

Pre-Scrutiny questions and answers on reports being considered by Cabinet on 25 May 2022

(This forms part of the considerations at Group meetings before a decision is made on which Cabinet reports will be called-in for scrutiny by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee)

4. Programme Team (Green Spaces) – Resourcing Delivery of Live Projects

Questions asked by Councillor Syson and [responses from Ruth Hytch – Programme Manager](#)

1. Am I right in assuming that funds are now being sought as they were not included in the Council's budget for 2022/23? Is this the right time to be asking for funding from the General Fund when we do not yet know the revised Medium Term Finance Strategy following the decision not to merge with Stratford District Council? The General Fund may have had savings at the end of March 2022 but these may be needed more urgently elsewhere, though I note that the Section 151 Officer confirms that the funding asked for is available.

Response

WDC was previously committed to these projects and work on them has been progressed to a point where they are about to be implemented. Funds and staff time have already been committed to their fulfilment. Much of this work could have to be repeated were they to be paused now. They are noted in the Council Business Strategy 2020-2023 as key Council projects. Whilst it is recognised that the Council's overall funding position needs to be clarified by the S151 Officer, the funding for this initiative is one-off and can be sourced from an available balance.

2. I do acknowledge that £350,000 is not an enormous sum and is budgeted to last until the end of the financial year 25/26 but Table 5 , Staffing resource, only allows for 2% annual increase in staffing costs. Given the current level of inflation is that wise? Table 6 only allows for 2% increase in annual costs as well. Is that enough?

Response

Based on advice from the S151 Officer, the current calculations that the Council is using are for 2% annual increase in staffing costs. The same applies for Table 6.

3. The cycle tracks: are those the ones for which outside funding is/was being sought, or the others? What is the 'public', ie non-confidential, answer to where we are on that funding?

Response

Funding To Ride Funding through British Cycling and Sport England has been sought. The funding is not confirmed until a funding agreement is executed and this is well under way, with officers in close dialogue with the funders over the last eighteen months.

4. The £119,000 is for the launch and operation of the cycle facilities. Operation for how long? Table 5 refers to a Cycles Site specialist and Cycling liaison which are only until the end of 24/25 but Table 6 indicates spending until the end of 25/26.

Response

Bearing in mind the context of a review of the wider Council MTFs, it has been proposed (see note at Table 5 and Recommendation 4) that this is treated as a transitional phase to get the final operational needs of the facility clearly established and is therefore reviewed at the end of 24/25, whereas the roll out of education and development of cycling in relation to the use of the facilities and working with local voluntary organisations is anticipated to need a further time period to the end of 25/26 to make it sustainable beyond that time. The operational lifetime of the trails will be much longer term than this first point of establishment.

I note that recommendation 4 says "That ongoing assessment is undertaken of the operational needs of the cycling facility to establish the future resources required **in its first 18 months of operation.**" That implies that in the next 18 months more money than set out in Tables 5 and 6 may be needed. Is that right?

Response

The operation of the facilities is a new venture and will need to settle before we understand fully the maintenance and operational needs. Whilst we have benchmarked with other facilities to understand what that implies, this may vary for our specific circumstances. Bearing in mind the current review of the MTFs and general context of a changing Council, the 24/25 date allows for 18 months' operation to enable a clearer assessment of needs for the site. These can therefore be established amongst other financial considerations for the Council. Other spending relates to the ongoing project commitment to get delivery of it to a defined milestone and the date is therefore later.

Maintenance would be ongoing beyond the 18 months period and if grant funding is confirmed, there is a long term commitment to maintain and deliver the facilities to a recognised British Cycling standard.

Will there be charges for the use of these facilities?

Response

There will be no charges for this facility. The wider Newbold Comyn masterplan provides for a mix of charged for and free facilities. The aim of this is to enable access and enjoyment for all site visitors.

5. I agree with recommendation (3) but am not clear about the date of 2025. A review needs to be done before then, or does that date refer to work still being done or in the pipeline in 2025?

“That a review is undertaken of the commitment of the Programme Team including pipeline workloads in April **2025.**”

Response

April 2025 is proposed bearing in mind the current overall review of the Council via the MTFS. Whilst the programmes for the projects are currently clearly identified, it is the nature of project delivery that other factors can impact ongoing implementation. A review at this point is viewed therefore to be prudent.

6. When the Council allocates funds in future to some or all of the Pipeline Projects in Table 2, will that include resourcing the Programme Team?

Response

The Council is currently reviewing the resources required for all projects' delivery and which pipeline projects will become priorities. This will include the resourcing of the Programme Team.

Questions asked by Councillor R Dickson

Is the much-delayed Abbey Fields Management Plan a 'live' project? If so, should it be included on this list?

Response

The Abbey Fields Management Plan is a live project but is being implemented by the Green Space team rather than the Programme Team. It is not currently intended to transfer this work between the teams. At the moment, consultation responses are being collated with a view to progressing the work further. In addition, it is hoped that a report on a cycle link at Abbey Fields will be coming forward to the Cabinet in the near future.

Questions asked by Councillor Quinney and [responses from Ruth Hytch – Programme Manager](#)

1. Only questions there are for clarification of the agreed Newbold Comyn cycling project -
- have the overall costs changed?

Response: The overall costs have changed due to factors such as labour and material.

- has all the external funding been obtained?

Response: Places To Ride Funding through British Cycling and Sport England has been sought. The funding is not confirmed until a funding agreement is executed and this is well under way. Any further discussion of this progress would currently need to be private and confidential.

- is the WDC funding commitment unchanged?

Response: The initial funding commitment is unchanged. This request would add to that commitment and is based on the detailed consideration of the appropriate consideration of regulatory requirements for its delivery, including protection and enhancement of ecology and archaeology.

- does this project spend effectively add to that commitment?

Response: see notes above.

2. How does this extra project management resource relate to the resources managed by Paddy Herlihy on Leisure projects i.e. are they net additional or partly replacement?

Response: The Programme Team was established in 2020 and was originally formed based on the project workload in Neighbourhood Services/ Environmental and Operational Services alone. It should be noted, as set out in the paper, that this team is required to work differently, including the development and design of project concepts and direct management of project implementation. It has therefore not been a replacement for the team looking after projects in Leisure.

Questions asked by Councillor Cullinan and responses from Ruth Hytch – Programme Manager

1. In 5.3, you refer to 'learning gained in early implementation', can I ask what was learned?

Response: The formation of the Programme Team responded to some early learning about the way projects evolve in the Council and the importance of a single team to have oversight and early intervention in planning forwards at the right practical point for efficient implementation. In addition, the consultants' concepts for the projects did not include their practical implementation, meaning that additional details for consideration in their delivery have emerged as implementation has progressed. Examples are:

- The construction methods for cycle trails is more 'organic' to ensure safety for all and appropriate final trail lines for the planned tracks. This differs from 'traditional' path construction.
- At Newbold Comyn, consideration of important safety factors means that staffing resource will be needed as the transition from construction to operation takes place.

2. There is no reference made to the partners in the mountain bike track and cycling hub? These organisations were very visible in the Planning Application and Planning Committee, is there a reason for this?

Response: The project at Newbold Comyn includes some very willing volunteers and partners. These partners are not responsible for the implementation of the project and its construction of facilities which remains wholly within the Council. The operator of the hub will be a commercial lease arrangement between the Council and a provider. This lease is still to be confirmed. Other partners continue to work with us on the cycling development strategy and will be instrumental in supporting us to ensure all site users have the relevant information and conduct themselves appropriately, so that everyone can continue to enjoy the increasing offer of facilities at Newbold Comyn.

Questions asked by Councillor Kohler and responses from Ruth Hytch – Programme Manager

The majority of the requested funds are to extend 2 fixed term Project Managers for the 3 years from the 2023-24 financial year onwards.

Could you remind me when these roles were created?

Response: The Programme Team was created in 2020 and commenced operation on 1 April 2020.

How confident are we that there will be sufficient Green Spaces team projects that both of these roles will be required for all 3 of the additional years? For example, will no permanent Project Managers be available from other teams during that time?

Response: We are confident that the posts will be required as this paper is based on the current workload to get the projects to clear milestone points (rather than complete the whole masterplans agreed for Tachbrook Country Park and Newbold Comyn). As the paper notes at paragraph 1.4 a broad set of skills and experience are required to fulfil the team's work. A number of recruitment rounds were taken to fully staff the team and tested the internal 'market' of skills both from WDC and Stratford District Council, as well as agency supplies of employees. Achievement of recruitment was still testing. There are no other permanent project managers identified within WDC who have the necessary breadth of experience.

Quite a few projects are listed as being in the Pipeline - how confident are we that these roles will not be required any longer than these 3 additional years?

Response: The recommendation to review the position is because it is anticipated that further work will accumulate for which the roles will be required. However the recommendation is mindful of the wider Council review for its operational model in the MTFs. This is also the reason that the recommendation is not for the posts to be made permanent at this stage. However please also note the response to your question about permanent posts below.

Do the figures quoted include all staff costs, pensions, benefits and employer NI costs, for example?

Response: Figures quoted do include all necessary overheads.

Given that these fixed term Project Manager roles are proposed for at least the next 3 years on top of the time that they have already been with WDC, have we considered whether these roles should be made permanent?

Response: In employment law terms, the staff, should they remain the same throughout, will gain the same rights as permanent staff. So if funding was not to continue they would benefit from the same redundancy and "at risk" provisions as permanent members.

The balance of the funding is required for 2 Cycling related roles. These roles are "monitoring, inspecting, recording and liaising for maintenance and repairs" rather than project or programme work. Do they belong in the Programme Team or should they be part of a more operational team?

Response: These roles have been treated as 'transitional' and needed to establish the project to a point of steady operation. It is anticipated that they would be needed in some form for the further operation of the facilities. However the review to establish what exactly is needed is recommended once this transitional project phase has been achieved and the facilities are "bedded in".

Finally, please could you provide more information about the items listed on Table 6?

Response: Cycles site specialist – this person will be responsible for inspection and monitoring of the trails, including physically riding and inspecting the trails on a regular basis. The sums are estimates of what it would require to ensure they have appropriate specialist knowledge and have been trained to ride safely during their duties to a standard that would be expected by British Cycling.

Roll-out of the development plan – in association with the physical construction of the trails, there is an intention to make cycling more available to audiences who might not naturally already be cyclists. This includes encouraging different ages and abilities to ride safely, along with the encouragement of groups from the community who might not have the confidence to take part. To achieve this, there is a programme of activities being planned, in conjunction with partners. These are estimates of funding that would be needed to support these activities.

Cycling liaison – this is money to support the work of volunteer groups in their activities on behalf of the Council's cycling development plan and it would be used in the form of a simple service level agreement or conditioned grant arrangement. Details are currently being worked up.

5. Levelling Up Fund Round 2 – Decision to Submit

Questions asked by Councillor Davison

Regarding the report on Levelling Up Fund Round 2 – Decision to Submit, these 2 projects look to be important and worth supporting. However, there is insufficient information. How will decisions be made, particularly with respect to WCC and CRT? When will plans be made available to members (perhaps via briefings)? What input can members have into the submission?

Response from Chris Elliott

The difficulty is the Government timetable – we have to submit the bid by beginning of July so this is the only Cabinet meeting that we can take the decision to submit a bid and basically in principle with the detail to be agreed by delegation. We can certainly do a detailed presentation when we have more detail and open it to members but I'd suggest the bid itself is not written by Committee but the LCG could decide to agree its content. Of course there will still work to be done after the bid is submitted and before it is implemented so further detail can be amassed and subject to scrutiny.

Questions asked by Councillor Cullinan

1. Are the planned improvements for Canalside going to be accessible to the public? Is there a baseline Air Quality measure for Bath St.? The success of the plans can then be measured and reported on?
2. Will the improvements planned for Bath St and Canalside continue should this Bid not be successful?

Response from Chris Elliott

The answer to question 1 is yes, yes and yes. We measure the air quality and so we have both a baseline but also therefore a base to report against.

In response to question 2, there would be some improvements but clearly not to the same extent. We don't have other funds to make up or what the Levelling Up bid would help us to achieve.