

HAYLE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

DRAFT

TOWANS PARTNERSHIP'S SUBMISSION

BACKGROUND

The Towans Partnership is a forum involving people who have an interest in and/or a responsibility for the conservation, protection and management of the Hayle to Godrevy Towans. .

The forum meets quarterly and was established nearly 20 years ago because of the fragmentation of ownership and management across the Towans. It was recognised that there was a need to facilitate communication between different agencies and groups in order to identify issues and to assist in coordinating and addressing concerns. It has no management powers but it can advise, recommend and ask people to attend to explain decisions.

The Partnership has representatives from local communities attending and they work together with representatives from the statutory and voluntary sectors involved in conservation. This includes representatives from the Countryside and Beach section of Cormac solutions, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, National Trust and Natural England. It also includes private landowners, holiday parks and businesses and Cllrs from Cornwall Council, Hayle Town Council and Gwinear-Gwithian Parish Council.

One major recent success for the Partnership has been the appointment of a Towans Project Officer for 12 months on a 50 day contract which will finish on 30th September 2014. The main grant for the project came from the Cornwall Community Foundation (Funding from the Gwithian Solar Park) as well as financial support from Hayle Town council and GG Parish Council. The aim of the project is to assess the need for, and the role of, a Ranger to “help conserve, protect and promote the Towans into the future”

Further details of:

- The ownership and management of the Towans can be found in the enclosed map (*This is being updated –to follow*)
- The role and function of the Towans Partnership and the issues and concerns that have been discussed can be found in the enclosed report annex 1
- The proposed draft Job description for a Towans Ranger can be found in the enclosed report annex 2

COMMENTS ON THE EVIDENCE REPORT



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There is an inaccuracy regarding the conservation management of the Towans. On page 15 fifth paragraph in italics it says “ Upton and Gwithian Towans, St Gothian Sands and Gwithian Green are all designated as Local Nature Reserves, managed by the Cornwall Wildlife Trust”. This is not correct. The sentence should say Upton Towans is owned by Cornwall Council but managed by Cornwall Wildlife Trust. Gwithian Towans is owned by the Hocking Trust but managed by Cornwall Council. St Gothian Sands is owned and managed by Cornwall Council. Godrevy is owned and managed by the National Trust. Gwithian Green has no known owner but is the responsibility of Gwinear-Gwithian Parish Council and is managed by volunteers through and advisory group. (Refer to annex 1)

There is also an omission at the bottom of page 18 under the heading Proposed projects depending on resources. It should include “Appointment of a full time Towans Ranger”

COMMENTS ON THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Towans Partnership submission is based on the following policies:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)- Section 11.Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment
- Cornwall Local Plan General Policy 23 Natural Environment and General Policy 25 Green Infrastructure

Key phrases and sentences in all these policies include “ protecting and enhancing valued landscapes”, “minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible” ,”locally designated sites for nature conservation are safeguarded from inappropriate development” and “ conserves, protects and enhances biological or geological features (including BAP habitats and species “)

PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE TOWANS

The coastal area between the Hayle River and the Red River consists of an extensive beach of some 5km backed by a fragile sand dune system of high ecological value. (Penwith Local Plan). This whole area is the richest place in Cornwall for vascular plants where approximately a fifth of all the plants recorded in Cornwall can be found (Dr Colin French) and with 12 UK BAP species

There a number of key threats with regard to the protection of the Towans from potential holiday accommodation developments, the proposed growth of housing developments in Hayle Camborne and Redruth increasing visitor number and the potential for flooding and further pollution of the rivers and streams impacting on marine life. There is also the serious erosion of cliffs and paths caused by wind, sea and human activity and the need to maintain biodiversity through active habitat and species management.

Landscapes/Habitats

There are 2 SSSI designations. Mexico to Gwithian and Godrevy. The former includes Mexico Towans , Lethlean Towans, Phillack Towans, Upton Towans(a section of St Ives Bay Holiday Park), Upton Towans, Gwithian Towans. These provide an essential legal protection “ Any development or activity that restricts natural processes is likely to damage interest features of the site” (Natural England Report 06/05/05). There are however other designations in the Penwith Local Plan which provide added protection on the Towans . This is especially important when you take into account the historic value of the national explosive works on Upton Towans and the Tin Streaming on St Gothian Sands.

The Towans Partnership would want to see the following policies remain in place

- CC5 Areas of Great landscape value
- CC16 Areas of Great Historical Value
- CC8 Areas of Greta Scientific Value and County Wild life sites

In addition the protection and enhancement of the Towans can be best achieved through the designation of St Gothian Sands and a small section at the northern end of Gwithian Towans as a SSSI. This will then provide a contiguous landscape from Hayle to Godrevy. There are a number of notifiable habitats and species and locally NE have accepted that it should be considered as part of the Country wide review of SSSIs which nationally NE are undertaking over the next 4 years. **The Towans Partnership would like to see this recommendation supported by Neighbourhood Plan**

Holiday accommodation

The Towans contain one third of Penwith's total tourist accommodation (Penwith Local Plan) this includes static caravans, chalets, camp sites and touring units. It is essential that the fragile dune system is safeguarded and that environmental polices mentioned above are not undermined by allowing an increase in holiday accommodation. **The Towans Partnership would strongly recommend the retention of policy TM5:-**

“Within the Towans area, between Hayle and Gwithian, the provision of new, or the extension or intensification of existing , holiday accommodation sites will not be permitted”.

The Towans Partnership would support the Design Guide which is being advocated for the Gwithian Chalets. It would not support any further commercialisation of the area. The overwhelming response to a questionnaire which has been used as part of the Towans Partnership Project (100 individual questionnaires have been completed) is that the strength of the Towans and the beaches is their unspoilt nature.

Growth in visitor numbers, increase in housing developments and the erosion of cliffs, paths and dune systems

The growth in visitor numbers over the last 10 years due to the popularity of the beaches and the leisure pursuits such as surfing has already impacted on erosion of footpaths and dune systems. This can only increase with the proposed housing developments in Hayle, Camborne and Redruth. The Towans Partnership does not want to see any further extension of car parking spaces but recognises there needs to be ways of managing visitor numbers , reducing the pressure on car parks and preventing damage to the dunes. **The Towans Partnership would want to see further exploration of the following :-**

- A park and ride scheme.
- Increase in the number of buses bringing visitors to the Towans and the beaches
- Safer cycling paths along the main roads.
- Fencing off sections of the Towans where human activity has threatened rare habitats or species and where wind and sea have eroded cliffs and coastal paths

The Towans Partnership would not support a cycle path through the Towans. The concern is that people would not keep to the path and that “off road” bicycles and motor bikes already present problems through damage to paths and safety concerns for families and children

The increase in number in the two campsites in Gwithian over the past 10 years has meant that the Gwithian Sewage works has been unable to cope and there have been incidents of pollution into the Red River and the sea at Gwithian/Godrevy with consequences for beach activity and marine life. There are plans in place for a resolution of this problem but it is important that pressure is maintained on SWW and EA to ensure that these major works do take place. The main option is to turn the site into a pumping station and transfer the sewage to St Erth. The proposals are in the 2015 to 2020 investment programme but no final decision has been made.

The new housing developments in Camborne and Redruth can only add strain to an overloaded sewage system. In 2013 between May and September there were 7 CSO (Combined Sewage Outflow) varying between a few minutes and 7 hrs due to heavy rain combining with sewage. In 2014 since May they have already been 5 CSOs. SWW say that if the gates had not been opened sewage would have backed up causing flooding to homes in Camborne and Redruth. There are no easy solutions without considerable money being spent on upgrading the sewage works but the Towans Partnership are of the view that the situation is not acceptable and solutions do need to be found.

Maintaining and Enhancing Biodiversity

The Hayle to Godrevy sand dune system with the exception of Hayle Towans, Riviere Towans and St Gothian Sands is protected by the SSSI designations. However, each of these SSSIs need to be maintained in favourable condition. To support this NE have available Higher Level Stewardship and scrub control. At the present time only Upton Towans and Gwithian Green are in HLS. Phillack, Mexico, Lethlean and St Ives Bay have a special short term funding arrangement (CES) which has 3 more years to run. Gwithian Towans could have a new HLS for 10 yrs but Cornwall Council will not sign the agreement because of uncertainty about the Council's future situation. A new Agri-environment scheme (NELMS- New Environment Land Management Scheme) is to be operational by 2016. The scheme will be based on 5 yr agreements.

There is uncertainty about how this situation in the future is going to be managed with NE preference in having agreements which can be negotiated with one organisation representing all the landowners rather than many individual landowners. At the present time this is not possible but whatever the future arrangements which will be critical in terms of protection and enhancement of the biodiversity of the dunes there needs to be in place in addition to an advisory group such as the Towans Partnership someone on the ground to ensure there is communication and coordination between landowners, conservation managers interested voluntary groups and local communities

It is the view of the Towans Partnership that this can be achieved through the appointment of a Towans Ranger. One of the key roles would be to have an overview of the conservation management plans across the Towans and to support local friends groups to monitor as well as to assist in conservation and related work. The annex to this report of the draft job description highlights a number of tasks including education and promotion, liaison and outreach, practical site management, project management including specific projects.

Funding for this project on a 3/5yr time scale is being actively pursued. **The Towans Partnership would want to see the proposal for Towans Ranger being included in the Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment section of the Neighbourhood Plan.** DG/120814