

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cabinet Members Cllr Joanna Wright and Cllr Neil Butters, Cabinet Members for Transport	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	On or after 30th January 2021 (for single Member decision)	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3250
TITLE:	Chew Valley Recreational Trail	
WARD:	Mendip	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1: location plan Appendix 2: Planning permissions Appendix 3: 25 Year Environment Plan goals Appendix 4: Impact Assessment Tool Kit Appendix 5: Section 151 officer letter for WECA bid		

1 THE ISSUE

To confirm the proposal is for the construction of approximately 2.75km shared use path around Chew Valley Lake.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Members are asked to;

2.1 Agree to change the provisional Capital programme item for Chew Valley Recreational Trail from £1,000,000 to £1,519,285.

£60,000 for 2020/21 and £1,459,285 for 2021/22.

2.2 Agree to delegate the approval to the Director of Partnership and Corporate Services in consultation with the S151 Finance officer to;

- i) **Enter funding agreement with WECA to fund investment in the Chew Valley Recreational Trail and demonstrate compliance with the pre-commencement funding project specific conditions of WECA & Rural Payments Agency funding.**
- ii). **Move provisional capital approved to full approval upon entry to Funding Agreements and commitment to proceed with expenditure.**

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 The figure of £1,000,000 was included in the provisional Capital programme as a cost estimate for the project using the information available at the time. Since then the cost of this project has been evaluated in detail, funding bids have been awarded and the cost is now estimated at £1,519,285.
- 3.2 The Chew Valley Lake, a reservoir owned by Bristol Water (BW), has long been used for recreational fishing & sailing, under strict control. Over the last 10 plus years sections of the lakeside have been made accessible for walking and sections of traffic free cycling adjacent to the road. It is the ambition of Bristol Water, Bath & North East Somerset Council, Sustrans, West of England Rural Network & the local community to create a circular walking and cycling trail around the whole lake to open this natural amenity for all whilst taking account of its international, national and local landscape and wildlife designations. This trail will form part of a green active travel network in the WoE, and project within the Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy (JGIS) AONB Link Programme.
- 3.3 The Chew Valley Lake Recreational Trail project is part of the West of England (WoE), Joint Green Infrastructure (JGIS), AONB Link Programme (Cotswolds to Mendip Hills AONBs) that includes development of a green active travel plan and delivery of the WoE and AONB local nature recovery strategies.
- 3.4 This project will provide a well-constructed all-weather off-road shared trail for cyclists and walkers around Chew Valley Lake. Whilst providing greater access to natural green space, benefitting residents and tourists, it will protect the landscape character, habitat and wildlife, that has national and international designation status.
- 3.5 The objectives are to:

Enable responsible community and visitor access to the designated international and national wildlife site in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, that provides access for a wide audience

The scheme will achieve:

- Construction of new off-road shared use path between Woodford Lodge and Walley Lane that will total approximately 840m in length
- Realignment of the road over the dam which will widen the existing footway to provide a segregated cycle/pedestrian path and reduce the road width and road speed from current 50 mph speed limit to 30mph thereby also improving road safety and reducing carbon emissions.

- Construction of a shared use path between the dam to the north and Hollowbrook Road. This also includes replacing an existing narrow footbridge. Total length approximately 1.5km.
- 3.6 Planning permission has been granted for the northern section in June 2019. It will link with the east section given planning permission in 2011 but had only one section constructed. See appendix 2 for details.
- 3.7 The project delivers on a number of the 25 Year Environment Plan goals: Clean air, thriving plants and wildlife, enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural beauty. It supports delivery of the JGIS outcomes particularly; Greater resilience to climate change, Valued healthy landscapes, Resilient Economy, Health and Wellbeing, Sustainable Places. See table in appendix 3.
- 3.8 The all-weather northern section is intended for use by wheelchairs/mobility scooters users as much as walkers and cyclists. Currently those with mobility issues have limited and restricted access to the lake and cannot travel, other than by car, between the two major visitor facilities on the lake. See section 7.
- 3.9 This green infrastructure project delivers a range of multi-benefits with regard to improving opportunities for people's health and wellbeing and, providing opportunities for access to the natural and cultural resources which contribute to the AONB special qualities, and lake status as a SPA and SSSI.
- 3.10 The new trail will help people from all backgrounds and abilities access nature, removing physical and perceived barriers to the countryside and potentially reducing isolation, thus helping people's physical health and their mental health and wellbeing. Government policy increasingly recognises the importance of greenspace in people's health and wellbeing for promoting good health, prevention of poor health and treatment and recovery from illness and injury. The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, 'A green future: Our 25-year plan to improve the environment' (25YEP) (12) acknowledges the essential role that the natural environment and greenspace play in people's physical and mental health, and aims to improve population health and wellbeing by forging a closer connection between people and the natural environment.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 Discharge of Planning Conditions under Town and Country Act as detailed in Appendix 2
- 4.2 Due to Chew Valley Lake being a European designated Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) situated in the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), particular attention has had to be taken in designing the route and additional requirements met as part of the planning permission process with regard to sustainability and climate action considerations. See section 8 below.
- 4.3 Traffic Regulation Orders will be required for the proposed speed limit reduction on Walley Court Road and to suspend motorised rights at the south east end of Woodford Lane adjacent to Chew Valley Lake for the provision of the route at this location. These are being progressed or will be progressed in due course as required.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 5.1 The total cost estimate for this project is £1,519,285 (£56,800 for design/fees and £1,462,485 for construction). A Rural Development Programme England (RDPE) grant of £506,685 has been secured to be spent and claimed by July 2021. The works cannot commence until the required pre-commencement planning conditions have been met and all land agreements are in place.
- 5.2 West of England Combined Authority (WECA) has awarded £1,005,800. This is subject to resolution of land issues and planning conditions, the supply of a detailed programme and the confirmation of the final costs.
- 5.3 Bristol Water have contributed. £6,800 to B&NES Council for design work on this project in 2020/21.
- 5.4 A contractually binding agreement between Bristol Water and the third-party landowner is being progressed to facilitate the construction of the route and use of the path by cyclists and pedestrians.
- 5.5 Bristol Water have committed in principle to the future maintenance of the route including that part of the route on third party land as detailed in section 5.6.
- 5.6 In 2018 the CVLRT Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) was set up with Trustees for Bristol Water (BW), B&NES, and members of the local community to support management and maintenance of the route after construction and take forward visitor management, interpretation and community engagement work, working closely with BW. BW as the main landowner have confirmed their commitment to maintain the trail on their land and the third-party land recognising the CIO as the potential mechanism through which they will finance this work and attract financial support possibly through visitor giving. It is intended through the CIO to engage with volunteers through social prescribing and direct community engagement to undertake practical conservation management.
- 5.7 The highway works will be maintained by Bath and North East Somerset Council. This work will renew an existing asset. The expected future maintenance costs for the carriageway will be nil for first 5 years and minor 5 – 10 years with some patching 10 – 15years. After 10+ years surface dressing is likely to be required. It is anticipated that no maintenance will be required for 20 years other than minor patching the footway.
- 5.8 Feasibility and design works have been advanced to date within the Transport Improvement Plan with forecast cost of £60,000, in addition to costs outlined above.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.
- 6.2 The appropriate road safety audits will be carried and a Walking, Cycling & Horse Riding Assessment and Review (WCHAR) will be completed.

7 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 B&NES Equalities Impact Assessment Tool Kit (see appendix 4) is being used and will be reviewed through the implementation and delivery of the project. Assessment and actions consider visitor information being appropriate to all users, opportunity for feedback from all users, review seating, signage, facilities, cycle lock up disabled parking and staff training.
- 7.2 The Council under the Public Sector Equality Act 2010 has duties to eliminate discrimination and provide access for all around the highway network including design of footways, crossing points and general road safety. The scheme has been designed to fully take these and planning policies into account. This shared use facility will be designed to provide access for all permitted users, whether on foot, or via a variety of wheeled means. Any ramps or necessary gradients and road crossings detailed will comply the DfT Inclusive mobility, the Sustrans Design Manual and other current design guidance. These has been fully taken into account by the scheme engineer.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

- 8.1 The project would contribute to the 25 year Environment Plan through the following outcomes:

Clean Air: The local connections will provide safe links between local communities and local facilities, and so should reduce local short travel trips and help to reduce local congestion. Emissions from the most frequent car journeys should therefore be reduced.

Thriving Plants and Animals – the immediate project for the northern section is associated with a requirement to provide and implement an Ecological Management & Monitoring Plan and so will deliver new and additional habitat management to some habitats and areas. The wider scheme has the potential to secure more significant benefits by securing more substantive changes to the way the lake is used and managed to benefit key wildlife.

Enhanced Beauty: planning approvals associated with the project are also associated with landscape management plans

Heritage and Engagement with natural beauty: this scheme for the northern section of the trail, and the wider trail bring substantive opportunities for people to access and engage with this site which has largely been inaccessible to many people. In particular access for buggies and wheelchairs is particularly significant.

- 8.2 It supports delivery of the JGIS outcomes particularly; Greater resilience to climate change, Valued healthy landscapes, Resilient Economy, Health and Wellbeing, Sustainable Places.
- 8.3 The Cotswolds- Mendip Hills Link (AONB Linkway) is identified in the adopted B&NES GI Strategy (2013) – it intends to strengthen the habitat and access connectivity between the Mendip Hills and southern part of the Cotswolds AONB. To some extent these two AONBs are linked naturally by exiting east west river corridors of the Wellow and Cam. In terms of recreation and active access they are connected by the Limestone Link. However, there is no specific

strategy or initiative to link the two AONBs proactively for recreational or ecological benefits. The Chew Valley recreational trail provides opportunities to build on recreational links through the National Cycle Route 3, encouraging access to the Lake via active travel rather than by car, and also for developing and enhancing habitat links.

8.4 The route surface is an all-weather route that will allow all year round use by local community and visitors. In creating a trail that links to existing cycle and walking routes and by creating a safer route between communities by reducing traffic speeds on the dam, it will potentially reduce car journeys and thereby carbon emissions.

8.5 As a Green Infrastructure scheme this project will provide a wide range of multi-functional benefits, in line with the West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy and the West of England Unitary and Combined Authorities Climate Change Emergency declarations.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 Options for the route alignment were subject to detailed discussion with B&NES Highways, Natural England & local private land owners, to ensure along with projected costing for detailed design, construction & future maintenance the route will ensure protection of wildlife & habitat and be a route that will be attractive and safe for users, and respects the wildlife. No other viable options were identified.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 The idea of the Chew Valley Lake Recreational Trail was first proposed by Chew Valley Recreational Trail Association (CVRTA) in 1999. Since then there have been studies & consultations over many years & some sections of route have been constructed but large parts of the lake remain inaccessible to visitors & there is not currently an accessible circular route.

10.2 The Chew Valley Transport Strategy (2017) https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/siteimages/Parking-and-Travel/final_draft_chew_valley_transport_strategy_-_non_technical_report_oct_17.pdf includes an action (CV7) to progress the Chew Valley Lake route stating that new off road routes would engender a new cycling culture and should be supported. In addition, it proposes off-road cycle route improvements between Chew Magna and Chew Stoke and Bishop Sutton and Chew Stoke to improve access to Chew Valley School should be progressed. Neighbourhood Plans (Chew Valley Parishes NP and Stowey Sutton NP) for the parishes surrounding the lake all refer to the importance to the local community of a circular route around the lake. These plans have all been created through formal consultation & adopted by the local community through referenda.

10.3 As part of this project Sustrans organised Community Consultation in June 2018 and produced a Consultation summary report July 2018 that showed 92% of respondents supported the scheme. The two reasons given for supporting the proposal were:

- Enabling access to lake and natural resource, and

- Enabling more active travel.

10.4 Consultation has also been carried out as part of the planning process.

10.5 The section 151 officer has given approval for this project as part of the WECA funding bid. See letter in Appendix 5.

10.6 The Monitoring Officer has been consulted.

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Background papers	
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	