

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE RIVER WYE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Officer contact: Catherine Whitehead (Head of Democratic Services Officer) 01494 421980, catherine.whitehead@wycombe.gov.uk

What is the Commission being asked to do?

- i) To consider the recommendations of the River Wye Task and Finish Group as outlined below;
- ii) To decide on whether to endorse, amend or reject these recommendations for referral onto the Cabinet Meeting of 12 November 2018; and
- iii) To note that the River Wye Task and Finish Group has now completed its work.

Task and Finish Group Recommendations -

1. That cabinet be recommended:

To recognise that the technical feasibility of remaking the river has been established.

The reason for this recommendation:

On the basis of all the evidence the TFG has considered since its first meeting in September 2017, it is now known that the river can be opened between Westbourne Street & Archway Roundabout, (see the indicative plan in appendix 1), this takes into account issues relating to hydrology, flooding, underground utilities, levels and other considerations.

2. That cabinet be recommended:

To recognise the extent of support for remaking the river.

The reason for this recommendation:

The economic assessment found that 8/9 stakeholders interviewed were very positive about the idea of remaking the river. Bucks County Council's Head of Highway Infrastructure Projects has voiced supportive to bringing the river back at the same time as carrying out highway works. The High Wycombe Society have shown their support. Other public and press support is also evident (see appendix 2).

3. That cabinet be recommended:

To recognise that the wider economic, social and environmental benefits justify the remaking of the river.

The reason for this recommendation:

From research undertaken into benefits and experience in other case study towns where watercourses have been remade, the effects are

transformative and this could be replicated in High Wycombe. The remaking of the river work would bring substantial benefits to the town, improving its environmental, health & wellbeing, air quality, social and economic outlook, thus enhancing the sense of place and transforming it to a more desirable destination (see appendix 3).

4. That cabinet be recommended:

To recognise that the financial returns which will accrue directly to Wycombe District Council resulting as a direct consequence of remaking the river will exceed the costs in most scenarios.

The reason for this recommendation:

Wycombe District Council has employed consultants to undertake an Economic Assessment of remaking the river. This focussed particular attention on the financial impact on the Council. The assessment has shown that the remaking of the river will impact rents, rates and redevelopment values all of which will improve income for the council. High, central and low impact scenarios were modelled for 30 and 60 year time frames, only the low impact scenario over 30 years, resulted in the remade river returning less than its full cost to the council (see appendix 4).

5. That cabinet be recommended:

To agree that highway works within Phase 7 (Oxford Road) should not be progressed if they prejudice remaking up the river and that it would be most cost effective and publicly acceptable to undertake both the road and the river together.

The reason for this recommendation:

Given that highway and river works within Phase 7 (Oxford Road) are so closely related, a phased delivery approach would not only substantially increase the costs and disruption but also be seen unfavourably by the public when compared to undertaking the works together in a coordinated fashion.

6. That cabinet be recommended:

That it has been established that the remaking of the river between Westbourne Street & Archway Roundabout will cost approximately £3 million more than highway works alone.

The reason for this recommendation:

The preliminary design work for Phase 7 (Oxford Road) has been costed with the benefit of a detailed understanding of the river culverts, underground utilities, levels, and other survey information, as well as expert engineering knowledge and experience gained from delivery of the

rest of the Town Centre Master Plan.

7. That cabinet be recommended:

To consider funding the works from its CIL & capital programme.

The reason for this recommendation:

A wide range of external opportunities have been investigated but due to their scale and focus they are unsuitable for anything other than minor augmentation of Council funding sources (see appendix 5).

8. That cabinet be recommended:

That funding be made available to commission the detailed design, costing and consultation of public realm work including the river for the phase 7 area.

The reason for this recommendation:

Detailed design and technical work is required before phase 7 (Oxford Road) and the river can be brought forward. Funds that have been allocated in the 2018-19 capital program for High Wycombe town Centre public realm enhancements should be made available to support this, subject to the development and approval of suitable project documentation.

Background and Issues

1.1 The River Wye Task and Finish Group was set up by the Improvement and Review Commission on 21 June 2017 and the following Terms of Reference were subsequently agreed at the meeting on 11 September 2017:

- To conduct a review of the proposal that the River Wye between Westbourne Street and the Archway roundabout should be re-made and opened up as an amenity within the town.

The Group Membership was as follows:

Chairman: Councillor Hugh McCarthy

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Mrs Lesley Clarke

Membership:

Councillor A Hill

Councillor R Farmer

Councillor M Hussain

Councillor R Raja

Councillor M Clarke

Councillor C Whitehead

Councillor P Turner

Councillor A Baughan

The following investigations were carried out by the Group:

Monday 17 July 2017

- Scoping Meeting

Monday 11 September 2017

- Discussion to confirm the terms of reference and consideration of the work programme. Also a review of the feasibility and design work carried out to date and a recap of how the river is considered in policy.

Thursday 12 October 2017

- Discussion with Charles Brocklehurst, Major Projects and Estates Executive, WDC and external visitor Neil Marples, MWH Global, about feasibility, costs and a high level discussion about economics of remaking the river.

Friday 1 December 2017

- Site visit to Sheffield to consider the regeneration of the river and other green infrastructure improvements in the city centre.

Monday 4 December 2017

- Discussion with Dan Fenn, DRF Ltd and Ian McGowan, Head of Highways Infrastructure Projects, BCC. Members also received feedback on the site visit to Sheffield.

Tuesday 30 January 2018

- Presentation from Dan Fenn and Ian McGowan on estimated project costs and visit from Mike Overall, Chairman of Revive the Wye; Chris Woodman, High Wycombe Society; and Allen Beechey, the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project Officer, who explained the special nature of chalk streams and the

Wye in particular. A presentation was also given by Philip Simpkin on some of the health benefits which would be associated with remaking the river.

30 July 2018

- Presentation of the Economic Assessment of remaking the river wye by David Baxter and associated discussions Report of - Eunomia.

6 August 2018

- Presentation given by Philip Simpkin on the results of investigations into funding sources, and of the recent condition survey of the culvert. Finalising the recommendations and reasons for recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.

Conclusions / Recommendations

The Group having taken evidence from external sources and WDC officers and identified that the remaking of the river is a feasible, desirable and well supported project which would not only have great environmental, social, health and wellbeing, place making benefits but that it would also have positive economic benefits with direct financial benefits to the Council in the long term.

The costs of the work to reopen the river would be a relatively small proportion of the total cost of phase 7 of the Town Centre Masterplan and in the longer term remaking the river would overcome any future need to replace the culvert.

The works to remake the river would be most economically and efficiently undertaken if carried out at the same time as highway works in phase 7 (Oxford Road) of the High Wycombe Town Centre Master Plan (HWTCMP) and therefore it is recommended that the Council fund the necessary detailed work to bring the project to a point where it can be delivered and then that the council fund its delivery through CIL and the capital programme.

Next Steps

To be referred to the Improvement & Review Commission on Wednesday 12th September 2018 for onward referral, with endorsement, amendment or rejection, to Cabinet on Monday 12th November 2018.

Background Papers

Notes of TFG meetings held in Democratic Services

Appendices