

The Ness Working Group – 17 August 2023

Present: Cllrs Wendy Brooks, Andy Pearce, Bernie Rappensberger and Elise Youngman

In Attendance: Lauren Elliott (Project and Committee Clerk) and Taylor Williams (Committee Clerk)

1. The Coastal Garden

Two landscape designers had been contacted and whilst one had not provided a quote as they needed to know the scale of the project and review the site, the other confirmed costs would start from £1,200 (depending on the size of the area) with an initial consultation fee of £75.

An initial site visit with each designer would be ideal where they would be notified of the contamination of the site.

Cllr Brooks suggested the designers be provided with Suffolk Wildlife Trust's report, noting their advice to not interfere with the natural habitat should be followed. Cllr Pearce agreed they should have visibility of the contamination report and the colour-coded map that displays the restrictions of planting.

It was thought that the ramp to the sea wall had rare invertebrate that required constant turnover of soil, therefore the Project and Committee Clerk would seek advice from Cathy Smith at Suffolk Wildlife Trust regarding planting around the ramp as it was thought their report had recommended no meddling with either side of the ramp.

2. Herring Lassies sculpture

Cllr Brooks suggested local sculpture artists be sought for the work and have this sculpture be part of the plans for the drying racks, publicised with invitations to the local people for ideas.

Cllr Pearce agreed to link the statue with the drying racks with a heritage plan to cover both (such as information panels mounted on the fencing surrounding the drying racks), however there needed to be distinguishment between the Herring Lassies and the Drying Racks which pertain to the beach community and local women who cleaned the nets.

Cllr Pearce suggested input be requested from the Heritage Focus Group, including John Standard and David Butcher, for the heritage aspects of the project as an informal consultee input to be considered by the Working Group before recommendations are made.

Officers would compile a proposal for the heritage plan which would also demonstrate how the Herring Lassies would be distinguished from the Drying Racks.

Officers would need to ascertain how deep foundations go for sculptures as there may be limitations on where the sculpture can be located.

3. Drying Racks

The general consensus of the survey was maintenance and repair of the drying racks, with many suggestions to re-use the existing wood (depending on the state of the wood).

The scale of repair or replacement would be dependent on the costs, for which it should be noted that the current racks are replicas, and if the Town Council opted to reconstruct the drying racks then there would need to be an agreement on the number to be reconstructed.

It was suggested that officers seek input from David Butcher, John, and Ivan Bunn, with the consultation survey findings to be made available to them and to receive their recommendations on the course of action for the Working Group. It was also asked to query if they are aware of whether the original racks were sourced from available materials or if specific materials were obtained.

On the topic of restoration or replacement, Cllr Brooks suggested to keep half of the drying racks in the south area and approach the International Boat Training College to assess the wood and provide advice on the feasibility of maintaining or repairing the existing wood, whilst Cllr Rappensberger suggested to endeavour to keep as many of the drying racks as possible and restore them, with the others left to decay, particularly if there are issues with working on contaminated land.

Officers confirmed that workers would be notified of the contamination of the area where appropriate.

J P Chicks had completed an independent report surveying the area, which officers can make available to members of the Working Group (via the members-area of the website) so that they can review what recommendations came from J P Chicks and the Environmental Officer respectively.

The drying rack results paper is available on the public access area of the website and the Communications Officer would notify residents that the survey results are being considered and taken into account for planning and next steps with this newly created Working Group. Cllr Brooks suggested the Working Group conduct a site visit to the Heritage Workshop Centre to meet the heritage focus group and view the Beach Village model to see if it includes the drying racks.

4. Sea Wall

Cllr Brooks had spoken with an artist and practitioner and had been informed of different techniques to embed the mural on the sea wall.

Discussions were held on the theming of the wall, to which Cllr Brooks suggested it focus on celebrating the wildlife, which would then connect with the proposal for telescopes to be installed in the area to celebrate sea life.

It was agreed to seek public participation with the project, possibly with a public announcement to be made and for the theme to be left open for public interpretation and have it as a competition rather than a direct commission. It was further suggested to involve the local people in the procurement with a judges panel.

The method of application, such as painting or transfer, to the sea wall would be decided after the competition has finished, and the final design has been chosen.

It was agreed to progress the competition and set a budget once designs have been received.

Cllr Brooks suggested a telescope be installed on the sea wall by Ness Point, with some accompanying seating to also be installed. The Working Group were in agreement to install a telescope and officers were asked to examine the possibilities for telescopes and funding opportunities.

This item could be considered part of a development programme for Ness Park in terms of the budget allocation, therefore a budget and plan would need to be considered before funding options are explored.

It was confirmed that whilst small stretches of the sea wall were owned by the Town Council, the installation of benches or a telescope would not result in the Town Council taking on responsibility of coastal defence.

5. Plans for the next meetings (dates, which topics to be discussed at which meeting)

The next meeting was set for the beginning of October so officers have time to progress the requests.

An overall plan for the area would be required with timeframes for each element, noting that some aspects may develop faster whilst others have contingency plans due to requirements such as risk assessments.

It was requested to have a placeholder item on the Five Year Plan or The Ness Park play area where some equipment may be approaching end of life and the need to monitor and consider when it should be replenished, and if so whether like-for-like or alternative options.