protect and increase revenue streams</li> <li>• Provides a guide to attract commercial leisure investment</li> <li>• Provides a strategic context for seafront development to support future planning applications</li> </ul>
Portfolio Holder(s):	<p>Cllr Millie Earl, Portfolio Holder for Connected Communities</p> <p>Cllr Mike Cox, Portfolio Holder for Finance</p>
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton, Chief Operating Officer
Report Author	Seafront Service
Wards	Not applicable
Classification	For Adoption

## 1. Background

- 1.1 BCP Council is responsible for managing the 15 miles of seafront and 26 miles of harbour edge from Hamworthy to Highcliffe as well as Christchurch Harbour itself. This includes a wide range of infrastructure and public facilities ranging from seawalls, cliffs, beaches, piers, promenades and the leisure attractions and facilities situated upon it. Many of these facilities, such as some beach huts, public toilets, piers and pontoons, kiosks, beach lodges, golf attractions, land trains and cliff lifts are currently operated directly by the Council.
- 1.2 Other sites, including the majority of cafes, restaurants, community facilities and attractions on Bournemouth Pier and the Oceanarium, are operated by the private sector under various forms of lease agreement with the Council. Some sites are also freehold owned and operated by external organisations. The majority of the 3700+ beach huts are also privately owned on sites leased by the Council. The seafront attracts a footfall of over 10m people a year from residents and visitors and is critical to under-pinning and sustaining over 12,000 jobs within the local economy.
- 1.3 BCP Council has a legal responsibility to produce a balanced budget and seeks to prioritise protecting the most vulnerable in the community. Facing unprecedented financial challenges driven inflation and rising demand for services, the Council has produced a new Corporate Plan designed to enable and unlock opportunities for the community to invest and support non-statutory council activities, which includes the seafront. This update to the Seafront Strategy is designed to establish a framework to enable external investment and greater involvement by the community.

- 1.4 In April 2022 BCP Council adopted its first 'whole place' Seafront Strategy together with a 5-year plan to help guide investment in leisure infrastructure and attractions set out in the previous Cabinet Report from April 2022. The Seafront Strategy is designed as a flexible, 'living' document kept under regular review and able to respond to changing priorities whilst holding firmly to key, overarching principles. It also supports other key strategies and policies such as the [Green Infrastructure Strategy](#) and the coastal protection plans including [Poole Bay Beach Management Scheme](#).
- 1.5 The Seafront Strategy was developed from extensive consultation and engagement with over 4,000 members of the public, community, business groups and agencies, via online surveys, group workshops, face-to-face roadshow events and visitor surveys throughout 2021.
- 1.6 The ideas and feedback, alongside a review of existing plans and policies, has helped to identify the remarkable qualities and identity of each section of the seafront. It identifies how they contribute to a wider sense of 'place' and supports the local ecology and environment, delivering the community benefits and adding value to the local economy. This approach is expressed by the 18 'character areas', illustrated in Background Paper 1.
- 1.7 Whilst the strategy is primarily focused on the future of the leisure and visitor offer, it is also cross-cutting across a range of other services, strategies and plans. These are reflected and referenced throughout.

## **2. Revised Seafront Strategy Vision, Objectives, investment criteria and priority projects (2024 – 2027)**

- 2.1 A review of the Seafront Strategy has been undertaken to assess progress to date and refresh priorities in light of significant changes, new pressures and opportunities. A summary of key updates can be seen in 2.5 below.
- 2.2 Recent changes include:
  - a. BCP Council elections in May 2023 and the formation of a new administration and engagement with Members.
  - b. Major pressure on Local Authority budgets, reducing ability to invest in non-statutory services, necessitating a far greater reliance on securing external funding via external investors.
  - c. Revised Corporate Strategy, adopted February 2024.
  - d. Consultations on the new draft BCP Local Plan and adoption of new Local Neighborhood Plans.
  - e. Construction industry inflation, impacting on project affordability.
  - f. The rising cost of living impacting on local communities and visitors.
  - g. The results of the 2023 seafront visitor survey
  - h. Emerging local issues (seafront infrastructure, commercial, environmental and social)
  - i. Project delivery performance to-date and project governance
- 2.3 Arrangements linked to planning and licensing processes for operations across the BCP seafront area have recently been reviewed and work is ongoing to ensure greater clarity and transparency in relation to these elements connected to both internally and externally delivered developments.
- 2.4 Key challenges and opportunities identified during the review include:
  - Significant investment required to support cliff stabilisation.

- Planning review of seasonal commercial beach-based developments.
- Anticipated continued (and potentially expanded) requirements for commercial/community led events and festivals.
- Rising sea levels and aging coastal defence infrastructure requiring significant future investment.
- Newly introduced bio-diversity net gain planning contributions will shape future seafront leisure schemes and potentially provide a pipeline of investment to improve and grow coastal habitats.
- Identifying and working with partners to maximise environmental awareness and deliver a financially sustainable offer at the Durley Environmental Hub.
- Work with transport teams to improve public transport, cycling and walking access to and across the seafront through wayfinding.
- Embedding the Seafront Strategy into the new BCP Local Plan (currently under consultation). Working with communities to deliver neighbourhood plans impacting on the seafront.
- Complete delivery of Levelling Up Fund seafront infrastructure programme.
- Enabling communities to grow and do more for themselves.
- Bring forward market led opportunities to accelerate investment across key seafront development sites.
- Ensure a more balanced delivery focus across the three towns, necessitating further focus toward opportunities along Christchurch and Poole seafront areas.
- An emphasis on improving accessibility to the beach and prioritising the needs of young people and improving access for deprived local communities.
- Secure greater collaborative partnership working with landowners to accelerate investment proposals coming forward.
- Identify options for more innovative, commercial led investments along the promenade between Bournemouth and Boscombe Piers.
- Review promotion of the seafront to signpost residents and visitors to the best beaches for particular experiences, aligned to the Seafront Strategy Character Areas.

## 2.5 Key summary of updates to Seafront Strategy 2024:

Adopted Vision Statement 2022	Revised Vision Statement 2024
Establish a World Class Seafront, prioritising the protection of our natural environment, responding to climate emergency and supporting the distinctive identities of our coastline, whilst promoting sensitive inward investment, employment, community use, wellbeing, inclusivity and sustainable tourism.	Enhance our Seafront, prioritising the protection of our natural environment, responding to climate emergency and supporting the distinctive identities of our coastline, whilst enabling sensitive inward investment, employment, community use, wellbeing, and improving access, inclusivity and sustainable tourism to support sustainable, safe and healthy communities.

Strategy Objectives 2022	Revised or new objectives 2024
Conserve and protect biodiversity across the natural coastal environment	Work with partners to identify and deliver a net gain in biodiversity across the natural coastal environment
Achieve carbon neutrality for all Council seafront operations by 2030 and work with partners to ensure all seafront activities become carbon neutral before 2050, in line with the Council's Climate Emergency commitments	Achieve carbon neutrality for all Council seafront operations by 2030 and work with partners to ensure all seafront activities become carbon neutral before 2045, in line with the Council's Climate Emergency commitments
Maintain and enhance the distinctive look, feel and identity of each of the character areas along the seafront.	Maintain and enhance the distinctive identity of the seafront character areas, supporting community pride in our public spaces
Deliver sustainable investment in community-based facilities and infrastructure to support access for all and well-being	Unlock potential to encourage external investment in new leisure attractions to manage growth and year-round footfall in sustainable areas of the seafront
Unlock potential for new leisure attractions to manage growth and year-round footfall in sustainable areas of the seafront	
Maximise income to support Council services benefiting the local community	Maintain income to support Council services enabling local communities to shape the services that matter to them and look for new opportunities for income generation that respect the natural environment and enhance its beauty
Celebrate and encourage increasing diversity of our seafront audience through investment in culture, events, heritage and education	Encourage active, healthy and independent lives by removing barriers for all our communities to access the seafront with a particular focus on young people and those with disabilities. We will also work to enable sports and wellbeing activities through community partnerships

## 2.6 Key criteria informing investment decisions:

Investment Decision Criteria (2022)	Revised Investment Decision Criteria (2024)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protection of the natural coastline and biodiversity</li><li>• Leadership in the environmental challenge</li><li>• Movement towards 'active lives' and inclusivity</li><li>• Boost for creativity, enterprise and new investment</li><li>• Deliverable within financial, economic, political, social factors</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Delivers against Corporate Plan priorities across People &amp; Communities, Place &amp; Environment, Open, transparent &amp; accountable Council</li><li>• Aligns to the vision, character areas and objectives of the Seafront Strategy</li><li>• Can be delivered by partners or otherwise funded from external grants</li><li>• Maintains or unlocks new income generation in support of a balanced Council budget</li></ul>

## 2.7 Revised investment priorities

Subject to adoption of the Seafront Strategy, a detailed implementation plan will be developed to schedule the following priorities against identified resources and opportunities:

Investment Priorities (2022)	Investment Priorities (from 2024)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental Innovation Hub, Durley Chine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilise the site to maximise environmental awareness and deliver a financially sustainable offer via educational, cultural, and commercial partnerships.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bournemouth International Centre</li> <li>Poole Quay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with partners to deliver improved coastal connectivity' community/leisure and cultural amenities along the Seafront.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Southbourne redevelopment (Former Bistro on the Beach)</li> <li>Sandbanks Pavilion</li> <li>Beach House Café, Mudeford Sandspit</li> <li>Canford Cliffs Pavilion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enable external investment, engaging with local residents &amp; visitors, and the potential operator market, to deliver long-term high-quality facilities at key locations across the seafront.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enabling external partners to re-invest in current leisure sites inc: Happyland, Sandbanks &amp; Branksome cafés plus kiosks, Westbeach restaurant, Harry Ramsdens, Hot Rocks, Bournemouth Lifeguards (Joseph Steps)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beach based seasonal food, beverage and leisure developments, between Bournemouth West Cliff and Boscombe Pier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enable diverse and vibrant seasonal sports, leisure and food &amp; beverage offers that sympathetically enhance the public amenity and open space, with a particular focus between West Cliff and Boscombe Pier.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coast protection beach management, flood defence and salt marsh restoration works</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support coastal protection investment and management plans, preparing for long term adaptation in response to climate change</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Festival Coast Live! &amp; major event programming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with community and commercial groups to enable sustainable investment and delivery of major events and festivals on the coast at Bournemouth, Sandbanks, Poole Quay and Christchurch Quay</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review potential access improvements around, Highcliffe Beaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and deliver access improvements around Highcliffe Beach and surrounding coastal areas.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cliff Management Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and secure funding to invest in a programme of cliff maintenance</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult with community to identify further opportunities to improve physical access to shoreline for people with a disability</li> <li>• Work with youth groups to develop proposals to introduce new play facilities across the seafront and identify sustainable funding</li> <li>• Work with community groups, regional funders and commercial operators to increase access to participation in health, sport and wellbeing based activities</li> <li>• Work with Wessex Water, landowners and communities to improve water quality within our harbours and across the seafront</li> <li>• Explore development of a branded Coastal Nature Park to link cliff top green spaces with enhanced wayfinding, interpretation and access between Poole and Christchurch</li> <li>• Deliver the externally funded Levelling Up seafront infrastructure programme to secure the long-term future for Bournemouth Pier, East Cliff, commercial investment, Hamworthy promenade, Holes Bay access to Upton Country Park and public realm promenade safety and access improvements and investment in public toilets</li> <li>• Deliver signage and wayfinding improvements to encourage greater access and discovery of our varied coastline.</li> <li>• Secure additional storage capacity along the seafront to support seafront commercial operations and community group needs as site development opportunities arise.</li> <li>• Invest in existing council income generating services and/or review options to externalise management to maximise surplus in support of critical statutory services.</li> <li>• Keep seafront byelaws and operational management plans under review and implement RNLI safety audit to improve visitor safety, sea safety, access and inclusivity.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify options for Hengistbury Head Outdoor Education Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to work with community to secure a future for the Outdoor Education site at Hengistbury Head</li> </ul>



### **3. Summary of financial implications**

- 3.1 The criteria informing future investment decisions is presented in 2.6 (above) and assumes external funding via commercial, community or grant sources. Where investment priorities are identified, a full review of ongoing impact to the Council's revenue budgets will be undertaken as part of the project business case.
- 3.2 On-going investment in existing infrastructure will be required to secure current revenue streams particularly where those assets are approaching life-expiry. Replacement of tired facilities will also present opportunities to reduce expenditure via more efficient building design and reductions in energy usage and maintenance burden.

### **4. Summary of legal and planning implications**

- 4.1 The revised BCP Seafront Strategy provides a strategic steer for future investment decisions. It updates and replaces the BCP Seafront Strategy adopted in 2022. It will be used to inform and support new proposals and planning assessments in light of market viability and evolving visitor demands during the life of the strategy and is embedded into the draft BCP Local Plan, currently undergoing consultation.
- 4.2 In January 2024, the Council's Corporate Strategy was agreed with the commitment that "We are an open, transparent and accountable Council, putting our people at the heart of our services". To reflect this the new administration have requested that Planning Committee consider all applications where the council is an applicant or the landowner. It is possible that there would be exemptions related to this, the detail of which is still to be worked through by the constitution working group but an indicative list of what may be considered as exempt could include, prior approvals, certificates of lawfulness, advert consents, tree applications and non-material amendments.
- 4.3 The Commercial Operations Directorate is undertaking a review of previous approaches to planning requirements and make improvements where required. This includes identifying events zones within the Seafront Strategy character areas (see Background Paper 1). This will focus primarily on the larger character areas working closely with Events Team and the Planning Department.
- 4.4 Individual title, lease arrangements, planning approvals and covenants will need to be assessed to determine feasibility as specific projects are brought forward. Resources to undertake searches and provide guidance will need to be built into project feasibility studies.

### **5. Summary of human resources implications**

- 5.1 Following recent changes as part of the Council's transformation programme, delivery of future investments may require additional project management resources. Implications will be costed and set out within individual work programmes and business cases as they are brought forward for consideration. Delivery at pace and scale will also require additional support services from legal, estates, procurement, communications, and project management teams.

### **6. Summary of equality implications**

- 6.1 Most impacts arising from the strategy for protected characteristic groups centre around improvements to access, movement and safety whilst at the seafront. As such, the strategy will have a number of positive outcomes for a wider variety of protected groups, both young and old.
- 6.2 Improving the seafront environment to enable access for all to the beach and promenade will require a focused project to consider mobility friendly facilities, changing spaces, toilets and on-beach accessways, whilst also exploring potential external grant funding for such schemes.

- 6.3 A programme of investment in public toilets and changing facilities is proposed in the seafront strategy. Where development takes place, investment in individual cubicle unisex facilities opening directly out on to the promenades will be encouraged to benefit the widest range of protected characteristic groups as well as ensuring safe spaces for all.
- 6.4 The Strategy aims to encourage investment in the range and quality of the food and drink offer at all price-points, appealing to the widest range of social economic groups, to include provision of a wider range of high-quality seasonal catering outlets between the piers.
- 6.5 Further work will be required to understand social barriers to access to the seafront, particularly by residents who rarely visit or enjoy the facilities on their doorstep. Previous consultations have identified barriers to access to the seafront for some socio-economic groups due to affordability and frequency of public transport, limited leisure time or awareness of benefits rather than a lack of facilities or 'things to do'. As such, collaborative work remains ongoing particularly across transport strategy and education.
- 6.6 The completed Equalities Impact Assessment can be found in Background Paper 2.

## **7. Summary of sustainability impact**

- 7.1 Overall, the Seafront Strategy sets out a wide range of positive contributions to sustainability.
- 7.2 Positive impacts include:
  - a. Proposals to introduce new renewable energy generation projects.
  - b. Reduced carbon emissions and maintenance from highly energy efficient new facilities and infrastructure, including provision of charging points.
  - c. Improvements to waste and sand management.
  - d. Climate adaptive and demountable new facilities.
  - e. Improvements to sustainable transport and access across the seafront including improved cycle storage.
  - f. Improvements to the natural landscape and habitats.
  - g. Promotion of new community facilities, volunteering and education initiatives.
  - h. Investments promoting health and wellbeing ranging from beach sports and water sports, through to yoga, walking trails, interpretation and improved access and seating.

## **8. Summary of public health implications**

- 8.1 A key aim and objective for the strategy is to deliver sustainable investment in community-based facilities and infrastructure to support access for all and well-being.
- 8.2 Support for development of community facilities and the encouragement of walking, cycling, beach and water sports through concessions, community spaces and interpretation trails will have a positive impact on wellness and mental health for residents and visitors.
- 8.3 Community group access will also include ongoing support for and development of charity/ community run beach hut facilities which offer opportunities for further engagement and work with armed forces groups as well as adult and children's services to improve access to leisure at the seafront.

## 9. Summary of risk assessment

<b>Risks</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Council transformation and restructuring could impact capacity to directly facilitate and attract investment or manage the delivery of projects	<b>Medium</b>	An implementation plan to be developed once the strategy is adopted, matching capacity to deliver against available resource.
Stakeholder support for the strategy	<b>High</b>	Ongoing member liaison and review to inform priorities and track progress. Individual projects will be subject to further engagement exercises as they come forward.
Programme delivery: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• uncertainty around supply / construction inflation</li> <li>• securing consents and permissions</li> <li>• supply/demand for proposed new services and facilities.</li> <li>• Environmental/climate change, cliff fall, erosion, beach loss.</li> </ul>	<b>High</b>	The Strategy takes a flexible approach with investments being subject to individual business cases, that take account of evolving risks and impacts at that time.
Deliverability of investment within context of rising costs, viability and market demand	<b>Medium / High</b>	Strategy takes a flexible approach to market led investment plans
Failure to deliver long term regeneration across key locations, resulting in derelict sites or lower quality short term 'meanwhile' uses	<b>High</b>	Implementation plans to set out short, medium, and long-term strategy, securing appropriate investment that does not limit options through the development cycle for each site.  The strategy recognises that securing longer term investment takes time and meanwhile use options can deliver site betterment and support viability to attract investment in major schemes
Capital funded investment in new or improved leisure attractions and infrastructure is not accompanied by on-going revenue budgets to maintain new facilities	<b>Medium / High</b>	All investment proposals / business cases will require identification of resources and approach to maintain infrastructure throughout its lifecycle

### Appendices:

- 1 Draft BCP Seafront Strategy 2024

### Background papers:

- 1 BCP Seafront Strategy Character Areas – Map & Illustration
- 2 Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) Panel Outcome Report (April 2024)