

Statement From the Chairman

Proposed Laxey Sea Defences

On the evening of the 5th of December, the Board of the Commissioners took the decision to support the Department of Infrastructure in their plans to build new sea defences around Laxey Harbour and Laxey Promenade.

This is in their role as a political entity and, in due course, a submission will be forwarded to the Planning Authority indicating the Board's support for the sea defence scheme.

In addition, the Commissioners have also been asked to report directly to the Department of Infrastructure on the level of public support for the proposals. This will be separate from the submission made to the Planning Authority. The Department has made a commitment that they will not progress any planning approval if public opinion is against the scheme.

In terms of the submission to be made by the Board to the Planning Authority, the Commissioners have taken into account a wide range of aspects. Most importantly they have noted that the majority of written comment submitted by the public has indicated opposition to the proposal. All of these comments have been considered and used to inform their considerations.

So why did the Board support the proposals?

- There is something of a misconception that the proposed wall is to be 1.2 metres (four foot) high. This is incorrect. The original proposal for a 1.2 metre wall was rejected by the Commissioners in July 2018. The Department took this rejection into account and resubmitted plans for a much smaller wall that would be 650 mm high above current pavement level for 116 metres, with a 38 metre section of raised footway at the harbour end. This has now become the subject of planning application 18/01160/B. The current design will mean that the proposed wall will be generally 150mm – 200mm (6 inches to 8 inches) higher than the current wall.
- In terms of the Board's decision, it should be noted that the decision was not unanimous. Two resolutions were put to the Board, one for the wall around the harbour and one for the promenade defences. Both were carried by majority.
- As stated, Members have listened to the community and the strong message received was that the amenity value was extremely important. The disruption of views, reduction of parking facilities, access for the disabled, disruption for local businesses were all presented to us as concerns and have been very carefully considered in all of the Commissioners' deliberations.

- However, Members have also had to consider other factors. In particular, the scientific consensus is overwhelming in predicting increasing global temperatures and rising sea levels. These changes are likely to impact on coastal communities such as Laxey with increasing frequency and severity in the coming years. The most recent analysis presented directly to the Commissioners by a local expert using global and regional data is that sea levels will increase by 62cm within the next 50 years, with much of this rise occurring over the next 20 years. Generally, this kind of scenario is supported by the vast majority of global scientists.
- They have also considered empirical evidence. In October 2002 an event characterised as a '1 in 50 year occurrence' took place in Laxey which affected the Promenade, harbour and properties severely. This '1 in 50 Year occurrence' was repeated in January 2014 and this was followed by another '1 in 50 year' episode a few weeks later.
- The decision of the Commission to support the sea and harbour wall proposal has been taken in the light of the increasing frequency of these events in the current period. It has also been taken as a measure to mitigate against overtopping for a much longer period, for perhaps 20, 30, 50 years into the future (In addition it should be noted that the design gives the opportunity for the wall to be extended vertically should there be a necessity to provide further protection for the community in the future).
- In these circumstances the consensus was that to oppose the latest proposals submitted by the Department would not be a responsible course of action.
- Following consultation the Department has already agreed to changes to the proposals. Some of the concerns of residents were presented to the Department of Infrastructure at the public meeting held on the 19th of November, and subsequently by the Commissioners in meetings with the DoI. As a consequence, the Department have indicated that they would be content to abide by conditions attached to any planning approval which insist:
 1. That disabled access is provided at both ends of the proposed raised walkway
 2. That addresses the concerns that parking spaces may be lost
 3. And ensures that a beach management strategy is imposed going forward.
- As stated above, the effective height of the new wall will be approximately 650mm (2 foot, 2 inches or 'mid-thigh' height) along its entirety. The section of the pavement which will be raised tapers down for 38m from the Harbour end, leaving the most significant section (100 metres +) of the wall built to 650 mm high above the current pavement level.
- Evidence seen by the Commissioners demonstrates that there are two particularly effective methods to reduce overtopping these are a wall with a 'wave return' profile and the deployment of rock armour: these methods are both utilised as part of the proposed scheme for the sea defence wall at Laxey Promenade.

- In the light of these details the consensus amongst the Board was that the proposals offered an acceptable balance between the need to maintain the amenity value of the Promenade with the responsibility to protect the property of residents and businesses in the vicinity.

The Commissioners have noted that the majority of comment submitted by the public is opposed to the proposal, the reasons for and level of this opposition will be reported to the DoI as requested by the Department.

It is anticipated that this report to the Department of Infrastructure will be submitted in the next seven days.

If any further clarification or information is required please do not hesitate to contact the Commissioners Officers at 35 New Road, Laxey, on email garff@manx.net, or by telephoning 861241.

Nigel Dobson

Chairman, Garff Commissioners
6th December 2018