

Coastal Schemes with Multiple Funders and Objectives FD2635

Case Study Report 14 Weston-super-Mare Seafront Enhancement



Image taken from www.ejmcgrath.co.uk last accessed July 2011

This case study is one of 14 documents supporting the research project Coastal Schemes with Multiple Objectives and Funders - Case Studies FD2635, available from <http://tinyurl.com/6dzyusy>. This research was conducted in 2010/2011 by Maslen Environmental on behalf of Defra and the Environment Agency's Research and Development programme.

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1 Case Study: Weston-super-Mare Seafront Enhancement

1.1 Introduction

The Seafront Enhancement Scheme in Weston-super-Mare started in August 2007 and involved three phases of work (see Figure 1). The Marine Lake and Scour Protection Apron works are complete (Phase 1 and 2, see Figure 2). The Phase 3 works involve upgrading the sea walls (i.e. strengthening and building a splash wall between the promenade and road). This Phase was completed in November in 2010 (see Figure 3 and 4). The roads and drainage have been improved and the promenade transformed with new seating, litterbins, lighting and surfacing.

Funding for the £30million improvement scheme has largely come from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Flood Defence Grant in Aid

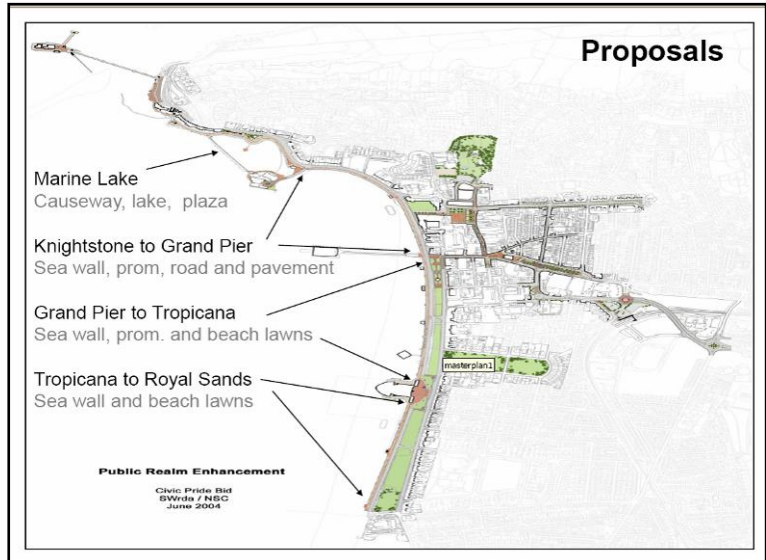


Figure 1. The Weston-super-Mare proposal for the £30 million project including splash walls and drains, 2.4km of seafront. Image courtesy of the Environment Agency



Figure 2. Phase 1 Marine Lake. Photographs courtesy of the Environment Agency

(FDGiA) (£29.1million) for coastal defence works, without which additional regeneration funds and elements could not have been incorporated. Multiple funds sourced included £1.46million from the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) 'Civic Pride' Initiative, £860,000 from the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) 'Sea Change' Programme, £184,000 from North Somerset's Local Transport Plan, and £250,000 from Wessex Regional Flood Defence Committee (WRFDC) Local Levy

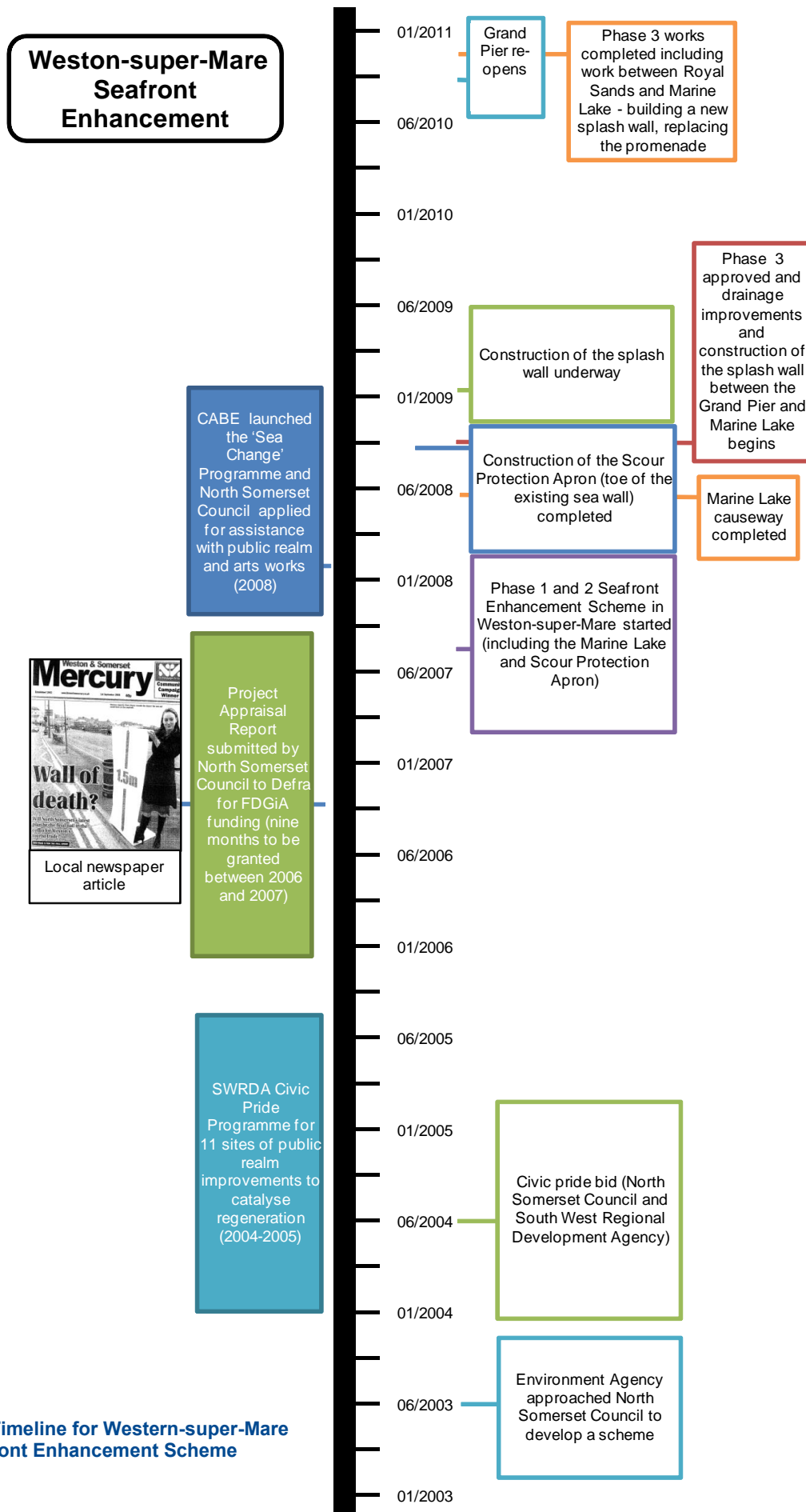


Figure 3. Timeline for Western-super-Mare Seafront Enhancement Scheme

Past coastal flooding events extend beyond the frontage properties into the town centre and up to one mile from the sea front. The scheme will provide a 1 in 200 standard of protection (SoP) (0.5% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP)) to protect 4,467 properties (3,830 residential and 637 businesses) in the town from flooding and improve the quality of the promenade for businesses, residents and visitors, providing a major boost to the tourism trade and economic prosperity of the area.

North Somerset Council (the Council) was the lead partner, working with the Environment Agency, CABE, SWRDA, and the design contractor and consultants to oversee the project and construct the scheme.



Figure 4. Phase 3. Splash Wall. Photography courtesy of the Environment Agency

1.2 Objective Settings

1.2.1 Project Drivers

Weston-super-Mare has seen a decline since the 1950s, blighted by tourism decline and local industry closures. The lack of high quality hotels and a poor public image has added to the decline. In addition, there is a history of flooding in the area such as the events in 1903, 1981, 1990 and 1996 hindering growth and damaging an already poor area. The SoP pre-scheme was estimated as 1 in 5 (20% AEP) and the promenade level was estimated as below 1 in 50 SoP (2% AEP). The scheme was initiated by the Environment Agency who put pressure on the council to develop a scheme in the early part of 2003.

The development of this project was aligned with the SWRDA 'Civic Pride' Programme for 11 sites of public realm improvements to catalyse regeneration (2004-2005). The Seafront Enhancement Scheme is part of a suite of regeneration projects that have started taking place. In 2008, CABE also launched the 'Sea Change' Programme and the Council applied for assistance with public realm and arts works as "icing on the cake" (Lewis, 2010c).

1.2.2 Partnership Objectives

The Council was at the heart of project and lead with the help of the partners, SWRDA, the Environment Agency and CABE. The main driver is to provide protection from flooding and due to the cost of such works a large contribution was gained through Defra's FDGiA. This presented opportunities for the Council to design a scheme that could provide a suite of benefits including flood risk, environment and regeneration benefits for the town (specifically inward investment, promotion of the town, increased tourism, use of local labour in construction, additional spend in the local economy, and local business growth). There were no formal measures in place before the scheme was implemented other than the general monitoring of visitor number/spend, local employment and business information.

As well as providing a contribution, SWRDA provided design support to wider public realm work in the town. Its interest was in improving the local economy, creating jobs and developing the economy. Evidence suggests that following these public investments into Weston's public realm assets, has levered private sector investment in adjacent properties.

CABE's work is still to be completed, with public art works soon to be installed. CABE recommended that the Council should take more of an active interest, and support its culture and public art assets. CABE used its position to attract an internationally acclaimed artist to carry out design work, without this help, the Council would have found it difficult to attract such expertise.

After the initial promotion of the scheme, the Environment Agency supported the Council with the Defra FDGiA funding application processes. This Wessex Regional Flood Defence Committee (WRFDC) paid for this Environment Agency support. More latterly during the construction phases, the Environment Agency sat on the Project Board and were very helpful assisting with contractual and financial issues.

1.2.3 Project Objectives

The main objective of the scheme was to achieve a 1 in 200yr SoP to reduce the flood risk, stimulate regeneration of the town and improve the quality of landscape.

The scheme forms part of the 'Civic Pride' Initiative, "The overriding aim is to make people feel good about the places in which they live, work and relax" (Civic Pride, SWRDA)

The principles of the scheme include:

- Property protection from flooding (3,830 residential and 637 commercial);
- Regeneration, job creation, increased visitor numbers;
- Upgrading quality of the public realm;
- Ease of maintenance; and
- Improving public safety.

1.3 Partnerships

1.3.1 Building the Partnership

The lead partners were:

- North Somerset Council (lead authority);
- SWRDA;
- The Environment Agency; and
- CABE.

The Council are leading the scheme working with Royal Haskoning (specialist coastal engineers) to design the works, EC Harris are contract administrators and cost consultants for the project and Birse Coastal (part of the Balfour Beatty group) are contracted to construct the scheme.

In the early phases of the scheme the public were consulted about the design options through a series of public meetings. The preferred option, a new wall along the promenade was described in the front page of the Mercury local press as the 'Wall of Death' (see timeline on Figure 3). The negativity expressed by the community lobby group was described as "impossible to overcome" (Lewis, 2010). At the planning committee meeting over 300 objections were presented against the proposals for the sea wall. In response to the objectors the wall height was lowered but designed to take into account the increases in sea levels in the future. The Project Appraisal Report (PAR) and Whole Life Costs (WLC) included the expectation that the wall would need to be raised in future - this approach was supported by the Environment Agency/Defra. It was felt that this was the best approach, to have raised the wall further could have had a severe economic impact on the tourism industry in the Town for many decades when the greater height was not required immediately.

1.3.2 Partnership Working the Governance

In terms of the structure for delivery and engagement of partners, there is a monthly Project Board meeting attended by representatives from all the key partners:

- North Somerset Council (lead);
- The Environment Agency;
- Contractor (Birse Coastal);
- Design engineers and site supervision (Royal Haskoning); and
- Contract Administrators/Cost consultants (EC Harris).

The Project Board started life including Council representatives only (including a Deputy Director and other senior management representatives), but overtime the partnership expanded to include the wider partners. It is worth noting that the Council's Project Manager attends the Project Board and reports directly to them, however is not a board member. Weekly meetings between various Council staff and site staff from the partner organisations help to develop good communications between partners.

The Council's Project Board had no political representation, however, the Council's Executive Members obtain regular updates from the Project Manager. The Project Manager supported an informal Working Group of nine local ward Councillors as a way to inform them of contentious issues, especially during the early phases of construction work.

The Council regularly attends the Hotels and Restaurants Associations meetings to update local businesses on scheme progress. This association is comprised of representatives from the sea front businesses.

The contractor employed a public liaison officer to engage and inform the public. Monthly newsletters are distributed to the seafront properties immediately affected by the works.

The Councils Project Manager has also reported to SWRDA and CABE regularly through separate project management arrangements specific to each grant.

1.4 Approvals, Planning Context and Legislation



Figure 5. Special Protection Area, Ramar site and Specialist Area of Conservation. Photography courtesy of the Environment Agency

A PAR was developed and the Environment Agency's National Review Group (NRG) approval was required. The Council was the first local authority nationally to go through the NRG process, eight iterations were needed, and there were long delays due to size of scheme, taking nine months to be finally granted in July 2007 (see timescales in Figure 3). The Environment Agency supported the Council throughout this appraisal process.

Planning consent was obtained from the Council and land drainage consent from the Environment Agency. As mentioned there were over 300 objections to the initial proposals. The wall height was lowered in response to the objectors, but it is recognised that it will need to be heightened in the future to protect against a 1 in 200-year flood event.

Specialist Area of Conservation (SAC) (see Figure 5), therefore great care was taken in liaison with Natural England to adhere to Habitats Regulations. An Environmental Action Plan was required for the construction of the scheme but an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was not.

The area of the works is immediately next to a Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramar site and

Two Food and Environment Protection Act (FEPA) licences were also required due to works taking place on the foreshore. This application process was described as "tricky, this was due to the long timescales and the need for a full resubmission when an extension of time was required" (Lewis, 2010a).

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1.5 Funding Arrangements

To establish the scheme's requirements, initial feasibility, appraisal and economic studies were under taken 'at risk' by the council with some support from the WRFDC. These costs were in the order of £600,000 and paid for entirely by the council. The Council was reimbursed these costs when the £29.1 million funding was obtained from Defra's FDGiA for the coastal defence works (capital costs only). The Council developed a lengthy business case in the form of a PAR. Once submitted, the FDGiA funding took approximately nine months to be granted (this took place between 2006 and 2007, see timescales on Figure 3).

The Council put together an integrated and joined-up bid proposal to Defra, linking coastal protection with future regeneration that "demonstrates a joined-up approach from government by allowing the council to make use of regeneration funds which might otherwise be lost" (Defra 2006 - letter to Local Authorities re funding allocations for 2006/7). The Present Value Damages were estimated at £355,000,000, including approximately 18 fatalities and 522 injuries (Defra and Environment Agency, 2006). The scheme obtained a cost benefit score of 11.7 and had a priority score of 31; this covers the reduced risk to 3,800 residential and 700 commercial properties.

Other funding streams are shown in Figure 6 these included:

- £1.46 million was contributed from the SWRDA as part of its Civic Pride Initiative¹ to improve public space and the civic area. The Council contributed half of the Civic Pride money (£700-600,000). An internal bid was made to the capital programme for investment;

1 <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Community/Regeneration+and+sustainability/Weston+Regeneration/civicprideinitiative.htm>
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- North Somerset Council staff costs at approximately £204,000;
- £250,000 from the WRFDC Local Levy;
- £184,000 from the Joint Local Transport Plan²;
- The Council has been awarded £860,000 through the CABE Sea Change initiative to create a series of cultural projects to compliment the seafront enhancements and to encourage private sector investment; and

The utilities companies (including water, gas, electric and telecommunications) used the project as part of their renewal's programme and paid a contribution based upon their renewal cost, discounted by having to bring renewal investment forward.

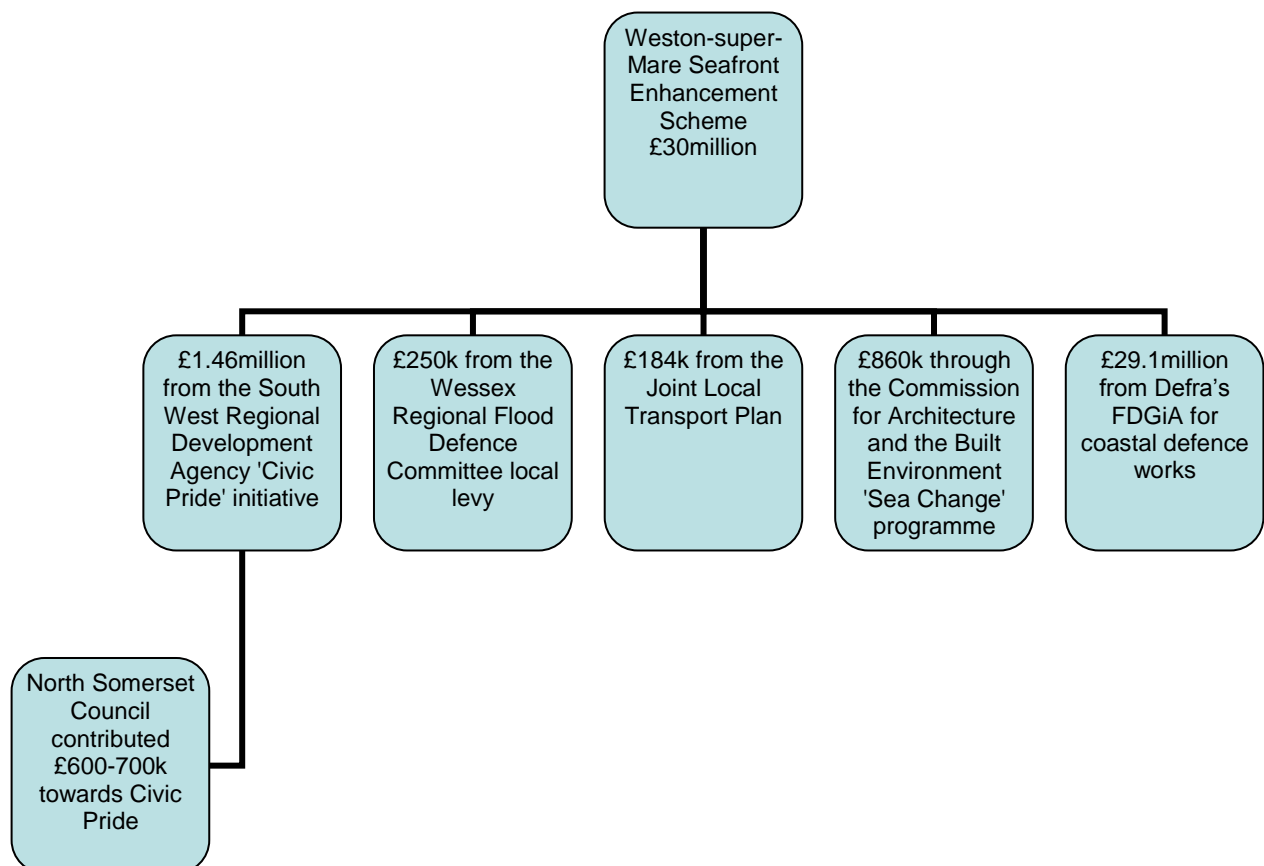


Figure 6. Funding streams

1.6 Summary of Key Issues

- Weston has seen a decline in tourist numbers, a lack of high quality hotels and has a poor public image. There is also a history of flooding in the area with events in 1903, 1981, 1990 and 1996;
- The main objective of the scheme is to prevent flooding and improve the quality of landscape and safety;
- Huge opposition and negative publicity to the initial options put forward, community lobbying enabled reduced height to the defence;
- The Council is the lead authority but the Environment Agency are providing significant support and guidance;
- The Council put together an integrated bid proposal, linking coastal protection with future regeneration demonstrating a joined up approach to obtaining funding;
- NRG approval required; and
- Funding for the £30 million improvement scheme has largely come from Defra's FDGiA (£27.5 million) for coastal defence works, with other contributions from the South West Regional Development Agency, the Wessex Regional Flood Defence Committee, the Joint Local Transport Plan and CABE.

1.7 Lessons Learnt

- There were large financial and social risks associated with this scheme, a significant barrier was the scheme initially not being able to obtain approval from Council members,
- The Council was the first local authority to go through the NRG and there were long delays due to size of scheme;
- Timescale constraints were significant, particularly when applying for funding from different sources (e.g. the nine months for the Defra FDGiA); Key success criteria includes:
 - Political 'buy-in' and continuity. The original executive member was very supportive from the outset and provided political will. Without this the scheme might not have been approved;
 - Officer continuity. The Council's Project Manager remained constant throughout, this greatly helped the development and delivery of the project;
 - Consultant and staff consultant continuity;
- In summary, limited staff turnover benefits schemes;
- The top lessons learnt were described as:
 - "Early contractor involvement was very valuable but the switch from design to construction stages, involved changes in contractor staff which led to loss of continuity and much re learning and some 'reinvention of the wheel', therefore contractor changeover could be improved. It would also be desirable to have the designers sitting in the same office as the contractors, working more closely with those responsible for delivering on site such as site forman, this would have made it easier to build and it would have run more smoothly (Lewis, 2010c)";
 - If more money was available to do more consultation/information provision at the outset of the scheme, or if the Council had the consultation skills in house, then the project might have been less "painful" to get through (Lewis, 2010c);
- The Council describes how the local people have been very positive about the scheme during construction and since it has been completed, "the Council have had overwhelmingly positive comments from the local people, visitors, and businesses about the improved quality and attractiveness of the seafront" (Lewis, 2010); and
- The scheme once complete will demonstrate economic and social best value, enhanced public realm and increased inward private investment. For example, tourism numbers have increased by 25% in the last two years, despite the disruption caused by the works, lots of people have been returning to see how the works were progressing. The completion of the works in November 2010 has also boosted the confidence of local people and business, both in the Council in being able to 'get things done' and in the economic future of the town. Many businesses have invested in their properties since the sea front works started.

1.8 References

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