



Beach School Gwithian

Public consultation report – July 2021

Background to this consultation

The Wave Project has undertaken a public consultation with local stakeholders, residents and businesses in the Gwithian area to request their comments and insights into the charity's proposed Beach School. The consultation was undertaken from January to June 2021. It was commissioned by Joe Taylor, founder and CEO of The Wave Project charity, and was led by community liaison consultant Vicky Garner, with support from planning consultant Ben Wood and the team at Lavigne Lonsdale architects of Truro.

The consultation team were aware of the environmental sensitivities of the site proposed for development, at Churchtown Farm, Gwithian Towans, which lies close to environmental designations and an AONB-designated landscape. They wanted to speak to local people to understand their views, both positive and negative, about the project. The intention was to see how the project could be developed as sensitively as possible, taking into account local perspectives, as much as possible.



How the Beach School developed



The proposed project, called Beach School, has been planned for over 5 years. The Wave Project team began exploring the possibility of a permanent, safe site to deliver its highly successful education programme in 2016, when it became clear that such a facility would be needed to deliver the best outcomes for Cornwall's most vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. In 2017, the team enlisted the help of land agent Chris Anderson to undertake a Cornwall-wide search for a parcel of land with close access to the beach, which could be used to site the Beach School.

The response was limited, with just 4 landowners proposing suitable sites and showing a willingness to work with a not-for-profit charity. However, one of these stood out for its proximity to the beach, excellent access to the A30 and seclusion from other businesses or residences. This was the site at Churchtown Farm, Gwithian Towans. Work began on designing the Beach School on that site, which led to the designs put forward in this consultation.

Who we consulted

The consultation process started by engaging a range of local community stakeholders, wider stakeholders, elected representatives in Gwithian and Hayle, Cornwall Council officers, statutory consultees and schools. Initially they were contacted by email, and some requested meetings with Joe and the team. In total, over 50 individual local stakeholders were personally contacted between April and June 2021, with 17 of them responding to the offer of a one-to-one meeting or presentation. As well as the meetings with individual stakeholders, 4 presentations were made to key local stakeholders. These were:

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| • The Towans Partnership | 21 April |
| • Gwithian-Gwinear Parish Council | 26 April |
| • Camborne, Pool, Redruth Community Network | 9 June |
| • Hayle Town Council | 17 June |

On Saturday, 15 May, a full public consultation event was held all day at Gwithian Towans, on the ground outside Sunset Surf café. This event was widely promoted in advance, via social and traditional media and with personal invitations going to over 50 local stakeholders. Over 200 members of the public attended throughout the day. They were invited to comment about the scheme by writing their thoughts and views on postcards and leaving them in a box. In total, 32 postcards were submitted. Of these,

- 21 (65.5%) were supportive
- 4 (12.5%) were neutral or provided general advice / observations
- 2 (6.5%) were negative or unsupportive.
- 5 (15.5%) were a mixture of positive and negative comments e.g. great idea, wrong location.

Themes



As was expected, the consultation process uncovered a range of views on the proposed Beach School. Some of these were very positive, others were supportive but with reservations, while some were opposed. While it is not possible to reflect every observation made, we have tried to draw out some key themes which came up from different consultees and in different ways. These were:

1. The need for the facility

Consultees clearly understood why the Beach School facility was needed in this part of Cornwall. They understood the problem it is trying to solve – namely, the lack of intervention support for the most vulnerable children and young people in Cornwall; and furthermore they understood why this approach would offer a solution – giving children the opportunity to learn outside, within the safety and security of a purpose-built facility. Many of the consultees who commented favourably on the scheme were teachers or worked in education settings; others were parents who could see how children would benefit. Interestingly, even consultees who were opposed to the scheme for other reasons still acknowledged that a specialist outdoor learning facility would help children improve their education prospects, and therefore, their lives.

2. Environmental concerns

Some consultees had concerns about the environmental impact of the project. Gwithian Towans is a treasured local landscape, and several consultees wanted reassurance that the project would not adversely impact the biodiversity of the area. The charity's commitment to increase biodiversity net gain on the site by 10% as part of its core objectives helped to reduce some of these concerns. Some consultees also expressed concerns about the potential for trampling across the Towans.

3. Overdevelopment of Gwithian / Greenfield development

This concern was only raised at the public consultation event, and did not feature strongly in the wider stakeholder consultation. Two specific concerns were raised. First, that the project would enable 'in-fill' of the land between the site and Gwithian village. Some consultees were mistrustful of the planning process after plans were approved to build holiday chalets near the beach, and far more were built than planned (according to them). Local residents and chalet owners were concerned that this might happen again and that in allowing the Beach School the precedent for new development would be further reinforced. Secondly, some consultees were concerned that the site itself might be sold off and converted to a different use, either commercial or residential housing.

Most consultees were unaware that the landowners had already placed a legal covenant on the use of the land solely for the purpose of developing the Beach School project, meaning it could not be converted to a different use. This fact reassured a number of consultees, though they emphasised that the existence of the covenant should be made more prominent in the planning application itself. Other consultees were concerned about building on a greenfield site, and questioned why the project had to be located there. Some consultees observed that the site of the proposed Beach School lies outside of any settlement boundary shown within the Neighbourhood Plan.

4. Visual impact

The potential visual impact of the project on the local area was a significant theme throughout the consultation. Some consultees felt that any new building in Gwithian would spoil the natural beauty of the area. Others felt that Cornwall generally was over-developed and this project would contribute further to that. However, the design of the Beach School itself was generally well received, with some consultees claiming it would add aesthetic value to the area. Consultees liked the fact that the grass roofs and sunken buildings would mitigate any potential adverse visual impact. It was also noted that the buildings did not obscure any key landmarks and would not be visible from most parts of the Towans.

5. Road safety / access to site

Some consultees, in particular elected councillors, highlighted concerns about the safety of access to the site from the road / visibility / signage etc.

6. Access to the beach from the site

While not specifically a planning issue, some consultees questioned how children would access the beach from the site. The need for a minibus to transport children from the Beach School to the beach was also questioned.



How we have responded to these points

The overwhelming level of support for the Beach School project was welcome. It was particularly encouraging that consultees understood the essential purpose and ethos of the project, even if they did not always know how it would be used.

In response to the specific points raised, the architects have made the following changes:

- It is clear that the planning application needs to emphasise the exceptional nature of the Beach School project, in order that it cannot be used as a 'Trojan horse' for further residential or commercial development. The application must also make clear that the covenant on the land prevents it from being converted into a different purpose, whatever happens to The Wave Project.
- The specific nature of this project, the need for accessible greenspace and potential for a peaceful and quiet wider environment are a vital part of the provision for the children are informed the decision around the choice of site. For the Beach School to fulfil its potential, being able to design it from scratch, in order for it to serve a very specific purpose in the optimum way, is essential. To retrofit existing buildings or indeed demolish them on a previously developed site, could both limit the potential of the design.
- The natural environment and the ability to interact with it is one of the core principles of the Beach School. Creating an intrinsic relationship between the buildings and landscape is at the heart of the architect's design and brief. The goal of extending the Towans and creating a native landscape within the site has become a key part of the design process. The aim is to go beyond the minimum 10% biodiversity net gain required through implementing various ecological interventions and mitigation. For example, we are liaising with the Towans Partnership to look at ways to restore/reintroduce the dunescape environment within the western part of the site. This has the additional benefit of limiting the need for students to enter the Towans themselves; whilst providing a safe space for children to enjoy the benefits of the beach within the safety of the site. Crucially, this idea embeds the concept of biodiversity net gain within both the design and the purpose of the project and we believe sits comfortably alongside the ambitions of the Towans Partnership to restore the dunescape. Architects Lavigne Lonsdale have embraced this idea and are designing the western beach landscape as an integral aspect of the design, rather than peripheral landscaping. These design proposals will look to enhance and preserve the adjoining SSI designation and mitigate any adverse effects upon it.
- The architects have worked hard to create a contextual rural aesthetic to the buildings, referencing the local architecture and materials to ensure the building feels of 'the place', in response to the specific concerns about visual impact from the surrounding viewpoints. The buildings have been positioned toward the lower part of the site and all buildings are single storey to keep building heights as low as possible. Where they are visible, the use of recessive natural materials such as timber and stone help to bed the design into the landscape. In addition, the buildings have grass roofs to enhance their biodiversity value and reduce visual impact further.

- The entrance to the site has been relocated to maximise visibility for traffic entering or exiting the Beach School in line with the recommendations of Highways expert Jon Pearson and planning advice received from Cornwall Council.
- The Beach School has been designed to enable students to access different parts of Godrevy Beach using the minibus shuttle, not just the Towans car park. However, proximity to the beach and the sea is at the heart of the project – and this will be reflected in the finished designs.

Next steps

Architects Lavigne Lonsdale are in the process of making the required adjustments to the design of the Beach School. Once these are completed, a planning application will be submitted to Cornwall Council for review.

