

<b>Improving Beach Accessibility – in partnership with Mae Murray Foundation</b>	<b>13<sup>th</sup> June 2017</b>
<b>To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Decision</b>	

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)</b>	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and enhancing our environment and assets. Resilient, healthy and engaged communities.
Outcome	Giving citizens the maximum opportunity to enjoy our natural environments to help their physical, cognitive and emotional health.
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation Services Coast and Countryside Manager
Cost: (If applicable)	TBC – subject to outcome of funding applications

**The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Members for Council to work in partnership with Mae Murray Foundation to enhance beach access and opportunities for participation.**

### **Background**

The Mae Murray Foundation is a registered charity, set up and run by volunteers, established to allow people of all ages and abilities to take part in activities, experience the world and enjoy friendship together in an inclusive environment. The Foundation wishes to play an active part in helping local authorities understand the full range of need and improve participation, by offering both design input and partnership.

The Tourism and Recreation Service, through the Coast and Countryside Team, has previously engaged with the Mae Murray Foundation to undertake a review of Benone Strand and the facilities at The Ark as well as delivering a number of beach participation days which has enabled families and individuals to take part in water based beach activities.

The opportunity has arisen to formalise this relationship with a number of specific actions identified to deliver an improved and inclusive service that will enable visitors to enjoy a quality experience in terms of beach access and participation.

### **Proposal**

Mae Murray Foundation undertook a review of The Ark and environs in terms of accessibility and suitability for wheelchair users and other people with mobility issues. (Please see report attached at ANNEX A). This review has identified a number of measures that would further enhance The Ark and surrounding area to move towards meeting 'Changing Places' the ideal build standard, positing Benone Strand as an all-inclusive destination.

The recommendations from the report are as follows;

#### **The Ark – accessible shower area.**

- Provide mobile trolley – to double as a shower facility and changing bed.
- Add mobile supported shower chair.

- Installation of adult flip-down changing bed and overhead hoist – subject to space and suitability.

In order to facilitate these additional facilities, the Mae Murray Foundation is seeking funding to purchase a hoist, a changing bed, some mobi–mat (portable hard stand and pathway) and adaptive lifesaving equipment which would be gifted to Council to install in The Ark to move towards meeting Changing Places standards.

### **The Ark - exterior and approaches**

A number of additional measures have been identified to the exterior and approaches to The Ark which would assist with accessibility and maintaining a stress free environment, for all users and not just those with limited mobility, These include;

- Speed restrictions and traffic calming measures on approach road.
- Appropriate ramp access point leading to and from the public road.
- Clearway for safe sight lines.
- Installation of speed ramps (suitable for low floored vehicles).
- Regular maintenance schedule to clear sand from access points.
- Provision of radar locks at kissing gates on boardwalks.

Some of these points will require input and action from Transport NI. Council officers will be meeting on site with Transport NI to discuss these suggested measures.

### **Enabling participation on the beach**

During 2016 Mae Murray Foundation organised a number of pilot participation events at Benone Strand and the Peter Thompson Hall, Castlerock in 2016. Working with local activity providers and making use of the facilities at The Ark such events have enabled many families to enjoy an inclusive beach experience together.

In order to permit such events to happen some specialist beach equipment is required. Council already has a Hippocampe beach wheelchair which was funded by Loughs Agency. Subsequently Mae Murray Foundation has purchased additional beach wheel chairs, floating beach wheel chairs and a wheel chair surfboard. This equipment has been invaluable in providing an inclusive beach experience.

As a means of further developing Benone Strand as the flagship beach in Northern Ireland for all-ability access and participation, Mae Murray Foundation wishes to work in partnership with Council to;

1. Secure funding to provide additional beach wheelchairs, amphibious chairs, mobi-mat and other equipment to enable beach participation.
2. Develop appropriate risk assessment, maintenance schedules and operational procedures prepared by Mae Murray Foundation and verified by Council.
3. Provision of safe storage of this equipment at Benone Strand initially.(With potential to roll out to other beach sites)
4. Mae Murray Occupational Therapist volunteers carry out training in basic equipment operation eg. hoists, for council staff and carers/family members.
5. Develop booking system for use of equipment to ensure smooth operation and avoid disappointment, implemented and overseen by Mae Murray Foundation.
6. Develop rules, regulations and operating procedures for use of equipment.
7. Enhance facilities to achieve Changing Places standards including provision of hoist and adult changing table.

## **Recommendation**

Council avails of the opportunity to work further in partnership with Mae Murray Foundation to implement improved accessibility to beaches, facilities and opportunities for participation. This will initially focus on The Ark and Benone Strand with a view to extending the initiative to other sites where appropriate.

This will include the following elements:

1. Provision of safe storage of accessible equipment.
2. Development of appropriate procedures and risk assessments for the use of equipment.
3. Development of an appropriate booking system and code of conduct.
4. Undertaking appropriate staff training.
5. Subject to funding, achieve continuous improvement of facilities to enable a quality experience for all beach users.

# Beach Access & Participation Proposal

## Benone Beach

By kind invitation - Causeway Coast & Glens Council, November 2015 / updated  
2017

*Prepared by A.Crawford on behalf of the Mae Murray Foundation*



## ANNEX A

*(Reg. Charity no. NIC100842)*

### Contents

- 1.0 Who are we and how can we help?
- 2.0 Overview of Shower Block
- 3.0 Exterior
- 4.0 Collaboration Proposal
- 5.0 Summary of other considerations for council
- 6.0 Draft sample documentation A & B

## 1.0 Who are we and how can we help?

We, at the Mae Murray Foundation, are a registered charity, set up and run by volunteers and members who are experiencing, first-hand, the difficulties we aim to address. We have come together to create real change to our own quality of life, and that of others like us, by bringing practical and sustainable solutions to real life problems. Beach access and participation, and the lack there of is just one of those problems.

We have approximately 360,000 disabled people in Northern Ireland, with over 35,000 being wheelchair users. Too much focus is placed upon 'caring' rather than enabling disabled people to play a full and active part in society. Inclusion is not just about access, everyone needs to be able to 'take part.'

The Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) states *'Persons with disabilities should be able to participate on an equal basis with others in family life, health maintenance, education, public life, recreational, leisure and sporting activities'* - a right which, has not yet been fulfilled. Research tells us that social isolation increases our risk of mental illness and our prevalence here in Northern Ireland is estimated to be 20% higher than in England or Scotland. The social model of disability says *'Disability is understood to result from the interaction between individuals and their environment rather than residing in the individual.'*

We wish to play an active part in helping local councils understand the full range of need and improve participation, by offering both design input and partnership. All too often, huge expense and adaptation falls short of what our members actually require.

## 1.0 Overview – the shower building



Benone is a beautiful beach on the Causeway Coast, (with lifeguards in situ during peak season), which at its entrance benefits from a brand new building for public use. The block, which includes toilet and shower facilities, sits sympathetically in its surroundings. Space has been set aside for council staff to man the premises as required and provision has been made for a small shop, which has yet to be let. Suggested staff hours are 11am – 7pm July & August and potentially Easter, weather permitting.

The layout of the facilities is ideal for wheelchair users, with spacious turning areas and clean lines. Much thought has gone into the differing potential user groups and their varying needs. In addition to two standard sized toilet cubicles, there are two larger toilet cubicles both with grab bars, push flush toilets and taps, along with generous accessible sinks. Easy-clean hygienic materials have been used throughout.

There is a further accessible shower room - generously proportioned - which includes a toilet with simple flush lever, accessible sink, hand drier and emergency pull cord. Again easy-clean hygienic materials have been used throughout. An abundance of grab rails provide a variety of options for differing user needs. The flip down shower seat is a substantial size,

## ANNEX A

with an anti-slip moulded surface but will not suit those without trunk support. A range of motor functions have been considered with the installation of 'joystick' style shower controls. In a space of this size we would recommend working to 'Changing Places' standards, however the build is already completed and so we can look at adding on facilities and/or equipment.

Recommendations for the accessible shower area would be:

- Adding a 'mobile trolley' which will double as a shower facility and changing bed.
- Adding a mobile supported shower chair
- Installation of an adult flip-down changing bed and overhead hoist facility – subject to space and suitability
- Daily checks on the toilet seat, as this type of seat can be prone to detaching



*The 'Changing Places' Consortium launched its campaign in 2006 and is rapidly becoming widely recognised as the 'ideal new build standard.' There is currently no legislative requirement to build to this standard, but campaigners are seeking otherwise. It would certainly be a welcome addition and key to positioning Benone as an 'all inclusive' destination.*

If the existing ceiling doesn't have the required reinforcement necessary for a ceiling hoist, a portable hoist - available from the staff area – would be the best alternative. A list of the full 'Changing Places' criteria and how to become an approved facility under their scheme - along with funding advice - can be found at: [www.changing-places.org](http://www.changing-places.org)



## ANNEX A

The staffed area, which also has storage space, is glass fronted and faces the beach. The base of the door frame, through necessity due to the threat of water ingress, protrudes slightly. This is a minor obstacle which could be overcome by using a temporary ramp, such as the one shown below – it would also protect the door frame.



There is sufficient space for beach participation equipment within this building and council already store the first Mae Murray Foundation beach chair here.

The area would benefit from lockers at appropriate heights.

## 2.0 Exterior

The area immediately surrounding the 'new build' is still a work in progress.

An outdoor tap is in situ and the availability of a hose adaption from the staff area may be a useful idea so that wheelchairs can be used down if required.

A further safety precaution would be to place bollards at the top of the steps.

Provision for appropriately sized 'wheelchair access vehicles' parking is understood to be in hand and the need for safety measures at the base of the walkway, where the new ramp meets the road, is already recognised.

We understand that the road area does not come under council remit but would urge the following is brought to the attention of Transport NI if not already highlighted. The successful completion of this area could be dependent upon consideration of the following points:

- Speed restrictions and traffic calming measures
- Appropriate level crossing between the ramp access point and the far footpath
- Clearway for safe sight lines
- Level access joining any footpaths, roads and kerbs must be completely flush
- Installation of speed ramps (suitable for low floored vehicles)

**Maintaining as stress-free a zone as possible in this general area is key**

Again, it is already recognised that these areas not only require sufficient disabled parking and a clearway drop-off point, but that keeping 'sand' at bay will be a challenge. Sand maintenance should therefore be rigorous.



The pathway which leads from the 'new build' to the visitor centre and caravan park is currently unobstructed but it's understood that this route faces the same challenges as elsewhere, *i.e.* allowing clear passage for wheelchairs whilst keeping the pedestrian area free from abuse by other wheeled or motorised equipment.

It would be useful if a province-wide focus group of interested parties could be set up to resolve this issue. The Mae Murray Foundation would be keen to assist in this respect.

There are some pathway and kerb issues in the Visitor Centre area which are not addressed in this report, but we would be happy to advise.

## 3.0 Collaboration Proposal

### Beach Participation



Under current legislation, council has a statutory responsibility to provide actual beach access for people of all abilities, but improving access alone is not sufficient to allow full participation for people who are currently excluded. The issues which need to be addressed are a mixture of access issues and participation difficulties. To enable people of all abilities to 'take part' then the two must be tackled hand in hand. The Mae Murray Foundation would like to assist with the provision of beach equipment in the form of more beach chairs so that friends can enjoy games together, paediatric chair for smaller children, wheelchair accessible sand pits, hoist, shower trolley and mobi-matting which would enable a removable platform base to be created

We know from our engagement with Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council that 'beach access and participation' is important to council. We understand that work is currently underway to investigate the feasibility of designing a wheelchair appropriate walkway between the Ark shower block and the beach; in conjunction with wheelchair parking (suitable for rear ramp vehicles) and a wheelchair vehicle drop off point. The challenge of retaining sand so that the facilities are suitable for use over the longer term is part of this work.

We worked well with council during our pilots of 2016 and really valued the support and assistance. We are therefore keen as you know, to develop Benone beach as the flagship beach in Northern Ireland for all-ability access and participation.

Equipment would require safe storage onsite and systems put in place to manage its use. Risk assessment, maintenance schedules and operational procedures could all be handled by Mae Murray Foundation and we attach some sample draft

## ANNEX A

documentation as a starting point for discussions on these matters. Mae Murray Occupational Therapist volunteers can carry out training in basic equipment operation eg hoists, for council staff, but members themselves, along with their care/family member would be responsible for providing personal slings and executing the actual transfer.

In addition to disabled people and their families booking to use this equipment on an individual basis we are keen to create an activity days whereby we arrange specific family days, bring along games and volunteers, to encourage children and young people onto the beach to 'take part.'

A day out at the beach is something which most families can take for granted, yet we have members who in their teenage and adult years have never yet been to the beach. No child should be denied the opportunity to enjoy our beautiful beach environments as it can so easily be addressed with careful planning.

## 4.0 Summary of considerations for council

The provision of 'participation' equipment by the Mae Murray Foundation and the storage and proposed handling by the council raises some practical issues for consideration and agreement:

- Sustainability & Maintenance
  - If these items are treated with care and respect then we expect a lifespan of a minimum of ten years. Beach chairs will need to be washed down after use and all strappings and fixings should be checked before each use for wear and tear. Mobi-mat will need to be deployed and maintained in accordance with instructions. Regular servicing will be required, particularly with regard to the hoist, by a qualified engineer. Records need to be kept accordingly. Mae Murray Foundation can implement and oversee all of these processes whilst financing the upkeep as the equipment will remain under our ownership.
- Enablement of safe and dignified transfers – see sample faqs and sample T&C's
  - Storage of a portable hoist
  - User responsibility for provision of hoist sling and actual transfer
  - Implementation of staff training and processes, overseen by Mae Murray Foundation (in terms of ensuring staff avoid all lifting/handling and safeguarding issues)
- Public Liability Insurance
  - Appropriate risk assessments, written by Mae Murray Foundation and verified by council
  - Both parties have own liability insurance
- Excess demand
  - A booking system to ensure smooth operation and avoid disappointment, implemented and overseen by Mae Murray Foundation
- Clarity
  - Rules, regulations and pictures of equipment and facilities easily available online so expectations are clear

***We attach sample draft documents which would be a starting point for discussion.***

## 5.0 Draft sample documentation

### SAMPLE A

#### Frequently Asked Questions

##### **Who can use one of the Beach Wheelchairs?**

Equipment can be used by anyone in Northern Ireland who is a member of the Mae Murray Foundation and is in need of equipment to assist with mobility. Membership is free of charge and is open to anyone over the age of 18; either with mobility difficulties, or has a family member under the age of 18 with mobility difficulties. Membership forms can be completed in advance of arriving or upon arriving at the beach. Please bear in mind you may need assistance to propel a beach wheelchair and must bring your own help as we cannot provide this.

##### **Do you have a hoist?**

We have a portable hoist onsite to assist with transfers where this is needed, but it is essential that you bring your own sling. Staff have training in the operation of the hoist, but are not permitted to attach your sling, nor are they permitted to execute the actual transfer or assist with any lifting or handling – so please don't ask. It remains the member's responsibility to provide the sling, ensure that it is correctly attached to the spreader bar, is appropriate for use and that accompanying care/family member is competent to operate. Written consent/disclaimer will be required before use.

##### **Where are the Beach Wheelchairs located?**

The beach wheelchairs may be collected from the council storage facility, located at the beach.

##### **Where can I use the beach wheelchair?**

Our wheelchairs may be used on \_\_\_\_\_ beach and to/from the toilet block. It is not permitted to leave the boundary.

##### **How much does it cost?**

We want beaches to be accessible so do not make a charge for loan of the beach wheelchairs. The scheme is maintained by Mae Murray Foundation, a non-profit organisation, registered with the Charities Commission N.I. However, donations are very welcome to enable us to maintain, improve and extend our services.

##### **When can I use the chair?**

The scheme operates a staggered timetable all the year round, which can be found on our website at [www.maemurrayfoundation.org](http://www.maemurrayfoundation.org) and is subject to change. Chairs must be pre-booked to avoid disappointment. Please contact Mae Murray Foundation for more information.

## ANNEX A

### **Will help be available?**

Beach staff will be able to demonstrate the features of all our equipment but are not able to assist in transfers and cannot take you onto the beach. The user must have an adult helper to assist the transfer and push the wheelchair. Your helper must be fit enough to push the wheelchair across the sand and up and down the access point. Flat footwear is recommended.

Your own wheelchair or walking aids should be stored in your car. If you prefer to store your chair in the council storage area you should note that the council will aim to store safely, but cannot be responsible for any damage occurring whilst on council property.

### **What if the weather turns bad?**

We would like to say it is always sunny in Northern Ireland! Sadly this is not the case and the weather can change. If you wish to cancel your booking please contact the Mae Murray Foundation mobile number, or to return the chair early please return to the storage facility.

Even when it's sunny the wind can be very cold so please make sure you have plenty of warm clothing or blankets.

### **Comments and Feedback**

We welcome all comments in order to improve our service. A comments book is available in the council storage facility or you can email us from the Contact Us page on our website.

## SAMPLE B

### **Terms and Conditions of Use**

The beach staff on duty cannot assist you with the transfer to the beach wheelchair from your normal wheelchair.

You must ensure that the beach wheelchair is suitable for your needs.

Please use any straps or supports as instructed. The beach staff on duty can assist you by demonstrating different supports that may provide you with a greater level of comfort and safety, but choice is your responsibility.

You must provide someone who is fit enough to push the chair.

You will provide details of Mae Murray Foundation membership or complete an application giving personal details of name, address, mobile number and proof of address along with identification prior to the wheelchair being released.

Secure footwear is recommended.

The beach wheelchair should only be used on shore and in the shallows only (6" or 15cm depth). If you wish to use the floating beach chair, you should only do so when a lifeguard is on duty and immediately in front of their station. Extreme care must be

## ANNEX A

taken. We recommend straps should be undone before entering the water and you should have a minimum of two adult helpers to ensure safe positioning is maintained. Please be aware of the current sea conditions and always consider that these can change at any time. Do not enter the water if it is not calm. If in any doubt, check with a lifeguard in the first instance.

If at any time you have any problems or concerns with the beach wheelchair whilst it is in your care, please return immediately to the staff base or contact the Mae Murray Foundation mobile number. In the event of a medical emergency please contact emergency services.

For your safety:

Please wear the lap strap provided at all times on dry land.

Please take care on the access points.

Take care on the beach, especially of rocks and uneven sand.

Take normal precautions whilst out in the sun.

Please return the wheelchair at the agreed time.

**Website:** [www.maemurrayfoundation.org](http://www.maemurrayfoundation.org)

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### *Disclaimer*

*The Mae Murray Foundation does not claim to be professionally qualified to give advice in any particular area of expertise. Any considerations or suggestions given in this document are as a general and informal guide only, taken from practical experience and should in no way substitute for legislative guidelines. Please consider only in conjunction with standard professional advice and regulations.*