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Judith Plumley  
Head of Community and Leisure  
Christchurch Borough Council  
Civic Offices  
Bridge Street  
Christchurch  
BH23 1AZ

Dear Judith,

### **CHRISTCHURCH COASTAL STRATEGY - PROPOSAL**

I refer to the 'Public Report' on this matter presented to the Christchurch Borough Council (CBC) Community Committee on the 7<sup>th</sup> June.

I now present a response as part of the 'public engagement/consultation' process in respect of a Coastal Strategy, on behalf of the Friends of Highcliffe Beaches and Cliffs Interest Group (FOHBAC), who are also being encouraged to respond individually. Whilst it is noted that an 'event', to allow members of the public to give their views on a Coastal Strategy, to be held at Highcliffe Castle on 5<sup>th</sup> September it is felt important to place on record this response.

As the Interest Groups' focus is in respect of Highcliffe Beach and Highcliffe Castle Beach, the response below is in respect of these areas (that is the area covered by the Site of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI]) unless specifically qualified otherwise and has regard to the 'mapped' area as set out in the 'Christchurch Beaches and Hinterland Management Plan 2008 – 2018'.

To 'set the scene' it is appropriate to note that the 'Christchurch Times' newspaper, published on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, presented feedback from a random survey of public views in respect of Christchurch beaches. The overwhelming view was that the beaches are satisfactory 'just as they are. To quote two responses –

- *'I've been to a lot of different beaches around Europe and I feel what is on offer here is perfect. Everything is natural and it's so peaceful'.*
- *'I think the beaches are great as they are. I value having the sea defences in position. Some form of wheelchair access would be a good addition'.*

The lack of the Castle zig-zag path was a concern raised by a number of interviewees.

## **Highcliffe Beach and Highcliffe Castle Beach**

The summary, and firm view, is to leave the SSSI area as it is today, to protect it and enhance it. The differentiation of a natural environment and tranquil coastline from all other Christchurch beaches, and commercialised areas, is highly valued by visitors and residents alike as demonstrated by the objection to the CBC/Channel 4/Plum Pictures Beach Retreats project in 2016.

The existing 'Christchurch Beaches and Hinterland Management Plan 2008 – 2018' recognises the uniqueness of this section of coast and should be incorporated into any new strategy.

### Natural Environment

The flora and wildlife in this area must be protected. Over 120 different species of wild flowers have been recorded ('Highcliffe's Pot of Gold' by Joy Shellard, published by Natula Publications ISBN 9781897887707) and Adders, a species protected by statute, have been seen in the Spring.

We are aware that many student/school visits are made to the area on account of the fossil rich Barton Beds and Headon Beds and the contrasting coastal erosion to the Milford Cliffs in relation to the 'stabilised' Highcliffe Cliffs. A small section of Highcliffe Cliffs, subject to Natural England's approval, could be opened as a 'viewing point' to enable a clear view of the Barton strata.

### Leisure Use

The designated beach area is only suitable for summer swimming (lifeguard monitored, during certain periods), sun bathing and walking.

It is noted that the area between groynes H8 and H10 is reserved for water-sports, albeit wind and kite surfers and surfers invariably use the beach area beyond Chewton Bunny in Hampshire on account of the wave formation/beach condition.

The present arrangement should continue unaltered.

It is also noted that the windsurfing Club at Friars Cliff Beach enter the water below the 'Wave Wall', which falls within the SSSI area.

It is understood that the proposed Natural England's 'England Coastal Path' (LCH S010 to S013) will run along the beach/beach path between Friars Cliff Beach and Chewton Bunny and appropriate signage will be installed.

### Infrastructure

Please also see new heading 'Access' below.

We understand a 'Highcliffe Hub', to act as a visitor information point, is proposed replacing, or in addition to, one of the existing 'all weather shelters' on the cliff top path, in close proximity to the Cliffhanger restaurant/café. This project has funding from the Dorset Coastal Connections successful bid from the DCLG. FOHBAC would support this project, in principal, but require further details to understand what is proposed.

We are aware that CBC have undertaken feasibility studies to form a 'board-walk' between Friars Cliff Beach and the existing pathway at the bottom of the Highcliffe Castle zig-zag, thus enabling better access without crossing the beach shingle. FOHBAC

would only support this project if formed from 'crushed' stone with a top surface, as against any form of metal/concrete/timber structure, which will require a higher level of maintenance.

There is a need to improve the WC/shower facilities at the Cliffhanger, which we understand are under the management of the Cliffhanger restaurant/cafe operator.

We are aware that CBC have some initial thoughts about using the former SRDE (Signals Research and Development Establishment) site at Friars Cliff Beach for a possible structure to display the historical connection of this facility. FOHBAC would require 'firm' proposals to comment further.

No other new infrastructure is required in this area.

### Events

We are aware that windsurfing events take place at the Windsurfing Club, Friars Cliff Beach, and enter the water below the 'Wave Wall', which falls within the SSSI area. The management of overnight 'motorhomes' and camping, on CBC land, whilst events take place should be improved

No other events are appropriate for this area.

### Accommodation

This area is not appropriate for any 'accommodation', be it overnight Beach Retreats, Beach Huts, or any form of structure.

No further Beach Huts should be placed on the Friars Cliff Beach 'Wave Wall'.

There is an adequate provision of day/overnight Beach Huts at Hengistbury Head, Gundimore, Avon Beach and Friars Cliff Beach. It is clear that Beach Huts are underutilised and infrequently used by many Licence holders.

### Food and Drink

The Highcliffe Castle Kitchen concession holder (Aramark) are permitted to place an ice cream vending point/or similar on Highcliffe Castle Beach at the bottom of the Castle zig-zag path.

No other 'Food or Drink' outlets are appropriate for the area. Adequate catering outlets are provided at Mudiford Quay, Avon Beach, Friars Cliff Beach, Highcliffe Castle Kitchen and the 'Cliffhanger'.

### Coastal Protection

Measures to prevent coastal erosion of the coastal pathway (closest to the sea) through the area should be a high priority, particularly having regard to Natural England's 'England Coastal Path' (LCH S010 to S013) proposed route, as mentioned earlier.

### Safety

The 'Health and Safety' measures set out in the 'Christchurch Beaches and Hinterland Management Plan 2008 – 2018' (paragraph 1.11) are appropriate to 'carry forward' together with any new Local Authority regulations and other legal requirements.

The restriction placed on 'dogs on beaches' is particularly important.

### **Access**

This heading was not set out in the 'Public Report' to the Community committee.

Pedestrian and disabled access to the Beaches in this area are important and must be a 'key component' to the Coastal Strategy.

We have seen the loss of the 'Culmore Steps' off Wharnccliffe Road, formerly part of the national footpath network, and more recently the Highcliffe Castle zig-zag.

FOHBAC considers that the Highcliffe Castle 'on gradient' zig-zag path, whatever form it takes (following reconstruction), is important and essential for the enjoyment of visitors and residents and less able alike.

'On gradient' access should be available at three points; from Friars Cliff Beach, Highcliffe Castle zig-zag and the 'Cliffhanger'.

Stepped access points should be effectively maintained at all times.

I trust that the foregoing 'responses' will be incorporated into the new Christchurch Coastal Strategy.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Brooks MBA MRICS

On behalf of – Friends of Highcliffe Beaches and Cliffs Interest Group

Copies –

Cllr Sally Derham Wilkes - Chair Community Committee CBC

Cllr Colin Jamieson - Chair Scrutiny and Overview Committee CBC

FOHBAC Interest Group - Members

FOHBAC web site

Highcliffe Residents Association – Rob Austin

Rothsay Drive Residents Association – Bob Hutchings

Christchurch Residents Associations (various)

Highcliffe News (Steve White)

Nextdoor - web site

Highcliffe Residents Forum - web site

Bournemouth Echo - Katie Clark

New Milton Advertiser – Michelle Ray