

## **Rother District Council**

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	2 December 2019
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Water Feature – Bexhill-on-Sea Promenade

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### **Recommendation:** It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) £350,000 be allocated from earmarked reserves to refurbish and enhance the interactive water feature on the Bexhill-on-Sea promenade; and
  - 2) the Executive Director be granted delegated authority to appoint the preferred contractor against the contract specification.
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**Head of Service: Joe Powell**

**Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Mrs Earl-Williams**

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### **Introduction**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek authority from Members to reinstate the water feature located on the Promenade at Bexhill-on-Sea, and propose a way forward to bring it back into efficient and effective operation.
2. The water feature is a great asset to the public realm and is a corner stone of the regeneration of the Bexhill promenade. The water feature is a destination attraction for the town and supports local businesses by attracting people that may not otherwise come to Bexhill-on-Sea. It is in a safe location, well away from the road, and provides ample seating for parents and carers.
3. The water feature was installed as part of the Bexhill-on-Sea seafront regeneration, completed in 2011/12. In the last two years there have been an increasing number of faults that have led to the fountain only operating intermittently with regular delays in its functioning while the water tank refills.
4. All the equipment for the water feature is held underground, including the clean and dirty water tank, 32 individual pumps and the pipes that link the water mains to the tank and feed the 32 fountain jets.
5. In 2018, a series of structural and mechanical surveys were commissioned to try to establish the faults and the possible cause. The reports highlight that the feature is not operating effectively or efficiently because the system is leaking water. It is evident that the water tank is leaking and it is suspected that the pipes that feed the feature and return water to the tank are also leaking. It would only be possible to confirm that the pipes are leaking if the ground was excavated. Further, the water tank is compromised and at risk of collapse.
6. Due to the leaking pipework the feature uses more mains water than was originally specified and cost in the region of £10,000 from April 2018 to June

2019 in water and sewerage bills alone to operate. There is also a significant impact on officer time as Rother District Council staff are required to manage a high level of enquiries and complaints due to the feature only functioning intermittently.

7. In the spring 2019, the decision was taken not to operate the feature due to concerns regarding the structural integrity of the water tank located within the subterranean plantroom. The risk is that Rother District Council (RDC) staff would come to harm should the water tank collapse as they are required to regularly enter the subterranean plantroom to test the water and service the pumps. The Council has not been advised of any risk to the public or any persons above ground as the concrete structure housing the subterranean plantroom is stable.
8. The surveys that have been commissioned have highlighted various different potential causes for the system leaking water and compromising the structural integrity of the water tank. All the findings have confirmed that the only way of confirming the root cause of the faults and to repair these is to excavate the plantroom and the pipework.

### **Next Steps**

9. The surveys suggest that to remedy this situation and have the water feature up and running for 2020 we would need to excavate the majority of the site, remove and reinstall the 32 pumps, replace the water tank, and repair the underground water pipes.
10. With the above in mind, it is thought the opportunity should be taken to consider reinstalling the pump equipment above ground, and place the water tank and feeder pipes nearer to the fountain jets. This would allow easier access for maintenance of the pumps as they would be above ground, thereby reducing costs, and reduce the amount of equipment underground.
11. The local Ward Members, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Culture, Tourism and Public Realm and Council Leader have been consulted and have agreed to the appointment of a specialist contracts administrator, Potter Raper, with the structural engineering expertise needed to design a tender specification, review tender responses and oversee the new features replacement. If there is an appetite among Members to retain the water feature and its benefits then we will need to excavate the mechanism in any scenario. The present situation provides the Council with an opportunity to work with Potter Raper and a specialist contractor to replace the water feature for future generations to enjoy.
12. Indicative estimates expect this work to cost in the region of £300-330k, therefore up to £350k will be required to cover consultancy costs and provide a contingency. The expectation is that a water feature specialist contractor will take on full design and construction liability, with relevant and suitable warranties and insurances. They will be expected to propose a robust and effective solution to ensure the water feature meets the required quality in terms of maintenance, operation and longevity.
13. An indicative programme for the works has indicated that a new feature could be reinstated in readiness for the 2020 school summer holiday season. We

are working closely with key stakeholders on the promenade including kiosk owners and the De La Warr Pavilion to minimise the disruption of any works during the winter 2019 and spring 2020.

14. To meet the deadline for replacing the feature it has been necessary to start the tender process; this does not hold the Council to any commitment to complete works to replace the feature prior to approval for the budget being granted. We expect to have responses to the tender before Christmas with a view to appointing a contractor and having works commence in January 2020.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

15. Allocating £350,000 from earmarked reserves will enable this popular feature to be brought back into safe operation, attracting people to the promenade and supporting the local businesses and economy. It will also reduce the revenue operating costs in terms of utilities and officer time.
16. Officers recommend that £350,000 is allocated from earmarked reserves and delegated authority is given to the Executive Director to approve appointment of the preferred contractor through a competitive tender process.

Malcolm Johnston  
Executive Director

### **Risk Assessment Statement**

This is an estimated budget which may change subject to rising costs and other factors such as the uncertainty of the economy related to leaving the European Union. The water feature cannot be operated in its current condition, therefore if funds are not committed, it will remain switched off indefinitely. This will have an impact on the local economy, particularly the kiosks and Colonnade.