

Improving beach accessibility – in partnership with Mae Murray Foundation	12th December 2017
To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Information	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Resilient, Health and Engaged Communities
Outcome	Citizens will have access to recreation facilities and natural environments which help to develop their physical, emotional and cognitive 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 provide an update for Members on progress being made with the Mae Murray Foundation to assist in the delivery of Accessible Beaches within the Council area.

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.

Council's Coast and Countryside Team have continued to engage with the Mae Murray Foundation to make improved provision at Benone Strand and 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. In addition, consideration is being given to other sites within the Borough where additional roll out of the Accessible Beach concept may be appropriate.

Provision at Benone Strand

Mae Murray Foundation received £18,800 from The Wooden Spoon (The children's charity of rugby) to provide a range of accessible beach equipment which is currently stored at The Ark, Benone Strand. This included;

- Mobi chairs and amphibious chairs – allow access onto the beach and into the sea.
- Mobi mat (portable hard stand and pathway) – facilitates access across the sand for wheelchairs and buggies.
- Mobile trolley – to double as a shower facility and changing bed within The Ark.
- Portable overhead hoist – to facilitate changing with The Ark.
- Range of other beach play equipment and beach access equipment.

This equipment was introduced at the end of August 2017 at the all-ability family fun day on Benone Strand, which recognised and thanked funders and supporting partners. Subsequently Council staff have been working with the Mae Murray Foundation to ensure that appropriate risk assessment, maintenance schedules and operational procedures are in place. These have been prepared by Mae Murray Foundation and verified by Council.

A booking system for use of equipment, to ensure smooth operation of this service, has now been developed which will be administered by Mae Murray Foundation and assisted by the Benone Complex.

It has been agreed that any water based equipment will not be made available unless the RNLI Beach Lifeguard service is in operation. The RNLI have engaged with the accessible beach programme to ensure there is an understanding of the equipment and how RNLI will effect rescues should the need arise.

Through the Rural Development Programme it is planned to provide additional safe storage at Benone Strand for the accessible beach equipment. The Capital Projects team is assisting with this development to secure appropriate permissions and develop design concepts.

Moving forward, a number of additional measures have been identified to the exterior and on the approach to The Ark, which would assist with accessibility and maintaining a stress free environment for all users, 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. It is hoped to progress on these actions in the coming months.

Roll out of Accessible Beach concept to other sites

The roll out of the Accessible Beach concept to other sites is a desired next step. Whilst it must be recognised that it is not reasonably practical to make provision at every coastal site, it is appropriate to have such provision at key locations.

Mae Murray Foundation in conjunction with Council Officers have undertaken an initial review of East Strand, Portrush with a view to offering some suggestions as to what actions would be required to bring facilities towards Changing Places standards, and what level of provision of beach equipment would be appropriate.

Mae Murray Foundation Information Video Link

<https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AG6GwA0sFKsGewl&cid=03C563F08F32FCE9&id=3C563F08F32FCE9%21623&parId=3C563F08F32FCE9%21126&o=OneUp>