

 Executive Report 26th July 2017		Agenda Item No. 8B
Title	Temporary Assistant Conservation Officer – Historic Canal Network	
For further information about this report please contact	Nick Corbett, Principal Conservation and Design Officer	
Wards of the District directly affected	District-wide	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	The reallocation of funds from the Historic Building Grants Scheme to other conservation projects was reported to Executive on 13 th January 2016.	
Background Papers	None	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes
Equality & Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken	No (If No state why below)

There are no implications for Equality and Sustainability

Officer/Councillor Approval

Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	/06/17	Chris Elliott/Bill Hunt
Head of Service	6/06/17	Tracy Darke
CMT	/06/17	Bill Hunt
Section 151 Officer	/06/17	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	/06/17	Andy Jones
Finance	/06/17	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	/06/16	Cllr Alan Rhead

Consultation & Community Engagement

The proposals have been discussed with the Portfolio Holder.

Final Decision?	Yes
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)	

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 To agree to fund £35,000 for the appointment of a temporary assistant Conservation Officer whose primary role will be to create a new canal Conservation Area, covering the historic canal network in Warwick District.
- 1.2 It is estimated that the full cost of the appointment will be £35,000 (inclusive of all on-costs), which will come from the surplus funds following the cessation of the Historic Building Grant fund.

2. **Recommendation**

- 2.1 Executive agrees to the allocation of £35,000 from the Capital Investment Reserve for the appointment of a temporary assistant Conservation Officer for the period of approximately twelve months, to implement a new Conservation Area based upon the historic canal network in Warwick District.

3. **Reasons for the Recommendation**

- 3.1 Warwick District contains several miles of the historic Grand Union Canal (Birmingham to London) and the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal (Birmingham to Stratford-Upon-Avon), built in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The whole of this network, together with its associated bridges, locks, towpaths, and cottages, is of special architectural, engineering, and historic interest, and warrants designation as a Conservation Area.
- 3.2 This is a major piece of conservation work, requiring assessment of the canal network and the contribution of its setting, establishing conservation area boundaries, identifying development sites, undertaking public consultation, producing a conservation area management plan, and reporting to Executive and/or Planning Committee on recommendations.
- 3.3 It is envisaged that the work will also feed into a new Development Plan Document that will guide development that affects the setting of the canal network. It is considered that this will give more weight in raising the standard of design for developments and its public realm next to the canal, and will give the opportunity to require improvements where development directly impacts on the canal-side.
- 3.4 The amount of work justifies the appointment of one full time assistant Conservation Officer for approximately twelve months. The appointee will be part of the conservation team, line managed by the Principal Conservation and Design Officer, but will work across teams, and particularly closely with planning policy.
- 3.5 The appointment will secure continued investment in the district's heritage following the discontinuance of the Historic Buildings Grants scheme, but in the canal network rather than the Barford Wall as that project has been completed by the owner of that property. The principal of transferring these funds to another project was agreed by Executive on 13th January 2016.

4. **Policy Framework**

- 4.1 Local planning authorities are obliged (under S69 of the Planning – Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas – Act 1990) to designate as conservation

areas any parts of their area that are of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

- 4.2 *Paragraph 126 of the NPPF* advises local authorities to set out a positive strategy for 'the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment', ensuring emphasis is placed on 'sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets'.
- 4.3 **Fit for the Future:** protecting Warwick District's historic canal network will contribute to the vision of making Warwick District a great place to live, work and visit as set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy. The proposal will help to maximise the contribution that the historic canal network makes to attracting visitors, and attracting inward investment, in support of the Prosperity theme. The proposal also supports the Health and Well Being themes as it will promote public access to the countryside for leisure, recreation and exercise.

5. **Budgetary Framework**

- 5.1 It is estimated that the full cost of the appointment will be £35,000 (inclusive of all on-costs).
- 5.2 It was agreed by Executive on 13th January 2016 that the Historic Building Grant scheme would contribute towards the cost of a wall in Barford. The works were subsequently completed by the owner of the property, with no requirement for the Council to forward fund the works (which would have resulted in a charge on the property). Consequently there is an underspend on this budget.
- 5.3 The Historic Building Grant budget was part of the Capital Investment Programme. Consequently, if this underspend is to be utilised, this will be possible to be done by the Capital Investment Reserve.

6. **Risks**

- 6.1 There is a risk that the new member of staff is not proficient or effective in completing all of the required tasks, and/or all of the work might not be completed within twelve months, but this can be countered by a rigorous appointment process, and by requiring the new appointee to produce a precise timetable and project plan.
- 6.3 There is a risk that members of the public will reject the idea of a conservation area based upon the historic canal network, but this is unlikely given the fact that other local authorities have designated their canal networks as conservation areas, and the risk can be countered through positive public engagement.

7. **Alternative Options Considered**

- 7.1 The option of doing nothing is not considered to be appropriate given the high level of development pressure in the district, the fact that much of the canal infrastructure has no statutory protection, and the legal duty to designate conservation areas in those parts of the district that are of special architectural or historic interest.

- 7.2 The work could be undertaken by the existing conservation staff, but the team consists of only two officers and it would not be possible to take on the additional workload without cutting back on existing work streams, including providing advice on applications and enforcement-related work.
- 7.3 The work could be undertaken by consultants with experience of establishing new conservation areas, which could reduce the risk of relying on a single new member of staff, but recent experience suggests that the extra cost of appointing consultants compared with a temporary member of staff means this option would not represent best value for money.