
Subject:	ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR NEW BRIDGE AT THE BUTTS, SANDWICH
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 4 March 2024
Report of:	David Parish, Head of Corporate Assets
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Charlotte Zosseder, Portfolio Holder for Community and Corporate Property
Decision Type:	Non-Key
Classification:	Unrestricted

Purpose of the report:	To seek an additional £25,000 to allow construction of the new bridge at The Butts, Sandwich.
Recommendation:	To approve an additional £25,000 from the Special Revenue Contingency budget for the construction of a new bridge due to the presence of water voles.

1. Summary

- 1.1 Following the previously approved Delegated Decision (DD21/23) to award £50k to undertake the construction of a new bridge at The Butts, Sandwich works have been suspended due to the presence of water voles. This has resulted in abortive costs due to suspension of works. It is also necessary to put mitigation measures in place for the protection of water voles. It is therefore necessary to request an additional £25k to allow the works to be completed with a revised total project spend of £75k.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Prior to the works commencing in November 2023 Dover District Council were aware of the ecological interest in the area and the potential presence of water voles.
- 2.2 Prior to construction of the bridge two visits to investigate the site were conducted by specialist ecologists. These surveys were concluded with no signs of water vole activity recorded.
- 2.3 Following conclusion of the surveys and given the time of year it was deemed very low risk that any water vole habitats would be found so construction of the new bridge commenced with the recommendation of maintaining a full watching brief during the dewatering exercise of the stream to verify that there was no sign of water vole activity.
- 2.4 During the dewatering exercise, which included the removal of the timber supports stabilising the river bank the ecologist witnessed water voles exiting the bank and so works were suspended immediately. Given the legal protection for water voles the contractor demobilised from site.
- 2.5 Dover District Council notified Natural England of its findings, suspended works and reinstated the site as found. Natural England later advised that future consent and mitigation measures would be sought upon the submission of an advisory working licence for water vole habitats. This was submitted in December and so the Council will shortly be seeking a licence from Natural England with appropriate measures to deploy in conjunction with the works later this spring/summer.

3. **Identification of Options**

3.1 Option 1: Do nothing.

3.2 Option 2: (Recommended) To approve the additional £25k expenditure from the special revenue contingency budget to allow the construction of the bridge under the advisory licence from Natural England.

4. **Evaluation of Options**

4.1 Option 1 is not recommended. This option doesn't support the need for maintaining the local watercourses and issues with stagnant water and fish fatalities to the area.

4.2 Option 2 is the recommended option. The new bridge will allow access to unused council land to help aid the disposal of dredged water material, which will improve water quality and mitigate the risk of future stagnant water and fish fatalities.

5. **Resource Implications**

5.1 To request an additional £25k from the special revenue contingency budget to support the actions recommended by Natural England for the protection of water voles whilst constructing the new bridge.

5.2 The costs are associated with the following: demobilising from site, obtaining a licence from Natural England and further mitigation measures to support the construction of the new bridge which has been estimated at £25k.

6. **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

6.1 The works will have a positive benefit to the area by allowing future dredging works to be undertaken when required which will improve water quality and biodiversity. This also mitigates long distance transportation for disposal of waste offsite.

7. **Corporate Implications**

7.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy has been consulted on the report and have no further comments to add.

7.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.

7.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report seeking approval for an additional £25k to allow construction of the new bridge to The Butts, Sandwich does not specifically highlight any equality implications. In discharging their duties members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>.

7.4 Other Officers (as appropriate):

8. **Appendices**

None.

9. **Background Papers**

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

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