



Title: **Livermead Sea Wall**

Wards Affected: **Cockington with Chelston**

To: **Overview & Scrutiny** On: **30th April 2013**

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1. Key points and Summary

- 1.1 The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board has requested a report on the background and implications of the recent breach of the sea wall at Livermead. This reports answers the 5 specific questions raised.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 On Easter Monday 1st April, a breach of the sea wall was reported to Torbay Council which led to a failure of the SWW sewerage rising main which required emergency repairs. The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Board has requested a response to the following 5 questions:

1. When did the local authority first become aware of the threat to this section of sea defences?
2. In light of the sewage pipe and gas main being under threat if this risk was realised, why were the necessary works not fast tracked?
3. Plant appears to have been on site for about six weeks with little progress made. Why did this happen?
4. At the crucial time when the works could have been taking place there was a three week negotiation between SWW and the Contractor. Could this have been avoided?
5. Torbay chose not to include the sewage spill in a press release issued on Tuesday [2 April], when the pumps were turned off on the previous night, making a spill inevitable. Why did Torbay abdicate its public health responsibilities to a private company?

3.0 Background

- 3.1 **Question 1:** When did the local authority first become aware of the threat to this section of sea defences?

The Structure has been in a condition of poor repair for many years as are a number of coastal structures within Torbay which need significant capital

investment. An initial request for funding from the Environment Agency was made over two years ago. The most recent recorded inspection was May 2012 when significant failures to the revetment to the front of the sea wall were identified. A report was presented to SCOPE on the 6th July 2012 to request funding to carry out works to the sea defences at Livermead. SCOPE supported the application and subsequently £350,000 funding was provided to allow the Council to progress the works, however, officer were instructed to apply to the Environment Agency for match funding. The proposed works were predominately aimed at repairing the revetment to the front of the sea wall. On approval of funding a prequalification questionnaire was issued to potential bidders in August 2012 and detailed design was commenced.

In the short term some intermediate repairs were carried out in October 2012. The instruction to the Contractor was to carry out all necessary pointing and sand bagging to help maintain the wall prior to a refurbishment scheme being implemented. The works were supervised by staff from Torbay Council's Engineers Service.

- 3.2 **Question 2:** In light of the sewage pipe and gas main being under threat if this risk was realised, why were the necessary works not fast tracked?

The tender was issued at the start of December 2012 and tenders returned on the 22nd January 2013. South West Highways were appointed on the 30th January 2013 with an initial commencement date identified as the 18th February 2013. The intention was to commence works as soon as possible in the hope that the majority of the works could be completed before Easter. As some intermediate works had been carried out in October it was not felt the wall was at an immediate risk of collapse. The effects of six weeks of easterly winds and the fact that the beach was at a very low level did accelerate deterioration.

- 3.3 **Question 3:** Plant appears to have been on site for about six weeks with little progress made. Why did this happen?

The proposed machinery that South West Highways intended to use included a large crane which would be situated on the highway above the sewage rising main. When South West Water were advised of the preferred contractor's method they expressed their concerns regarding the loading on the rising main and asked for extra protection to be provided. Through discussions a revised method statement was agreed between South West Water, Torbay Council and the Contractor on the 22nd March and works commenced on the 25th March.

- 3.4 **Question 4:** At the crucial time when the works could have been taking place there was a three week negotiation between SWW and the Contractor. Could this have been avoided?

The Contractor could have discussed their temporary works with South West Water in advance. However, South West Water may not have been prepared to discuss temporary works designs and individual method statements with each potential contractor. This could have led to the tender period being extended for the same three weeks.

- 3.5 **Question 5:** Torbay chose not to include the sewage spill in a press release issued on Tuesday [2 April], when the pumps were turned off on the previous night, making a spill inevitable. Why did Torbay abdicate its public health responsibilities to a private company?

The Council did not abdicate its public health responsibilities, as warning notices were placed on every bathing water beach within Torbay by Tuesday 2nd April 2013. However, it was agreed that South West Water would lead on communications relating to the operation of their infrastructure. South West Water also have facilities in place to publish this information which specific users such as surfers can access.

4. Summary of Incident Response

- 4.1 Outlined below is a summary of the response to the incident.

Saturday 30th March

A report was made to the Council of an issue in Livermead, however this was reported as a rocking paving slab. An inspector visited the site but did not identify any failures in the pavement and so no further action was taken.

Monday 1st April

A hole in the pavement was reported on Monday morning, an inspector visited the site and asked for Tor2 to attend to assist with opening of the footpath to investigate. Once the extent of the problem had been identified the road was closed for safety reasons and a Marine Contractor contacted and asked to assist. The Contractor mobilised quickly and worked through the night to attempt to “plug” the hole temporarily with over 30 1 tonne bags. It was agreed late Monday night to switch off the pumps at Ilsham for two reasons, the first being the safety of the men and the second being that any spill would be better to occur at Hope’s Nose rather than directly on the beach.

Tuesday 2nd April

Further attempts to plug the hole only reduced the rate of erosion and the main failed. Further erosion put the gas main at risk and so a large piling rig and steel sheet piles were sourced. By 9.30pm the first sheet pile was placed in the ground to prevent further erosion of the road.

Wednesday 3rd April

The sheet piles prevented further erosion and temporary shuttering was placed on the outside of the wall to allow concrete to be placed in the hole.

Thursday 4th April

Over 100 tonnes of concrete in total was placed to repair the hole and the area behind the wall.

Friday 5th April

South West Water contractors commenced work to repair the rising main and the pumping station at Ilsham was switched back on late Friday night and monitored over the weekend. Water quality tests carried out on the following Monday showed the water quality to be excellent.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Works were planned to repair the revetment to the front of the sea wall, however, the effects of almost six weeks of constant Easterly winds found a weakness in the sea wall. The problem was further exacerbated by the fact that the beach was at a very low level which is reflected by the fact that the local failure was at the base of the sea wall.
- 5.2 As the summary of response outlines officers from Torbay Council and local contractors worked day and night during the week to prevent failures of the highway and other utility apparatus. Water quality surveys have shown that the unplanned spill did not have any long term effects on water quality.

Sue Cheriton
Executive Head – Residents & Visitor Services

Appendices

None.

Documents available in members' rooms

None.

Background Papers:

The following documents/files were used to compile this report:

None.