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Cabinet

Report Subject	**Heathlands Mitigation; Stour Valley Masterplan – Phase One - Hengistbury Head to Tuckton**
Meeting date	15th October 2014
Cabinet Portfolio	Councillor Lawrence Williams - Tourism, Leisure & Culture
Corporate Lead	Bill Cotton, Executive Director – Environment & Economy
Service Director	Gary Josey –Director for Housing, Parks & Bereavement Services
Status	Public
Classification Key Decision Impacts on Key Policy Framework	For decision Yes No
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Executive summary	To seek approval to carry out access improvements from Hengistbury Head to Tuckton to mitigate residential development pressure on the Dorset Heathlands. The plan is to: maximise accessibility and public enjoyment of this linear corridor on foot, bike, buggy and wheelchair; improve surfaces, signage, gateways and branding; to spread visitor pressure away from protected heathland sites in a way that is sensitive to the habitats through which it passes.
Recommendations	**To approve the project to carry out access improvements from Hengistbury Head to Tuckton to mitigate residential development pressure on the Dorset Heathlands.**

Reasons for recommendations	1. To provide space for residents to be more active, enjoy wider leisure opportunities and enjoy nature. 2. To provide opportunities for the development of low impact tourism and leisure within the Stour Valley. 3. To contribute to the councils Key Policy Framework – Building A Better Bournemouth - outcomes; a. AC3 Improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities for residents by providing improved access to our greenspaces. b. IE2 Working with others to deliver Bournemouth's housing needs by providing a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace to mitigate the impact of residential growth on protected heathland. c. IE3 Promoting sustainable travel by provision of new cycleways. d. IE5 Protecting Bournemouth's parks and natural open spaces by providing high quality and sustainable access improvements. e. TE4 Playing our part in a thriving conurbation by promoting access to our greenspaces and the local businesses around them. 4. To initiate works to achieve the Council's objectives set out in the Core Strategy CS36 Stour Valley Project. 5. To meet the Council's requirements under the Habitats Regulations - Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 - to mitigate future residential development pressure on protected heathland sites. 6. To demonstrate the Council's commitment to the Stour Valley Masterplan for the provision of a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace -SANG.

Background detail

1 The Stour Valley corridor within Bournemouth borough runs between Hengistbury Head Nature Reserve to the south and Millhams Mead Nature Reserve to the north. Within Bournemouth the corridor runs through the wards of East Southbourne and Tuckton, Littledown and Iford, Strouden Park, Throop and Muscliff, Redhill and Northbourne, and Kinson North. It shares boundaries with both Christchurch and East Dorset boroughs.

2 The Stour Valley corridor includes the following accessible spaces managed by or on behalf of Bournmeouth Borough Council - BBC:

Hengistbury Head Nature Reserve, Wick Fields, Riverlands & Tuckton Tea Gardens, Iford Playing Fields, Iford Meadows, Sheepwash Common, Throop Mill Car Park & River Islands, Hicks Farm, Erlin Farm, Muscliff Arboretum, Stour Valley Local Nature Reserve, Pelhams Park & Leisure Centre, Millhams Mead Local Nature Reserve.

3 The Stour Valley Way footpath trail runs between Hengistbury Head in Bournemouth and Stourhead in Wiltshire, a total of 77 miles. The signposting, branding and marketing of the trail is not consistent and it lacks the profile of both National Trails and prominent local trails such as the Tarka, Camel and Otter Trails found in Devon and Cornwall.

4 Hengistbury Head attracts over one million visits per year. It is a popular countryside site and beach site but it also contains areas of special protection including: a Site of Special Scientific Interest - SSSI, Scheduled Ancient Monument, Ramsar Convention Wetland Site, Special Protection Area - SPA under the European Union Habitats Directive and Special Area of Conservation - SAC under the European Union Birds Directive.

5 Under both the European Union Birds and Habitats Directives BBC has an obligation to mitigate pressure that arises from increased population through local housing development. In partnership with four other local planning authorities in South East Dorset, BBC levies a charge on new housing developments and applies the funds towards projects that provides or promote Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace – SANGs - where the public can enjoy nature. The principle of this approach is to encourage more residents to make more use of less sensitive sites and less use of protected heathland sites.

6 The Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework Draft Supplementary Planning Document 2012-14 sets out the requirement to carry out projects to provide SANGs and the levels of developer contributions.

7 Under this agreement Developers have been making Section 106 payments to enable residential properties to be built. These developer contributions are held in a ring fenced fund that is used to provide Strategic Access Management and Monitoring and carry out approved projects to improve green spaces within the borough.

8 The Heathland Mitigation Section 106 fund currently has a reserve to enable further projects to be carried out.

9 A new Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework Draft Supplementary Planning Document 2014-19 is due to be presented to cabinet in Autumn 2014. This includes a revised list of projects approved by Natural England as suitable for Heathland Mitigation.

10 The Stour Valley Masterplan Phase one - Hengistbury Head to Tuckton is included in the list of approved projects.

11 The Stour Valley Masterplan was adopted at Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 12th November 2013. This set out the overarching principles of the improvements that are proposed along the Bournemouth reaches of the Stour Valley.

12 The Hengistbury Head to Tuckton phase is the first of the project proposals within the Stour Valley Masterplan to be put forward for development.

13 Hengistbury Head is a popular site not only because of its special sea views and harbour views, but also because it provides a natural space with good visitor facilities, allowing longer visits. Many of the sites along the Stour Valley corridor could be enhanced to encourage more visits by improving the quality and facilities and increasing awareness of them.

14 Access improvements from Hengistbury Head to Tuckton have been identified for the first phase of the Stour Valley Masterplan as the opportunity to divert visitor pressure away from the protected heathland is greatest. With approximately 1 million visits per year a change of 1% in visitor behaviour will divert 10 thousand visits away from the most sensitive habitats.

15 The project will address :

a Improve overall route surfaces and address breaks in route accessibility;
b Improve quality signage, gateways and entrances;
c Improve wayfinding by the use of distinctive benches and public art;
d Provide viewing opportunities through to Christchurch Harbour and Hengistbury Head;
e Establish a Stour Valley Trail brand and raise awareness of the alternative routes that can be accessed and enjoyed.

Consultation

16 Internal consultation has been undertaken extensively across Council departments. Feedback received has been supportive. Suggestions for improvements have been incorporated as appropriate.

17 Views on the specific detail of the project have been sought from the following;

a Corporate management team;
b Operational officers and management within BBC's Planning and Transport, and Parks departments;
c Senior Countryside and Planning Officers within Christchurch and East Dorset District Councils;
d Rights of Way Officer within Dorset County Council;
e Senior Officer within Natural England.

18 Bournemouth ward councillors from the East Southbourne and Tuckton ward have been consulted. Councillor Lawton and Councillor Coope have expressed their support.

19 Other councillors consulted are; Councillor Williams, Portfolio Holder for Economy & Tourism; Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Environment & Transport; Councillor Anderson, Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Panel for Environment & Transport and the council's elected representative on the Heathlands Executive.

20 Views regarding the overarching Masterplan have been sought from a number of interested external organisations These include: Dorset Cycling Network, Sustrans, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Open Spaces Society, Ramblers, Holdenhurst Parish Council, British Horse Society and Access Dorset.

21 The Phase One project will undertake local public consultations and direct consultations with individual stakeholders regarding the detail of the access improvements.

Options

22 The recommended option is to carry out Phase one of the Stour Valley Masterplan - Hengistbury Head to Tuckton as described. The project includes a number of infrastructure improvements which will enable the promotion of the route to a wider audience.

23 A further option to do nothing exists. This is rejected as the Council has an obligation to carry out Heathland Mitigation.

24 An option to split the project into smaller phases is rejected as reducing the scope of the works would not allow the objectives of the project to be achieved.

25 An option to carry out works on a different section of the Stour is rejected as Hengistbury Head is the sensitive heathland habitat subjected to the greatest visitor pressure. With approximately 1 million visits per year a change of 1% in visitor behaviour will divert 10 thousand visits away from the most sensitive habitats.

Summary of financial/resource implications

26 **Budget**. The financial implications of the project are project costs estimated at £575,000.

27 Project officer time is included within the project costs.

28 Maintenance overheads will be kept to a minimum by selecting materials with best value whole life costs.

29 A maintenance allowance of 5% of construction costs has been incorporated into the project costs to offset any additional maintenance overheads.

30 **Funding**. All project costs will be covered by Heathland Mitigation Section 106, which currently has a reserve sufficient to cover this project and our commitments to the South East Dorset Heathland Strategic Access and Management.

31 There is no requirement in funding this project for capital contribution from Council budget.

32 The Heathland Mitigation capital funding offers an opportunity for additional external funding to be sought to enhance this and other Stour Valley Masterplan projects.

Summary of legal implications

33 The approval of the project strengthens the Bournemouth Borough Council's strategic position in addressing legal obligations within the European Habitats and Birds Directives.

Summary of human resources implications

34 The cost of employing a project manager is incorporated into the project budget.

35 Costs for providing communications support to the project have been incorporated into the project budget.

Summary of environmental impact

36 Appropriate assessments, methodologies and working practices will be undertaken as the project is developed to ensure that all potential impacts are mitigated.

37 The objective of the project is to mitigate impacts of an increasing population on protected heathland habitats.

Summary of equalities and diversity impact

38 An Equalities Impact Needs Assessment has been completed.

39 An access audit of the proposed routes has been commissioned and will be undertaken to feed into the project.

40 The Sign Design Guide – a guide to inclusive signage, will be referenced in designing interpretation signs.

41 The outcomes of the project will increase opportunities for more residents to enjoy local access to countryside:

a By making routes accessible to buggies, bikes and wheelchairs there is a particularly positive impact on quality of life for children, disabled and older people.

b By improving signage, promotion and the popularity of routes there is a potential positive impact for less confident user groups by increasing perceptions of safety.

c All residents will benefit from improved accessibility of the routes, providing greater opportunity to enjoy a key green space.

Summary of risk assessment

42 An outline risk assessment has been completed. The Stour Valley Masterplan - Phase One - Hengistbury Head to Tuckton is considered Medium to High risk because of the financial implications and statutory nature of the project.

Background papers

Stour Valley Masterplan
http://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/CouncilDemocracy/Councillors/CouncillorCommitteeMeeting/EnvironmentTransportOverviewScrutinyPanel/2013/11/12/Agenda/Agenda-and-reports.pdf

Appendices

Appendix One: Stour Valley Masterplan - Phase One - Hengistbury Head to Tuckton Business Case
Appendix Two: Stour Valley Masterplan - Phase One - Hengistbury Head to Tuckton Indicative Plan