

Mid Wales Regional Committee Mid 03-02 (p5)

Date: 17 May 2002

Time: 10.30 - 1.00pm

Venue: Neuadd Pendre, Tywyn

Coastal Erosion Tywyn & Aberdyfi.

Presented for Tywyn & Aberdyfi Coastal Protection Group

INTRODUCTION.

There has been concern regarding coastal erosion along the foreshore of Tywyn to Aberdyfi many many years. This has been accelerated owing to long term neglect with nothing more than minor repairs being undertaken for the past 10 years. The main problem appears to be caused by over topping. In certain storm and tidal conditions the large waves crash over the Victorian promenade sea wall causing flooding.

RECENT HISTORY.

Hopes were raised for a long term and permanent solution in 1995/1996 when a scheme was proposed and plans displayed. This consisted of a series of rock built fish tail groins at intervals along the beach area. They were to be positioned from the Arfon Dysynni to the north of Tywyn to Arfon Dyfi to the south. The plan was overwhelmingly accepted by the people of the area as it was seen not only to provide coastal defence but also to have a regeneration effect on Tywyn in particular. The two largest fishtail groins were to be positioned at either end of Tywyn's Victorian promenade. It was explained these would extend into the sea even at low tide and would have a smooth or paved walkway on top allowing people to walk along them. It was suggested seating benches could also be placed along them for people to enjoy the sea view. The effect on Tywyn's attractiveness as a tourist destination would have been very significant. The whole plan was seen to offer great hope and optimism for the future.

The area between Tywyn and Aberdyfi would also have been protected by the scheme in particular Aberdyfi Golf Club which is vital to the economy of the village of Aberdyfi. The golf club provides much employment not only for its actual employees but also in the wider effect on hotels, restaurants, and retail shops in the village The area between the golf club and

Tywyn, Penllyn marshes which consists of farm land and a static caravan site, is possibly the most "at risk" area from sea inundation as the land is low laying. The "Second Opinion" report (referred to later) warns this could become a salt marsh lagoon and cause flooding to houses and Aberdyfi Golf course.

From Tywyn to the mouth of the Dysynni in the north the scheme was to protect firstly the railway line and behind that the low laying farmland of the Dysynni valley. This is where the main sewage treatment plant for Tywyn, Aberdyfi is situated. If this area were to be flooded the sewage plant would be immediately lost. Flooding could extend inland for almost 3 miles to the village of Llanegryn destroying many homes and farms.

It was estimated this original scheme would cost in the region of £7,000,000 (seven million pounds). But it must be remembered this scheme was designed to protect the full coastal area from Afon Dysynni to Afon Dyfi.

The reason why the scheme never proceeded is open to dispute. The former Welsh office asked for a "Second Opinion" report to be carried out to try and identify a lower cost option. After the report was published the scheme was shelved by Gwynedd Council. The Assembly for Wales have stated the decision on whether to re-consider the original scheme rests with Gwynedd Council. (September 2001).

PROPOSED SCHEME 2001

In June 2001 it was discovered by pure chance that Gwynedd Council were to present a new scheme to Tywyn Town Council. Members of Tywyn Chamber of Tourism & Commerce were present at the presentation in the Council Chamber and were horrified at the plans, and shocked that the plans were accepted by the Council. I personally asked Gwynedd Council Officials if the plans were to be made public "we've just made them public" was the reply but they had no intentions of presenting or displaying them for the public to see.

The main aspect of their scheme was to cover Tywyn's popular recreational beach with large boulders, "rock armour". This would be placed immediately in front of the Victorian sea wall to a height of almost 3 meters stretching from the wall seaward for almost 12 meters. The Chamber of Tourism and Commerce felt this would have a disastrous effect on Tywyn as a tourist destination. Other concerns were raised by a local Doctor and Vet over health and safety issues. At a public meeting on 23rd July it was decided for the long-term economic future of Tywyn to oppose this scheme.

The S.O.B. (Save Our Beach) Campaign was launched with almost total support from the people of Tywyn and the surrounding area. Many Tywyn Councillors who had supported the scheme now began to have second thoughts owing to the weight of public opposition. A petition was started which was to eventually gain over 8000 (eight thousand) signatures. After

much pressure Gwynedd Council were persuaded to display the plans for public viewing. This they did for one day on 8th August with over 700 people going to view them. An exit pole taken by the Chamber of Tourism & Commerce showed over 97% were still opposed to the scheme. On 16th August Tywyn's two Gwynedd Councillors released a statement to the Cambrian news recommending that the plans should now be scrapped. On 29th August Tywyn Town Council held a special meeting where it was unanimously decided to reverse their decision to support the scheme and now recommended it be scrapped.

It should be noted again that the original 1995/1996 scheme was designed to protect the full coastline from Tywyn to Aberdyfi. This rejected scheme was only concerned with a much reduced area in front of the Victorian Promenade, and a short distance either end. There were no plans to undertake any coastal defence work to the south, Aberdyfi Golf Club, and Penllyn, or the Railway line and Dysynni Valley to the north.

SECOND OPINION REPORT / NEW GROUP.

In September 2001 Tywyn Chamber of Tourism & Commerce obtained from the Assembly for Wales a copy of the "Second Opinion Report". Commissioned originally by the former Welsh Office and published in 1999. The scenarios of what it suggested could, and probably would happen to the area if coastal defences were not improved with some urgency were so alarming it was felt a separate body should be set up to press the case for an adequate full and final scheme. As the report included Aberdyfi also it was felt a joint grouping from both communities was needed to work together.

In October 2001 the new group Tywyn & Aberdyfi Coastal Protection Group was set up with the backing of Tywyn Chamber of Tourism & Commerce, Aberdyfi Chamber of Trade, The Talyllyn Railway Company, Aberdyfi Golf Club, all the Farmers & Land owners who are at immediate risk along the frontage. We can also claim to be representing the 8000 people who signed the petition opposing the 2001 scheme.

THE WAY FORWARD.

The new group was set up with one clear focus that is to work with all relevant authorities to achieve a final acceptable solution to this long-standing problem. That however can not be at the loss of Tywyn's main beach and must include some provision for the protection of Aberdyfi Golf Club. We have to find an alternative to the very crude rejected scheme of 2001.

Myself and colleagues have had a series of meetings to look for a solution, some of the most significant are as follows,

16 November 2001, Environmental Protection Division, National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff. They confirmed alternative schemes were possible.

13 December 2001, Gwynedd Council Officials, Highways & Engineering Dept, at Aberdyfi Golf Club. Negative inflexible response and they would not consider any alternative suggestions.

2 January 2002 Senior Lecturer Liverpool University, in Liverpool. Having advised and designed schemes throughout Europe he confirmed there are a number of schemes that could be built at Tywyn & Aberdyfi.

CONCLUSION.

The findings of "The Second Opinion Report cannot be ignored. The report was commissioned to consider the full coastal area between Tywyn & Aberdyfi. It does not suggest, propose, or advise a partial scheme as Gwynedd Council tried to implement. Last year. The problem we now have is there is dispute between Gwynedd Council and The Environment agency as to who has overall responsibility for the area between Tywyn and Aberdyfi. What also appears to be lacking is the Political will to resolve this problem once and for all. Our group, the organisations, and people we represent firmly believe if Gwynedd Council can show some co-operation and flexibility we can design a suitable scheme that will not only provide long term coastal defence but equally important not have detrimental effect on Tywyn's future as a seaside tourist destination

Mike Stevens

(Chairman)