

New life for Brighton's Shelter Hall - video transcript

Brighton's seafront is world famous and crucial as a means of attracting the city's 12 million visitors a year.

It was renovated by the council in the mid 1990s. As a result, the former fishermen's arches now host a wide array of businesses. It's also a venue for major events, which help boost the local economy.

But behind all the modern activity, there's a problem. Most of the seafront was built in the late 1800s and is becoming structurally unsound. The whole seafront needs £100 million of repairs – money the council doesn't have to spare..

Much of the seafront isn't built on solid ground – it's actually a bridge, parts of which are deteriorating.

So the council has a programme of repairs underway – paid for from external sources – often central government. Already, long sections of it have been rebuilt in an award-winning scheme – with more under way. The new arches underneath are providing spaces for more businesses.

Now the council has won a £10 million grant from the government's transport department to rebuild the seafront Shelter Hall on the lower prom at the bottom of West Street. It too has become structurally unsound.

This is a critical issue because it also supports the A259 seafront road. Without repairs the road could eventually collapse.

Council head of transport projects David Parker says a harsh marine environment has meant the structure has corroded and cannot be repaired - so it has to be demolished and rebuilt. This gives the opportunity to move it slightly towards the sea, create a better place to let to businesses and improve the congested West Street junction above.

Over 30,000 vehicles a day pass through that junction. It's one of the main gateways into the city centre and a primary east-west route.

Council chief executive Geoff Raw explains that measures will be taken to make it less congested, and easier to access West Street. Changes will include 'smart' traffic signalling which improves traffic flows – and a better environment for pedestrians.

Mark Buchanan-Smith, director of Brighton's Churchill Square shopping centre says he supports the scheme. It will make it easier for people to move around and support the seafront and the transport network, both crucial elements of the city.

The video has pictures of what the new Shelter Hall will look like once rebuilt and shifted slightly south. In front of it, a new retaining wall with deep foundations will protect it from the sea.

Cllr Gill Mitchell explains that councils no longer have large sums for such big projects and are reliant largely on winning grants such as this from the government – or securing money from developers as part of planning agreements on major developments. The new Shelter Hall will be let to businesses, providing income for the council to invest in the seafront, create jobs and boost the tourism economy.

Inside the Hall there will be a new mezzanine floor, above a new rotunda – all this being let to businesses – plus providing new public toilets.

Concluding, council chief executive Geoff Raw apologises that it will be a long project, with roadworks in place for around two years. He says sometimes these things are necessary and we have to face the fact the seafront has been crumbling. The city will have to live with the fact we're trying to get this right and improve things for the future.