

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	26 SEPTEMBER 2019		
TITLE:	CHESTNUT WALK IMPROVEMENTS		
LEAD COUNCILLORS:	CLLR ROWLAND CLLR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE, HERITAGE AND RECREATION STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT ABBEY
SERVICE:	ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	WARDS:	ABBEY
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for improvement works to Chestnut Walk consisting of:
- Removal of the existing Horse Chestnut trees and planting of a new avenue of Sweet Chestnut trees
 - New pedestrian lighting
 - Installation of a new cctv camera connected to the town centre network
 - Resurfacing of the footpath in tarmac.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

That Committee note and approve:

- the forecast capital expenditure of £120k out of the total project cost of £160k will be spent in the current year (2019/20).
- advice from the Local Planning Authority is the scheme will not require planning approval but as the area is within the Schedule Monument of Reading Abbey Ruins it will require Schedule Monument Consent (SMC) from Historic England.
- that the Assistant Director for Environment & Commercial Services be authorised to progress and submit the SMC application to seek approval from Historic England to carry out below ground works within the Schedule Monument;

- that the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Assistant Director for Environment & Commercial Services be authorised to procure and implement the works within the funding limits set out in the report;
- tree removals works will be scheduled to take place in early February 2020 to implement the scheme.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council has an obligation to maintain its assets and improve Reading's green spaces for the community. The proposal's aim is to ensure that Chestnut Walk is a safe, green pedestrian and cycle route from east Reading into the town centre.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Chestnut Walk is planted with an avenue of over mature horse chestnut trees. The Parks Service has been monitoring the trees closely since the inspection in 2016 which revealed significant defects in a high proportion of the trees, including canker and fungal brackets. Two trees were felled and several others pruned to make them safe and in an attempt to lengthen their lives. In 2017 another tree failed and was removed. In summer 2018, prior to the re-opening of the Abbey Ruins, a visual inspection was carried out. Further deterioration was noted, and a re-inspection was carried out in winter 2018 when the trees were not in leaf. As a result of this re-inspection, four further trees were felled. The remaining trees will continue to deteriorate resulting in further removals. A planned wholesale replacement is recommended to ensure this important pedestrian thoroughfare remains safe and attractive for public use.

It is recommended that the Horse Chestnuts are replaced with fourteen Sweet Chestnut trees which is a large, robust species, known to be tolerant to the urban environment. The canopy cover created by these replacement trees will be equivalent to that of the Horse Chestnuts they will replace.

- 4.2 As Chestnut Walk does not have any pedestrian lighting a wider scheme is proposed to install lighting, a CCTV camera, and re-tarmac the surface to improve the safety and environment of this access route into the town centre. This thoroughfare will become more important as the new housing developments are built on the former Homebase and other sites in this area.
- 4.3 To do nothing would mean that as the trees deteriorate further the area will become unsafe to access and unplanned emergency tree felling would take place to maintain the thoroughfare.
- 4.4 The removal of the existing Horse Chestnuts, whilst essential to ensure the safety of users, will understandably attract comment and concern. Information

will be provided about the scheme to interested parties to clearly set out why the work is being carried out and the scheme benefits.

4.5 The project timeline going forward is as follows:

Oct 2019: Carry out archaeological investigations in proposed tree, and lighting locations.

Nov 2019: Seek Schedule Monument Consent approval.

Dec 2019: Agree construction contract sums, finalise construction programme.

Feb 2020: Construction works start. Tree removal, will be followed by lighting and CCTV installation, tree planting and resurfacing.

March 2020: Construction works complete.

The scheme aims to complete before Friday 3rd April 2020, the start of the Easter holiday period and events programme.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The Chestnut Walk improvements will help to deliver the following Corporate Plan Service Priorities:

- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe
- Securing the economic success of Reading

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 In addition to communication to neighbours of Chestnut Walk, engagement with specific interest groups will take place such as Friends of Reading Abbey, and Reading Tree Wardens.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The site works will be managed and delivered by the Council's in-house Commercial Services Department including Parks and Highways teams. In planning terms the scheme elements are classed as 'not development' work (tree replacements) or 'permitted development' under the General Permitted Development Order (2015). Installation of a CCTV camera is classed as permitted development under schedule 2, part 2, class F (closed circuit television cameras) Maintenance and re-tarmac to the existing footpath is permitted development under schedule 2, part 9, class A (development by highways authorities). Installing highways street lamps is permitted development under schedule 2 part 12(b) (development by Local Authorities).

7.2 The area is within the Schedule Monument of Reading Abbey Ruins and will require Schedule Monument Consent (SMC) from Historic England before works start on site. Archaeological investigation works will be required to inform the SMC application.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. It is considered that an EAI is not required for this scheme.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The proposed scheme involves the replacement of the existing horse chestnuts with sweet chestnut which, when mature will provide the same amount of canopy cover as currently. As well as being a significant landscape feature sweet chestnut will mitigate urban air pollution, reduce atmospheric CO2 levels, help cool the urban environment and provide habitat for animals, birds and insects. The scheme will ensure tree cover in this area of the town centre and will have a positive impact.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Revenue Implications

Ongoing lighting costs will be through existing street lighting maintenance budgets.

10.2 Capital Implications

Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line	2019/20 £000	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure	120	40	0
Funded by:			
Grant (specify)			
Section 106 funding	38		
CiL funding	25		
Capital Receipts/Borrowing	57	40	
Total Funding	120	40	0

10.3 Value for Money (VFM)

The works are being carried out by the Council's in-house Commercial Services department who will use direct labour for the tree installation and utilise existing term contracts for lighting and highways works.

10.4 Risk Assessment

The key financial risk is linked to any conditions for extensive archaeological investigations arising from the Schedule Monument Consent approval.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None