

## **M40 NOISE BARRIERS FUNDING REQUEST – TREE PLANTING PROPOSAL**

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Mrs Julia Adey

**Ward(s) Affected:** **Chiltern Rise**

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### ***PROPOSED DECISION OR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL***

Members are recommended to:

- 1) Approve the specific proposal for tree planting at Four Fields as detailed in the appendices.
- 2) Grant delegated power to the Cabinet Member in consultation with the Head of Environment and Head of Democratic, Legal and Policy Services to fund future projects which meet the criteria outlined in option 3 in the options section at the end of the report.

### ***Reason for Decision***

To support noise mitigation and provide visual screening and carbon capture and generally to reduce the negative impact of the motorway on residents living along the M40.

### **Corporate Implications**

The Council has been working with residents and community groups as well as Highways England to help reduce the negative impact of the motorway on local residents which helps to support the acceptance of transport infrastructure as a key economic driver for the District.

### **Executive Summary**

The Lane End Conservation Group (LECG) and the Chiltern Environmental Group (CEG) have worked together to put forward the proposal in conjunction with the Woodland Trust to seek funding for mitigation work along the M40. The project is complementary to the M40 noise barriers project being progressed by Highways England (HE). The proposal is also supported by local landowner. CEG has provided input on noise reduction and is in contact with HE, whose co-operation is needed to ensure tree planting is compatible with the motorway and its continued maintenance.

The proposal claims to provide a number of benefits

1. Noise reduction for the people in Lane End exposed to traffic noise from the motorway west of the Bullocks Farm Lane overbridge – principally those living

on Handelton Common, The Row, Prospect Drive, Finings Lane and Lammas Way in total to approximately 150 homes.

2. Visual screening of motorway traffic for residents at these locations.
3. Substantial improvement in noise and visual impact through rerouting of the public footpath currently located at the motorway boundary. This benefit would extend to the playing fields south of the motorway at this point.
4. Contribution to carbon capture.

With additional possible benefits of

5. Test site for HE to study the impact on noise and pollution and of tree planting along the boundaries of motorways.
6. Inclusion in the planting of trees in memory of men of the village who are named on the village war memorial.

**Costings** - The total costs of this proposal are modest at under £9,000 initially, with ongoing maintenance proposed at £800 per year. There may be other similar sites identified on the basis that the landowner provides the land and the project is managed by the Lane End Conservation Group with funding from the District Council.

Although there is no obligation on the council to provide any money for noise mitigation along the M40, there have been indications for a number of years that this money will be made available if suitable schemes were identified. The Council would not want to pick up ongoing maintenance but could consider providing one off funding, which would could support maintenance by the landowner while the trees are established.

In order to ensure that there are suitable criteria for considering the merit of any future proposals, it is suggested that any proposal should have at least equivalent match in terms of benefits from e.g. ongoing management by the landowner and work by the LECG in delivering the project and that the limit for such proposals should be no more than £125,000.

## **Background and Issues**

The Council has been involved in a project to seek to provide noise mitigation along the M40 since 2004, the CEG was established as the voice for the people living along the M40.

News was announced in summer last year of the success of the project and that funding would be provided by HE under their programme of noise reduction schemes. The Council have continued to chair meetings, as liaison between the CEG and HE. A Core Group of officers and the group, together with HE, have continued to meet to steer the project to completion.

## **Council Funding of the Noise Barriers Project**

In June 2008, Cabinet resolved to transfer to Catalyst Housing Group a property known as Sidney House, to redevelop the property for the purpose of delivering affordable housing and also for the development of land at Foxes Piece, with new affordable homes. The land was transferred at a value of £125,000. Cabinet also resolved that the receipt for the land would be made available for a period of up to three years for assisting with M40 noise reduction measures for the benefit of the wider area of Lane End, if a decision is taken to progress a suitable scheme. Assurances were provided when the transfer of the land was completed in July 2014 that the money would continue to be held for the purpose of noise barriers, despite the 3 years since the Cabinet having already lapsed. Even if it is accepted that the 3 years began to run from the date of the transfer this will now (albeit recently) have passed.

The decision by HE to proceed with barriers along the most suitable parts of the M40 has resulted in the proposed noise barriers scheme being fully funded. A view has been provided to the M40 Noise Barriers Core Group meeting that the scheme no longer required the funding and therefore the Council was entitled to use the £125,000 for other demands. However, assurances were also given that if a suitable noise mitigation scheme was identified, then this would be considered by Members. This scheme is therefore presented to Members within the context of those assurances.

## **Consultation**

**Expert Opinion-** Julian Smith, Divisional Environmental Health Officer, has reviewed the proposal and made the following comments.

The scheme has a number of benefits including carbon capture. There is no clear evidence that the scheme will act as a noise barrier to reduce noise, indeed the scheme is not positioned between the noise source and the receptors to obviously act as a noise barrier. However, once established, trees can offer a degree of noise masking, the pleasant noise of leaf movement masking the unpleasant noise of passing traffic, so this may be a benefit from the scheme. As mentioned the scheme would also present an opportunity for monitoring the noise reduction or otherwise of the tree belt although I'm sure there are other locations this could be carried out and, in this case, this will be a long term project.

The benefits from an air quality management perspective are also likely to be negligible, however, the trees do provide carbon capture. The benefits of visual screening are undisputed and, as indicated above, the positive noise distraction is also recognised. Whilst noise mitigation is not proven there is a need for further tests of this type of initiative to better understand the benefits to residents, as an alternative or in addition to noise barriers and there would be a benefit in a planting scheme of this nature to further explore those benefits. These initiatives are significantly less costly than noise barriers, less intrusive to residents and, in this case, are being driven by the community. The creation of a new footpath for residents as an alternative to the established footpath which runs along the M40 also has benefits for residents and the continued maintenance of the motorway.

Ward members are supportive of the proposal.

### **Options**

1. Not to provide funding and to require the community to seek funding from elsewhere.
2. To agree to provide the £9,000 funding for this project as a one off.
3. To provide funding for this project in anticipation of further requests, in relation to the Lane End area, with a limit of no more than the £125,000 identified as noise mitigation if it can be shown that these projects have landowner and local support in the form of contribution from the LECG.

### **Conclusions**

Members are requested to consider the request for funding and decide how any future proposals should be determined.

### **Next Steps**

The provision of funding will allow the LECG to take this project forward at the same time as the work on the M40 noise barriers project being carried out by HE. The contractors are likely to be on site in the early part of 2018 and it is anticipated that this is when the work will be carried out.

### **Background Papers**

Cabinet Report June 2008 in relation to the proposed transfer of Sidney House and land at Foxes Piece.