

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cabinet Cllr Anthony Clarke, Cabinet Member for Transport	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	On or after 31st October 2015 (for single Member decision)	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2799
TITLE:	Approval of Cycle Ambition 2 funding year 1 Kennet and Avon Canal towpath improvements and cycle parking	
WARD:	Bathwick, Bath Avon North	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
<p>List of attachments to this report:</p> <p>Appendix 1 – Pedestrian/cycle count results</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Questionnaire results</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Drawings nos. TC8762/002A – TC8762/006A</p> <p>Appendix 4 – Surfacing options</p> <p>Appendix 5 - Canal and River Trust Towpath Design, Guidance for Towpath Design, Version 2 – January 2013</p> <p>Appendix 6 - Better Towpaths for Everyone - A national policy for sharing towpaths-February 2015</p> <p>Appendix 7 – Equality Impact Assessment</p>		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Funding of £655,000 from the Cycle City Ambition Fund 2 (CAF 2) has been awarded to Bath & North East Somerset Council this financial year 2015/16 for improvements to the length of towpath between Bathampton and Sydney Gardens, including widening it to 2.5 metres where space allows, and providing a new improved towpath surface to benefit all users. This project also includes improvements to the path between the towpath and Grosvenor Bridge near

London Road. This report seeks approval to include this on the capital programme as a fully approved project.

- 1.2 Two public consultation events were held on 28th and 29th August 2015 to obtain the views of towpath users as to whether the towpath surface should be improved and, if so, what type of surface improvement should be carried out.
- 1.3 This report summarises the comments and issues from the consultation, provides responses and seeks approval for the use of the CAF2 funding to make the proposed improvements to the towpath between Bathampton and Sydney Gardens and the path between the towpath and Grosvenor Bridge.
- 1.4 In addition CAF2 funding of £40,000 has been awarded this financial year 2015/16 and £48,000 in 2016/17, totalling £88,000, for the provision of cycle parking throughout Bath and North East Somerset, and this report also seeks approval to utilise this CAF2 funding for this purpose and include on the capital programme as a fully approved project.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that approval be provided to utilise the CAF 2 budget for 2015/16 of £655,000 for the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath improvements and £88,000 for cycle parking and to include these projects on the 2015/16 capital programme as fully approved.
- 2.2 It is proposed that cycle parking is provided throughout the authority, particularly at the main communities and around major trip generators such as high streets and libraries etc.
- 2.3 It is recommended that the canal towpath between Bathampton and Sydney Gardens is improved, including widening it to 2.5 metres where space allows with it being resurfaced with a tarmac base and tar spray and stone chip surface with appropriate signing as recommended in the CRT document "Better Towpaths for Everyone" and ongoing safety education.
- 2.4 It is recommended that the section of path between the canal towpath and the railway bridge leading to Grosvenor Bridge is resurfaced with a tarmac base and tar spray and stone chip surface and appropriate signing.
- 2.5 The proposed scheme is shown on drawing nos. TC8762/001 – TC8762/005 included in Appendix 3.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 In December 2014 the government announced new funding for cycling infrastructure projects under the Cycle City Ambition Grant. A West of England bid for this funding stream has proved successful and £19 million has been awarded to the sub-region. This Council's share of this award is £3,880,000.
- 3.2 The B&NES Cycle City Ambition Fund 2 project has several elements. This financial year this includes the upgrading of routes along the Kennet & Avon Canal east of Bath and additional cycle parking. The main element of this is to improve the Kennet & Avon Canal towpath in Bath between Sydney Gardens and Bathampton with a budget of £655k.

- 3.3 A further budget of £88,000 is provided for improvements to cycle parking throughout the district of Bath and North East Somerset, with £40,000 in this financial year and £48,000 in 2016/17.
- 3.4 Two sections of the upgrading of the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath are already approved budgets within the transport improvement programme and the wider project was highlighted on an emerging list for Council funding in 2015/16, this approval seeks to combine the existing approved budgets and increase them to the total of £655,000 in line with the funding available and expected cost of works.
- 3.5 The canal works have the support of the Canal & River Trust (C&RT).
- 3.6 The CAF 2 project is managed through a programme Board within the West of England and reported to the Joint Transport Committee. Regular financial monitoring will be undertaken, grant claims are prepared with the support of the finance teams and regular internal capital monitoring in line with the Council's usual practices will be undertaken.
- 3.7 It is proposed that the construction works for the improvement to the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath will be procured through the Canal and River Trust's recently competitively tendered "National Engineering and Construction Framework Contract 2015 – 2021" which provides a value for money integrated design and construction method of delivery. Much local authority work has been procured in this manner, including Local Sustainable Transport Funding work for Somerset County Council, works on the towpath at Devizes for Wiltshire County Council and works in the West Midlands for Birmingham City Council.
- 3.8 It is noted that C&RT have considerable experience in the provision of specialist works adjacent to live waterways in constrained locations, including the delivery of construction plant and materials by barge.
- 3.9 Bath & North East Somerset Council's central procurement team have agreed that the C&RT National Framework having been competitively tendered provides an appropriate contract for the delivery of this scheme. A funding agreement will be put in place between the Council and C&RT when the Single Member Decision is made on this report.
- 3.10 The canal towpath is owned by the Canal and Rivers Trust and as land owner they are responsible for existing and future maintenance, the Council would not hold any additional liability as a result of these works for future maintenance costs.
- 3.11 The section of path between the canal towpath and Grosvenor Bridge which is proposed for upgrade is privately owned. It is Class 4 Public Highway and so is currently maintained by the Council. After the improvement works have been carried out it is expected that future maintenance will be minimal and consist of vegetation management funded from existing budgets. The Class 4 designation is not appropriate for the current and future usage so it is proposed that this will be reviewed as a separate exercise to these capital works.
- 3.12 The cycle parking maintenance would fall to the Council and external parties, depending on the particular site, the costs to the Council are expected to be minimal and would be maintained within existing budgets.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 A proportionate equalities impact assessment has been carried out on the schemes, to see if any discriminatory factors can be highlighted. There are no situations that could be thought of that discriminated against one over another. The EIA is attached to this report (appendix 7).
- 4.2 The design of the towpath will include the preparation of risk assessments to provide opportunities for lowering actual and perceived risks to all users. This will assist with the integration of the various different users of the towpath.
- 4.3 Planning consents are not required for the work to the canal path.
- 4.4 While consents may be required for some of the cycle parking this will be fully in accordance with planning policies. The majority will not require consent or will be covered by existing planning permission.

5 THE REPORT

Kennet and Avon canal towpath

Background

- 5.1 The Kennet and Avon Canal Towpath has become one of the busiest pedestrian and cycle corridors within the district of Bath & North East Somerset. Traffic on the towpath has increased rapidly over recent years, and pressures are beginning to emerge over maintenance and capacity.
- 5.2 A 12 hour manual pedestrian and cycle count carried out on Wednesday 1st July 2015 (between 7.00am and 7.00pm) at the southern (Sydney Gardens) end of the route, near to the access at Beckford Road. The results of the count showed a high level of usage by both pedestrians (682 users 48%) and cyclists (737 users 52%). This indicates that any improvements to the path would need to provide an acceptable surface for both pedestrians and cyclists.
- 5.3 The towpath itself is relatively narrow, approximately two metres wide along the majority of its length, with pinch points at bridges reducing to less than one metre over very short distances. The limestone stone/dust surface has also deteriorated to the point where it is unattractive for pedestrians and cyclists – particularly during the wetter months.
- 5.4 Recent cycling/walking infrastructure investment has resulted in an increase in the walking and cycling traffic using the length of the towpath between Bathampton and Sydney Gardens for both commuting and leisure journeys. The alternative route along the A4 London Road does not provide an appealing route for existing and new cyclists. The new cycle bridge across the River Avon at Batheaston draws leisure/commuting journeys along Mill Lane to join the towpath at the George Inn in Bathampton, and Sustrans are promoting the new Two Tunnels route as a circuitous route in conjunction with the towpath which forms part of the National Cycle Network Route 4 (NCN4).

Surfacing options

- 5.5 The CAF2 funding that has been provided is for an improvement to the existing path, as opposed to the maintenance of the path. Therefore the option of

renewing the existing dust/stone path was precluded. However, some feedback from the questionnaire states a preference for this type of surface. It is therefore considered in appendix 4 with the other surfacing options.

5.6 Appendix 4 also considers the following shared use path design options:

- Bituminous path
- Spray and chip path
- Resin bound path.

5.7 The existing level of use of this length of the towpath, together with the anticipated further commuter use from cyclists lends itself to a high durability surface. It is recognised, however, that any change to the surface treatment, width, profile or edging to a path can bring about a change in character to the wider towpath corridor. Therefore the impacts on the waterway, landscape, heritage sensitivity and users have been considered to allow the most appropriate solution to be identified.

5.8 From the different high durability surfaces considered, a “Tar spray and chip” surface would provide a hard durable surface that would also give a more organic and sensitive feel appropriate to its rural setting.

5.9 The design will be carried out in conjunction with the Canal and River Trust, and will be in accordance with the good practice laid down in the Canal and River Trust document “Canal and River Trust Towpath Design, Guidance for Towpath Design, Version 2 – January 2013” (Appendix 5).

Consultation results

5.10 The questionnaire results are detailed in Appendix 2. In summary there were 382 responses and the results show that improvements to the towpath are strongly supported, the majority favour a stone chipped surface and agree that the proposals will improve the towpath. Analysing the comments made in more detail, although there is general support for the proposals there were a number points/issues raised. The most frequent ones were:

- Support the stone chipped surface only if the speed of cyclists can be reduced and pedestrian priority is clear. Some supported signing but some did not believe signage would work. Other suggestions include enforcement of a speed limit, chicanes or speed bumps or segregation of cyclists and pedestrians. Some felt that cyclists and pedestrians don't mix and that the proposals would make it more attractive for cyclists at the expense of pedestrians.

Council response: It is considered that robust signage implemented in accordance with the C&RT document “Better Towpaths for Everyone” and ongoing safety education (which could include CRT Share the Space events on the towpath) would provide sufficient information to remind all users of how to behave courteously on the towpath. It would not be practical to enforce a speed limit. The proposed path width of 2.5m (where possible) will not be wide enough to segregate. It would not allow for easy two way passage of users. Chicanes or barriers would not be recommended as access for

legitimate users; particularly disabled people, older people or people with pushchairs could be restricted or prevented. 'Speed bumps' have been used on canal towpaths where this is a particular problem with motorcycles. This is not currently recommended but the situation will be monitored.

The design of the towpath has included the preparation of risk assessments to remove or reduce actual and perceived risks to all users. The design will also undergo both a Stage 2 (Detail Design) Safety Audit and a Stage 3 (Completed construction) Safety Audit which should raise any further hazards not currently unidentified.

- Comments also include resurfacing the path or filling in the potholes with the existing surface i.e. crushed stone to preserve the natural beauty, character and heritage of the path.

Council response: CAF2 funding has been provided to upgrade the surface to an "all year round" surface. A stone and dust surface would deteriorate swiftly, and would not provide the upgrade for which the funding has been provided.

- There are concerns about urbanising the countryside.

Council response: The C&RT has a commitment to protect the historic waterways in its care and to optimise the public benefit they can deliver. The C&RT criteria based approach respects both statutorily designated and non-designated areas and features including those associated with heritage, conservation and ecological qualities that may be affected as a result of any proposed changes in towpath design.

C&RT, working closely with the Council, have carried out an initial Scoping Environmental Appraisal Report with regard to the length of the Kennet and Avon Canal Towpath between Bathampton and Sydney Gardens. A full Environmental Appraisal will be also be carried out by the C&RT in conjunction with the commencement of detailed design proposals.

The Council Heritage manager provided the following statement: "The World Heritage Site Management Plan advocates both preservation of the authentic character of Bath and the encouragement of more environmentally friendly modes of transport. There are no objections raised therefore to the improvement of the towpath, but there is an interest in how this is achieved. One of the unique attributes of Bath is the way in which green fingers of countryside extend right into the heart of the city. There is a risk that inappropriate surface treatment could suburbanise the path and erode this character. I have been contacted by several customers who have advocated a crushed stone surface, which has a rural character and is apparently in use in a similar World Heritage Site environment in Llangollen, North Wales. I have requested that crushed stone as an option is considered and the evaluation of this option is included in your report to the decision maker. My knowledge of this surfacing relates only to visual appearance and I understand you will have other technical considerations to balance against this. I would prefer to see crushed stone used, with spray and (local) stone chip as a second choice if crushed stone is cannot be justified. I would lodge an objection to the introduction of a standard tarmac surface, but understand that this is not a preferred option."

See Appendix 4 for details on surfacing options.

- Comments were made regarding the existing poor surface/puddles, and how resurfacing will improve this benefiting all including wheelchair users and people with buggies.

Council comments – The aim is to provide an ‘all year round’ path. A tar and spray chip surface would require minimum maintenance.

- A wider path is supported by some as it will help to reduce conflict; however, others were opposed to any widening. Some comments stated that the current conflict is due to the poor (potholes) surface restricting the useable surface.

Council comments – Signage will be implemented in accordance with the “C&RT Better Towpaths for Everyone” document to support this and ongoing safety education which could include CRT Share the Space events on the towpath.

- The Grosvenor Bridge link from the canal towpath improvements are supported because of the poor condition but concerns about speeding cyclists.

Council response: The ability to widen the Grosvenor Bridge link path is limited, and signage in accordance with the C&RT document “Better Towpaths for Everyone” will be erected.

- There were requests for additional works such additional seating, dog litter bins, improvement of the steps from the bottom of the Grosvenor Bridge path to the canal towpath, Meadow Lane Bridge bypass, improvements to the lower path from Hampton Row to the Grosvenor Bridge path and improvements to the canal towpath between Sydney gardens and Bathwick Hill.

Council response: These will be considered to assess whether or not they are within the project remit and subject to funding available.

- Request for the works to be extended at Darlington Wharf to Beckford Road.

Council response: This will be completed as a separate CRT project.

5.11 The overall results for boat users and anglers indicate that these user groups view the resurfacing as better or about the same, although there is still concern regarding speeding cyclists.

5.12 The questionnaire responses from people physically disabled and/or blind and visually impaired would indicate that the stone chip surface is generally favoured and considered that the improvements will make it better for pedestrians or about the same. However, again there are concerns regarding speeding cyclists. The responses from deaf or hearing impaired towpath users favoured a stone chipped or resin bound surface but it was more of an equal split between those who thought it make it better or worse for pedestrians.

Cycle Parking

- 5.13 The first task would be to audit the existing and assess where new cycle parking can be located on the Public Highway.
- 5.14 The proposed locations and designs will be presented at the Highways and Traffic Scheme Assessment meeting and submitted to the Planning Department if required before installation.

6 RATIONALE

- 6.1 It is apparent that the existing condition of the towpath is reasonably poor, as the dust/ stone path has deteriorated to give an uneven rough surface which is not ideal for pedestrians and could also be a deterrent to cyclists, of which there are significant numbers of both leisure and commuter users.
- 6.2 The initial Scoping Environmental Appraisal and preliminary work carried out by the C&RT would indicate that a high durability surface is required based on the high levels of current usage together with anticipated increased cyclist commuter use.
- 6.3 The project will support the Council's Community Strategy by improving both Local Transport and the local economy and by promoting healthier (more active) lifestyles. The project will also provide important support for the Core Strategy in promoting less use of the car. Finally the project has an excellent fit with the Joint Local Transport Plan.
- 6.4 The Canal and River Trust (C&RT) is the Charity entrusted with the care of 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales, including the length of the Kennet and Avon Canal between Bathampton and Sydney Gardens. The C&RT have already carried out an initial Scoping Environmental Appraisal Report of this length of towpath, and have identified it as being in need of improvement.
- 6.5 The C&RT also recognise the potential for further commuter use, and as a result of their initial assessment the C&RT have proposed a "tar spray and chip" path, which is one of the options considered in Appendix 4.
- 6.6 The Council is keen to improve connectivity on its walking and cycle routes within the District, and has recently provided a new crossing of the River Avon in Batheaston, thus creating a new strong new link between Batheaston and Bathampton. It is possible that this new link may now attract further commuter cyclists onto the towpath to gain access to the City of Bath. Further leisure use is also being promoted by Sustrans' suggested 13 mile circuit linking the new Two Tunnels cycleway.
- 6.7 Improvements that are currently being considered that would connect directly with the Bathampton towpath improvement include:
- Improved link between the Kennet and Avon towpath to Grosvenor Bridge (included as part of the CAF 2 towpath works).
 - Improvements to Mill Lane in Bathampton which connects the Batheaston foot/cycleway to the George Inn at Bathampton (this could include modifications to the speed limit along Mill Lane).

- A possible toucan crossing on the A4 London Road in the St Saviours area of Bath to provide a cycle link from Larkhall to the Grosvenor Bridge access.
 - Possible improvements at Beckford Road and Sydney Place to improve the link to the Sydney Gardens area.
- 6.8 These improvements will provide strong links between residential areas on the east side of Bath and the city centre, thus integrating the canal and towpath into the fabric of the city centre.
- 6.9 The existing condition of the path presents a barrier to those members of the public with a range of mobility and visual impairments. The improvements will benefit people by providing a smooth hard surface.
- 6.10 Resurfacing of the Kennet & Avon canal path would benefit two primary schools in the vicinity (Bathampton Primary School and Bathwick St Mary). Previous consultation with both schools provides evidence that this would provide safety benefits to both schools. Both schools have demonstrated that their parents and pupils want to walk and cycle more than at present, and that improvements to routes which are safe and traffic free would enable this. The canal path is used by families to walk and cycle in a traffic free environment, but inclement weather currently causes hazards and undesirable conditions on the towpath which causes many parents to resort to driving, thus exacerbating safety concerns at the school gates through high congestion of vehicles. There is therefore good evidence to suggest that resurfacing the path would benefit parents, pupils and staff at both of these local schools, who would be supported in their desire to use the path for walking and cycling to school in a greater range of weather conditions.
- 6.11 The potential for greater use by cyclists of the towpath might impact on parking within Bath & North East, either in terms of less parking because of greater commuter cycle trips, or conversely more parking as a result of people driving to the area to take advantage of the leisure cycling routes. C&RT will carry out a "Visitor risk assessment" as part of their on-going design process.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 Other towpath surface options considered included tarmac and resin bound surfaces which are considered in appendix 4. Tarmac would not produce an aesthetically pleasing finish for the towpath at this location. A smooth bituminous finish to the path could also result in high cyclist speeds on the path. Resin bound gravel should provide an aesthetically pleasing surface finish but its smooth surface finish might still encourage high cyclist speeds and would be approximately 40% to 50% more expensive than a tar spray and chip surface.
- 7.2 There are a number of additional possible surfacing options for routes along a towpath, all with their own benefits and issues depending upon the local context. These include a soft path such as grass or paving slabs, but these are not suitable for the reasons detailed below.
- 7.3 A soft path, such as grass would tend to be used where there is a low intensity of use as drainage can be an issue with the route becoming muddy and rutted after periods of rain. A grass surface would not provide a path that could accommodate cyclists, for example, and this type of path is therefore considered unsuitable for the section of route from Bathampton to Sydney Gardens.

7.4 A path comprised of paving slabs would provide a wide choice of colour, size, type and laying pattern. However paving slabs (whether they are natural stone, reconstituted stone, brick pavers or high quality concrete paving units) are traditionally located in urban areas, particularly where there is a high commuter use. This type of path is therefore also deemed to be inappropriate for the rural location of this route.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 Section 151 officer, monitoring officer, procurement team, Strategic Director Place and Cabinet member for transport have had opportunity to review this report.

8.2 The C&RT have already carried out a Scoping Environmental Appraisal which has flagged issues regarding listed bridges and buildings and working within a Conservation Area, for example. The C&RT will build on this initial assessment by carrying out a full Environmental Appraisal which will further highlight areas that require consultation with specialist national and local organisations.

8.3 On 28th and 29th August 2015 two public consultation events were held to establish towpath user's views on the towpath improvement proposals. This was done by questionnaire. There was also the opportunity to complete an on line questionnaire up to 11th September 2015. The consultation events were advertised by the erection of posters along the towpath, the distribution of leaflets and via the media. Stakeholders directly affected by the proposals were invited by letter to the consultation events. Approximately 200 people attended the events.

8.4 Questionnaires were made available at the consultation events for completion at the event or by return in a pre-paid envelope to the Council. There was also the opportunity for respondents to complete an on line questionnaire, with all responses being required by the close of the consultation process on 11th September 2015.

8.5 There were a total of 382 responses and the results of this consultation are shown detailed and analysed in appendix 2 and discussed in section 5.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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Background papers	
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