

## 7. SUMNER BEACH: PROVISION OF BEACH ACCESS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

<b>Officer responsible</b> Greenspace Manager	<b>Author</b> Warwick Scadden, Parks and Waterways Area Advocate, DDI 941-6614
--	---

The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the investigation that has been completed into the alternative ways of providing beach access for disabled people at Sumner and to seek the Committee's recommendation to the Board regarding the beach access. A related report is also contained in clause 8 relating specifically to access to the promenade over the sea wall.

### BACKGROUND

Disabled people, particularly those who are reliant upon wheelchairs, are unable to access the beach at Sumner due mainly to:

- (a) the large rocks adjacent to Cave Rock and the associated rock walling;
- (b) the steps and decking by 'On the Beach' café;
- (c) the soft sand coupled with vegetation between the café and the Sumner Surf Club.

### INVESTIGATION OF THE BEACH AREA

The Sumner beach area is constantly changing. From advice given by the Coastal Parks Area Head Ranger, large quantities of sand are moved by the sea and wind to the extent that sand levels rise and fall quite dramatically throughout the beach area.

Currently, in the area between Shag Rock and the Sumner Surf Club, the sea has formed a significant channel near the main road edge of the beach. At high tide there is no dry sand for a large section of the road frontage. Approximately one year ago this area was a favoured beach for walking because of the amount of sand area, even at high tide.

The area from the surf club frontage toward the 'On the Beach' café contains extensive sand which is readily moved by wind. Some plants have become established in this area helping to provide a degree of sand stability. However, it remains somewhat fragile.

Between 'On the Beach' café and Cave Rock, the sand is also readily moved by wind. No sandbinding plants have been established in this area and sand is frequently blown over the stone wall and steps onto the streetside paving.

### OPTIONS FOR PROVIDING ACCESS

1. In 1998, rangers constructed a wooden board walk from the street pavement onto the beach near the junction of the Esplanade with Main Road. This was vulnerable to regular covering with sand, requiring frequent maintenance. In addition, this wooden board walk was twice damaged by fire.

An access for disabled people in this area of the beach, between the surf club and café, would need to extend 80 metres onto the sand in order to reach firm sand. This would be visually intrusive.

2. On the eastern side of 'On the Beach' café, a set of concrete steps exist adjacent to a timber deck. Staff have investigated this location for a ramp but it would be required to extend approximately 60 metres out onto the beach to reach firm sand. At this point of the beach, the sea can intrude significantly during spring tides. Plants have not established in this locality. This area is not considered a suitable option because a ramp could be damaged by the sea during spring tides and would also be visually intrusive.
3. The rocky area on the west side of Cave Rock has been investigated again. This is an area where able-bodied people walk over the rocks to gain access from the promenade to the beach. Firm sand is approximately 35 metres from the end of the promenade at this point and with an appropriate infill between rocks to blend with the natural materials, sufficient width could be provided for wheelchairs.

Of all the options considered by staff, the area adjacent to Cave Rock would provide the most direct and the shortest length required to reach firm sand. It would also be the least intrusive visually and would require a minimum of maintenance.

## **PUBLIC REQUEST**

Correspondence has been received from Mr Zefanja Potgieter as follows:

*"I have been a regular visitor to Sumner Beach for more than seven years now and have regularly enquired about wheelchair access to the beach area. As a wheelchair user myself I am a strong advocate of providing some means of wheelchair access between the paved esplanade and the wet sand area. Many times in the past I have spoken to other wheelchair users on the esplanade and encountered understandable disappointment about the lack of beach access. The absence of suitable access at Sumner is a particular concern also because the "Parks and Waterways Access Policy 2002" recognises and supports the need for such access.*

### **"4. Beach and Waterway Access**

*Access to the beach is essential as Christchurch has a large area of beachfront and there is high demand for wheelchair and pushchair access. The Christchurch City Council should provide at least one accessible entry to a beach in Christchurch onto a firm and stable surface such as wet sand."*

*I have seen the proposal for a concrete pathway directly next to and west of Cave Rock and support it for the following reasons:*

- 1. The design requirements will ensure that it will visually blend with natural rock/beach interface.*
- 2. It provides improved and safer pedestrian access for the general public to and from the beach.*
- 3. The design includes design features to ensure safety of wheelchair users although some part of the gradient will be outside the recommended building standard gradient. This is due to the physical constraints of the site and cannot be helped, and in my opinion, would be acceptable if signage indicates that wheelchair users should be assisted when using the access way.*
- 4. It provides improved and safer access for baby strollers, small children and those with walking restrictions.*

*Seen against the restrictions that the overall Cave Rock site presents, and acknowledging the fact that there will always be some parties who cannot be pleased no matter what is presented, I support the Community Board proceeding with the proposal and urge it not to delay this facility any longer."*

## **SUMMARY**

Staff have thoroughly investigated alternative ways of providing beach access for disabled people at Sumner. The conclusion reached is that the site adjacent to Cave Rock is the most suitable because:

1. It would be the shortest most direct route to firm sand.
2. It would readily harmonise with existing rocks where able-bodied people already access the beach.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

\$15,000 is available for this project within the Coastcare Capital Budget for 2004/05.

An estimate of \$7,000 for the project has been provided by City Solutions.

**Staff****Recommendation:**

That the Committee recommend to the Board:

1. That an access for people in wheelchairs be provided adjacent to Cave Rock to allow access from the promenade to firm sand.
2. That the access be created using a concrete infill between rocks, incorporating an aggregate to harmonise the surface with surrounding rocks.