

CABINET
18 March 2021**KEPAX BRIDGE**

Relevant Cabinet Member

Dr K A Pollock

Relevant Officer

Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure

Local Members

Mr S E Geraghty

Mr A Stafford

Recommendation

- 1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure recommends that Cabinet:**
 - (a) notes progress with the scheme and welcomes the completion of the Business Case; and,**
 - (b) authorises the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure to award construction contracts and enter into any other such agreements as are necessary to progress delivery of the bridge within the funding envelope already secured.**

Why are these decisions important?

2. It is important that these decisions are made now to enable work to start on site in 2021 and to take advantage of the external funding that is available.

Background

3. Building on the success of the Connect2 Diglis Bridge scheme, Worcestershire County and Worcester City Councils are working in partnership to provide a new walking and cycling bridge over the River Severn between Gheluvelt Park and Kepax. The project aims to provide improved cycle and pedestrian connectivity to the north of Worcester City and to enhance links along the riverside thereby completing a “figure of 8” circuit encompassing Kepax Bridge, Sabrina Bridge and Diglis Bridge (see Appendix 1 for a plan showing the location of the bridge and key wider links).
4. At its meeting on 14 November 2019, Cabinet approved the development of a Business Case to support the scheme, authorised the allocation of £1.5m towards its development and endorsed the development and submission of a planning application. It was agreed that a further report would be presented to Cabinet before construction began on site and that this would be subject to funding for the project being secured.

Policy context

5. The national, regional and local policy context for improving walking and cycling opportunities to provide health, transport and planning benefits is well established. The National Planning Policy Framework, strongly requires investment in walking and cycling including suggestions that:

- Local Authorities must promote healthy and safe environments – specifically by 'layouts that encourage walking and cycling'
- Opportunities to promote walking must be prioritised
- Investing in cycling and providing travel mode choice reduces congestion, improves air quality and benefits public health.

6. The Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership Energy Strategy identifies the facilitation of walking and cycling opportunities as a key aspect of achieving a lower-carbon economy while a number of objectives designed to encourage walking and cycling are included in Local Transport Plan 4.

7. The importance of walking and cycling infrastructure has been further highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic with the Government publishing *Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking*. This new strategy aims for half of all journeys in towns and cities to be cycled or walked by 2030 as 40% of journeys in urban areas are less than 2 miles and commits to new infrastructure to support this objective.

8. The potential scheme benefits and outcomes are anticipated to include the following:

- Increased use of active modes resulting in improved physical health and mental wellbeing of residents, reduced congestion, improved local air quality and improved accessibility and transport choice
- Reduced severance and increased network resilience through the provision of an additional river crossing
- Increased leisure use of the riverside area through the completion of a “figure of 8” circuit using the Kepax Bridge, Sabrina Bridge and Diglis Bridge as crossing points
- Increased tourism and visits to attractions such as Worcester Racecourse and the Pump House Environment Centre
- Increased use of the Green Flag park which includes a splash pad and open fields to the east
- A safer pedestrian and cycle network in the north of Worcester, with more off-road provision
- A more legible cycling network from the north of Worcester to destinations such as the canal, city centre and university
- Improved connections to National Cycle Network Routes 45 and 46
- Improved connections to Regional Cycle Network Routes 3 and 7.

Public health benefits

9. In Worcestershire, 65% of adults and one third of year 6 children are overweight and/or obese. A strong reason for this is physical inactivity – around 21% of adults in Worcestershire do less than 30 minutes of exercise per week. Encouraging active travel is one solution to help people achieve recommended physical activity levels and recommended weight. Active travel can lead to health benefits including reduction of heart disease, stroke, cancer, obesity and type 2 diabetes. The environment can also benefit by a modal shift to

active travel, including reduced air pollution, congestion, road danger and noise pollution.

Progress to date

10. The following activities have been completed:

- Initial Bridge Feasibility Study - identification of scheme constraints, initial costing based on feasibility study, geotechnical overview and environmental checklist
- Topographical, geotechnical, archaeological and ecological surveys
- Transport Planning/Economic Impact inputs to cover the forecast demand for the proposed asset and economic impact
- Flood Risk Assessment and river modelling
- Pedestrian/Cycle Upgrade Study – study into how the structure will link into the wider network and where improvements are required to ensure that the structure has the demand required for a strong Cost Benefit Ratio
- Detailed discussions with the Council's Infrastructure Engineering Term Contractor
- The bridge has been designed with input from architects, engineers and environmental advisors (see Appendix 2), and
- A planning application has been submitted.

Business Case and Benefit Cost Ratio

11. A Business Case (Appendix 3) included as supporting information to this report, has been completed and presents the Strategic, Economic, Commercial, Financial and Management Case for the provision of the bridge and improved local and strategic cycle and pedestrian links creating leisure, employment and access to education opportunities and delivering health and well-being benefits.

12. The economic assessment of the project has indicated that improvements to local and strategic cycle and pedestrian links in addition to the bridge would result in a significantly improved Cost Benefit Ratio (BCR) for the scheme compared with constructing the bridge in isolation. A strong BCR is essential to secure third-party funding and it was previously agreed by Cabinet that the strategic linkages should be included as an integral part of the scheme but that the project could be delivered in phases with the bridge being constructed first with links to the nearest highway, and improvements to the wider links following later. Following an economic assessment using government tools, the full scheme has been assessed as representing High Value for Money.

Planning

13. An extensive pre-planning stakeholder engagement exercise was carried out prior to the submission of the planning application and the responses were overwhelmingly supportive. Although most respondents were positive about the scheme, a number of more local concerns were raised most notably regarding security, parking and the environment and these were repeated during the statutory consultation process. These concerns should be addressed as part of the planning process.

Delivery and Timescales

14. Should Cabinet approve the scheme, work would start on site once it has received planning consent. It is anticipated that the work would be completed in 2022 if planning approval is confirmed by mid-2021.

Key risks

15. The bridge site is subject to occasional flooding which could potentially have an impact on the programme; a parcel of third-party land needs to be secured; and approvals need to be confirmed by some statutory bodies.

Legal Implications

16. The proposed location of the landing points of the structure are to be sited on Worcestershire County and Worcester City Council owned land. A small parcel of land needs to be acquired from a third party on the west side of the river to accommodate the access path, although negotiations are well underway.

17. Powers will be exercised under Section 106 (3) of the Highways Act 1980 to construct the bridge to form a footpath/cycle track over the navigable waters of the River Severn.

18. Various agreements and consents are being sought with statutory undertakers and legislative bodies including the Canals and Rivers Trust, Environment Agency and Fields in Trust.

19. No Human Resources or Human Rights issues have been identified. A small number of residential properties would be visible from the bridge. Although there are no specific standards for structures of this kind, a distance of 22m is commonly prescribed by local authorities to achieve adequate privacy between facing windows. In comparison, the proposed position of the bridge is approximately 100m from the closest residential properties.

Financial Implications

20. The cost of constructing the bridge has been estimated at £5.8m.

21. Funding already secured for this scheme totals £5.82m from the following sources:

- £0.82m - Worcester City Council (excluding sunk costs of £0.055m)
- £4m - Worcestershire County Council – already allocated to Walking and Cycling Bridges in the Capital Programme
- £1m of the £12m Getting Building Fund approved for Worcestershire.

22. It is recommended that the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure is authorised to award construction contracts and enter into any other such agreements as are necessary to progress delivery of the bridge within the funding envelope already secured.

23. Further expenditure will be required for the links to the local walking and cycling network and funding for this will be sought from other sources including from within the existing Capital Programme. This will be confirmed to Cabinet at a subsequent meeting, however, expenditure on this element of the scheme will not progress until funding has been identified.

HR, Privacy and Human Rights Implications

24. No Human Resources, Privacy or Human Rights implications have been identified.

Joint Equality, Public Health, Data Protection and Sustainability Impact Assessments

25. Full Equality, Public Health, Data Protection and Sustainability Impact Assessments have been carried out in respect of the recommendations (Appendix 4). No negative impacts have been identified for Protected Groups and other impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated through existing policies and procedures.

Supporting Information – Available Electronically

- Appendix 1 – Scheme location
- Appendix 2 – Bridge design
- Appendix 3 – Kepax Bridge Business Case
- Appendix 4 – Joint Impact Assessment Screening and Full Assessments

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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List of Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure) the background papers relating to the subject matter of this item are as follows:

- Cabinet Report 14 November 2019
- Pre-planning Stakeholder Engagement Summary