

## **Cornwall Council and Breage Parish Council Joint Press Statement**

Cornwall Council inherited responsibility for the middle set of steps at Praa Sands from Kerrier District Council on the formation of the Unitary Authority and has since spent considerable funds and resource monitoring, maintaining and extending this asset.

**Circa 2014**



**May 2017- following the installation of the steps in March 2017**



**November 2018**



In 2024, despite the installation of additional gabion baskets, the extensive erosion beneath and around the lower steps and structural supports necessitated an emergency response to remove them.

### May 2024



Following representations from the Parish Council, options for reinstatement of the steps were sought from Cormac's Structural Engineers and Cornwall Council worked closely with the Parish Council, consulting both the RNLI and Coastguard, to ensure the closure was maintained and alternative beach access was adequately signed.

Unfortunately, our engineers advised that a sustainable solution at this location would be extremely costly, require extensive excavation of the dune and would be at odds with the Shoreline Management Plan. They also identified a route 60m to the east of the middle steps as the only option where an alternative access could be sustainably maintained in the short and medium term.

When consulted, no concerns were raised by the emergency services or the RNLI lifeguard service regarding this approach and in May 2024 CC installed (and will maintain) a new set of oak steps at the recommended location, formalising an existing desire line and provide an additional route to and from the beach. It is recognised that this alternative route is not as accessibility friendly as the foundered route however Praa Sands has two other concrete formal beach access routes, both of which offer safer access to the beach for those less mobile.

Since the installation of the oak steps there has been some minor sand migration from the slope immediately above and CC and the PC will continue to follow national guidelines to ensure dune erosion is kept to within acceptable limits and to ensure dune health is maintained.

CC have planned further works for May 2025 to remove their remaining infrastructure from the area to eliminate the residual risk to beach users and to allow the dune habitat to regenerate.

Recently both CC and Breage Parish Council were approached by a Praa resident, and representative of the Facebook group 'The Friends of Praa Sands', offering, to rebuild and subsequently maintain, a new extension to the failed steps.

Whilst this offer and ambition are laudable, sadly neither Councils are in a position to undersign the liability for implementing and maintaining a structure with this level of associated risk, provided by a financially unaccountable 3<sup>rd</sup> party and which is at odds with National guidance, the Shoreline Management Plan and historic observations. In addition, no documented designs, method statements or risk assessments have been received to date.

This unfortunately means that neither CC nor BPC can see a way to facilitate this venture and therefore see no value in postponing these works, however, following strong petition from the 'Friends of Praa Sands', Cornwall Council, with permission from Breage Parish Council, will, as long as the remaining structure presents no additional risk to the public, **will postpone these works for 4 months** to allow the group to present a plan for constructing, maintaining and accepting ongoing liability for this structure.

Both CC and BPC acknowledge the depth of feeling amongst the community and can sympathise with their assumption that a replacement or repair is a simple matter, but we feel that expectations have been raised unnecessarily high without a full understanding of all the requirements needed to undertake such a project and we would urge residents to understand and respect the processes that must be followed.

***We know that the rate of coastal erosion is increasing and storm events becoming more frequent. We therefore must focus our efforts on building resilience for our communities rather than trying to hold the line. The dune system at this location represents the best long-term protection for this community and we would encourage this group to work with the PC to help maintain them.***