

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Richard Samuel, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Resources	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	On or after 14 May 2022	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3355
TITLE:	Bath River Line– WECA investment funding to deliver Phase I interventions	
WARD:	Newbridge and Kingsmead Wards	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM/		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 A £1,048.5k grant for Phase I of the Bath River Line has been secured from the West of England Combined Authority's Investment Fund.
- 1.2 A proposal put forward by B&NES Council through a Full Business Case for Phase I focused on the delivery of an initial suite of key strategic interventions along the River Avon in the west of Bath, between Newbridge and Bath Quays. The project will support the B&NES Green Infrastructure Strategy and help to address the Climate and Ecological emergencies by enhancing and expanding existing green spaces, enabling active travel, and connecting communities to their natural environment.
- 1.3 This report requests agreement to accept the £1,048.5k grant funding award from WECA in line with the Bath River Line Phase I Full Business Case approved at WECA Committee on 8th April 2022 (link in the Background Papers section). This Report summarises key items of proposed spend, funding approval mechanisms and the key deliverables and outputs anticipated.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is asked to;

- 2.1 Delegate approval to the Director of Sustainable Communities, in consultation with the s151 officer, to accept the £1,048k grant from WECA. This will allow full approval of the confirmed £1,162k in capital funds for Bath River Line Phase 1 as outlined in Section 5 of this report. These funds will be spent over a one-year period in line with the Full Business Case and the approved landscape designs.

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 B&NES Council recently secured £1,048k from WECA's Investment Fund for Phase I of the Bath River Line, via a Full Business Case approved at WECA Committee on 8th April 2022.
- 3.2 The Bath River Line is an ambitious green infrastructure project developed in partnership with the Canal & Rivers Trust, the Environment Agency, Wessex Water, the National Trust and Bath Spa University. In its entirety, the Bath River Line project will form a continuous 10km linear park from Newbridge to Batheaston, connecting communities, enhancing and expanding natural habitats and providing a level, accessible active travel route through the heart of the city. The funding secured via the WECA Investment Fund is for Phase I of the project and focuses on the delivery of an initial suite of key strategic interventions in the west, between Newbridge and Bath Quays.
- 3.3 Many sections of the river corridor are in decline and there is a decrease in the quality of the natural environment. Urgent mitigation is required to halt the decline of this important natural asset and take advantage of the extraordinary opportunity the River Avon presents to create a flagship green infrastructure project for B&NES and the West of England which directly addresses the climate and ecological emergency.
- 3.4 As well as addressing ecological decline, the BRL also meets a community need for improved walking and cycling infrastructure, which is not addressed by the private sector. Forming a strategic spine through the city centre, the BRL has been designed to help catalyse and leverage funding from future private sector investments along the river corridor. The BRL will also connect to, and help enable, the active travel measures being pursued by B&NES via the City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) programme. The schemes will be mutually supportive, helping to achieve a step change in sustainable mobility.
- 3.5 The Phase I interventions seek to:
 - Enhance and expand the active travel network in Bath by widening and enhancing existing towpaths/ paths and providing new LTN120 compliant infrastructure wherever possible.
 - Improve biodiversity and climate change resilience through the enhancement of existing, and the creation of new, natural habitats as well as through the provision of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs).

- Provide a welcoming, safe and attractive public space for residents and visitors, which is easy to navigate and with high quality surface materials and street furniture to enhance the setting of the World Heritage Site.
- Create new economic opportunities and support/ enhance the tourism, leisure and cultural offer in Bath by providing improved access to the water for recreational businesses, providing an additional destination for tourists and signposting and bringing additional footfall to businesses outside the city centre.

3.6 The Bath River Line firmly supports the B&NES Green Infrastructure Strategy by directly addressing the strategy's key objectives including enabling the creation of a sustainably managed, connected green infrastructure network which helps to support healthy and fit communities. It will also help mitigate the impacts of climate change, enhancing the unique and beautiful landscape of the district, showcasing excellence.

3.7 The proposals also support the B&NES Council Core Strategy and Place Making Plan With multiple cross-cutting benefits, The Bath River Line supports several policies including SU1; CP6; D1; D2; D10, ST1 and CP7. Specifically, it addresses policies NE2 to conserve and enhances landscape and landscape character; NE3 to conserve and increase the abundance and diversity of habitats and species and protect natural features; NE4 to protect and enhance ecosystem services; NE5 to connect and enhance ecological networks and CP7 to protect, enhance and manage the integrity, multi-functionality, quality, and connectivity of strategic green infrastructure.

3.8 The Bath River Line is also specifically mentioned as a key action in the B&NES Climate and Ecological Action Plan under both *Transport and Active Travel* and *Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity*.

3.9 The key deliverables for Phase I of the project can be summarised as follows:

- Approximately 4230m² of enhanced/ new walking/ cycling paths.
- Approximately 886m² of new planting including woodland and wildflower gardens.
- Approximately 696m² edible walking trail.
- Approximately 14 new trees.
- Minimum of 10 wayfinding totems.
- Decluttering the public realm and removing obstacles.
- Providing new, well-placed cycle racks.
- Providing seating nooks with space for wheelchairs, mobility scooters and buggies.
- Public art interventions to attract visitors and address antisocial behaviour (graffiti).
- Provision of rain garden for SUD.

- Planting climbers to discourage anti-social behaviour (graffiti)
- Opening and enhancing views to the river.
- Running a lighting pilot with Bath Spa University ecology students to test different solutions/ technologies. The findings from this pilot will be used to inform all future designs coming forward as part of the WaterSpace Connected programme and across B&NES.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 Ownership of Phase I of the BRL is almost entirely with public and charitable ownership and is split between the Canal and River's Trust, B&NES and Bath Spa University. A small triangle of land is owned by Rotork Ltd. Where interventions are located on partner land, these will require suitable legal agreements between B&NES and the Registered Title Owner to define ownership and ongoing operation and maintenance.
- 4.2 The proposals located wholly on council-owned land do not require planning permission and are permitted under Part 12 of the General Permitted Development Order. The proposals on Canal & Rivers Trust land fall under the Canal & Rivers Trust Permitted Development Rights available to the Trust under The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended), Schedule 2, Part 8, Class B and therefore do not require planning permission.
- 4.3 The remaining proposals, located on land owned by Bath Spa University and Rotork will require planning permission. Following a pre-application meeting, the interventions are acceptable in principle and supported by planning, representing an enhancement to the public realm within a key pedestrian and cyclist route in the west of the city of Bath.
- 4.4 In addition to landowner consents, the project also requires consent from the Environment Agency, as works are being undertaken within 8m of the river's edge. It has been confirmed by the Environment Agency that no Flood Risk Approval Permits (FRAPS) are required for Phase I.
- 4.5 Terms and conditions of government funding including consideration of state aid, best value and competitive tendering etc, form part of the scope of work and will need to be followed throughout the course of the project.
- 4.6 Equalities Impact Assessment considering accessibility has been undertaken to inform the scheme proposals, and ongoing accessibility assessment will inform the technical design stage.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 5.1 A provisional capital budget already exists for Bath River Line Phase 1. This comprises:

A Provisional Capital Budget of £1,612k funded by:

- £1,048k WECA Investment Fund grant;

- £435k from developer S106 contributions;
- £59k from strategic Community Infrastructure Levy; and
- £70k from supported borrowing.

5.2 Delegated Approval to the Director of Sustainable Communities, in consultation with the s151 officer, is sought to fully accept the £1,048k WECA grant funding which will then be integrated into the Council's approved capital programme under the usual approval processes.

5.3 For this first phase of the project, the operation and management of the interventions will fall with the existing management and maintenance regimes. In addition, as part of the construction contracts, B&NES will look to include a 24-month defect period for all landscape works.

5.4 At present the condition of the towpath/ paths is poor and often requires reactive maintenance. Additionally, the layout is poor and does not allow for easy access for maintenance vehicles and more efficient technologies such as mechanical sweepers. Whilst the ongoing operation and maintenance of the scheme might incur small additional costs, this increase is overdue and will significantly reduce the need for reactive maintenance whilst bringing much needed safety and public realm improvements to the area whilst significantly enhancing biodiversity.

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.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 The detailed design and delivery of the interventions will need to address and consider equalities impacts as a key part of the technical design process. Key recommendations to this effect are included in the Equalities Assessment.

7.2 The design for the Phase I interventions and the Equalities Assessment have been informed by input from community accessibility groups including WECIL (West of England Centre for Inclusive Living) as well as specialist landscape architects and consultants and therefore utilises specialist knowledge of accessibility requirements.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 As a strategic green infrastructure scheme, environmental sustainability and climate action have been central to the design and development of the Bath River Line.

8.2 The Bath River Line will improve wildlife habitats and boost biodiversity through the inclusion of bird and bat boxes, otter ledges and brash piles. It will create new areas of riparian planting along the riverbank, providing habitats for dragonflies, damselflies and amphibians which is currently lacking. A rich variety of native plant species have been specified, attracting pollinators whilst at the same time reducing watering and maintenance requirements during the operational phase of the project. The project supports local food production through the inclusion of

edible walking trails and vegetable gardens and will help improve climate resilience and water management through the provision of raingardens.

- 8.3 Central to the Bath River Line is the creation of a level, fully accessible walking and cycling route. This is expected to result in a significant increase in walking and cycling rates across the city, with all the associated benefits including reduced road congestion, climate change emissions, local toxic air pollution, noise and road danger as well as improved mental and physical health outcomes, increased social cohesion and benefits to local businesses through increased footfall (Public Health England, 2016).
- 8.4 To conserve resources, wherever possible the existing infrastructure along the route will be reused or refurbished including utilising existing paths as a sub-base and refurbishing existing handrails.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 9.1 There is an option to decline the grant from WECA and not progress the Bath River Line programme or to re-scope parts of the projects. However, the river corridor is in urgent need of support and investment. Without the project, the existing towpath/ path as well as the natural habitats along the River Avon will continue to degrade and the council will miss the opportunity to significantly improve walking and cycling rates across the city, directly addressing the climate and ecological emergency. The funding now will allow benefits for the community to be realised as soon as possible.
- 9.2 Work to demonstrate the economic, social, and environmental value benefits of the Bath River Line Phase I interventions was prepared by WSP as part of the Full Business Case. The initial Benefit Cost Ratio for Phase I of the Bath River Line is 2.3:1, suggesting it has the potential to deliver high value for money. This calculation is based on monetised benefits alone. There is also the potential for other impacts not currently captured or monetised in the appraisal to positively impact on the scheme benefits, and further boost the value for money. There are wider impacts associated with the GVA generated from increased construction and tourism jobs and also increased visitor spend. The scheme offers benefits in terms of severance, affordability and access to services. From an environmental perspective, the scheme will have a beneficial impact on landscape, townscape and biodiversity.

10 CONSULTATION

- 10.1 The development of the project scope has been informed by consistent consultation and engagement with local residents, businesses, community groups and stakeholders. The scheme proposals were themselves developed by a partnership of stakeholders including B&NES Council, the Environment Agency, Wessex Water, Canal & Rivers Trust, Bath Spa University and the National Trust.
- 10.2 Further engagement with key stakeholders will be undertaken as part of the technical design development.

10.3 The undertaking of the original Bath River Line Phase I WECA grant funding application was agreed by the s151 officer, Chief Executive, Cabinet and Senior Management and carried out in line with Council strategies and priorities.

10.4 The report has been agreed by the s151 Officer and Monitoring Officer.

<p>Contact person</p>	<p><i>Sophie Broadfield Director of Sustainable Communities</i></p> <p><i>Mark Minkley, Strategic Manager Green Infrastructure and Recovery</i></p> <p><i>Kim Moubray, WaterSpace Manager (Bath River Line Lead)</i></p>
<p>Background papers</p>	<p><i>B&NES Green Infrastructure Strategy</i></p> <p><i>https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/environment/green-infrastructure#:~:text=The%20B%26NES%20Green%20Infrastructure%20Strategy,within%20and%20beyond%20the%20district.</i></p> <p><i>B&NES Core Strategy & Placemaking Plan</i></p> <p><i>https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/local-planning-policy-and-guidance</i></p> <p><i>WECA Committee Decision to approve grant funding for the Bath River line Phase I on 8th April 2022:</i></p>
<p>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</p>	