Weston-super-Mare’s motto echoed in 21st century face-lift

Situated alongside the Bristol Channel, the town of Weston-super-Mare literally means ‘west town above the sea’. A tiny settlement of 100 people before Roman occupation, by the 1800’s it had grown into a bustling Victorian seaside town where thousands flocked to bathe, rest and relax.

Victorian entrepreneurs who gave the town its motto ‘Ever Forward’, developed the town into the resort it is today, building a railway, pier, sea wall and a two-mile stretch of promenade. Now, home to around 70,000 residents, Weston-super-Mare continues to attract thousands of visitors each year.

In 2004, North Somerset Council embarked on a £30m enhancement of its sea front to protect the town’s 4,500 seaside properties and businesses from significant tidal flooding, upgrade the town’s promenade and sea wall and regenerate tourism, economic prosperity and improve the appearance of the town for residents, visitors and investors.

The project received grant funding of almost £27.5million from Defra’s Flood Defence Grant in Aid; and was the first in the UK to go through the Environment Agency’s procurement system, with new powers delegated to them by Defra.

Building on work undertaken to examine the condition and effectiveness of the sea defences, the Council commissioned Royal HaskoningDHV to carry out detailed design work to strengthen the existing Victorian sea wall, erect a secondary ‘splash wall’, re-surface the promenade and upgrade street lighting, civic furniture and incorporate public art.

Howard Rushton for Royal HaskoningDHV, said: “The bulk of the project was to construct a secondary sea wall at the landward side of the promenade, install a number of flood gates, and reinforce some sections of the existing sea wall.

Although the original wall was built in the 1870’s, it has lasted very well, but recent storm events caused sections of the parapet to collapse, which led to flooding. We strengthened the wall by inserting stainless steel rods and constructed a second splash wall using reinforced concrete. These have been clad on both sides using a combination of Blue Lias and local stone, which the Council reclaimed from the town’s old British Legion site.

“The renowned Royal Academy sculptor John Maine was instrumental in the overall appearance of the masonry cladding, incorporating features, seating and the promenade paving. The result: the seawall no longer looks...
Weston-super-Mare’s motto echoed in 21st century face-lift

like a flood defence feature, but more like a public feature that has been designed to separate the promenade from the busy adjacent road. The effect has been well received by residents and visitors, and the promenade feels safer, quieter and very much in keeping with the surrounding environment. A scour protection apron, which incorporates bespoke seating made from natural limestone and granite blocks, has been constructed to protect the existing sea wall from erosion and undermining resulting from loss of beach material during storms.

“The promenade has been resurfaced using five different shades of granite, and John Maine has incorporated granite and wooden seating features on the promenade which now features new street lighting with LED displays.

The project was successfully completed in 2010.

Organisations involved include:
Royal HaskoningDHV – design engineers and site supervision
Birse Coastal – principal contractor
EC Harris – contract manager and cost consultant

Howard Rushton
T: +44 (0) 1392 447 999
E: howard.rushton@rhdhv.com