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## **UNION CHAIN BRIDGE - UPDATE**

**Report by Depute Chief Executive - Place**

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### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**7 March 2017**

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#### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report provides the Executive Committee with an update on the progress of the project prior to the submission of the Stage 1 application to Heritage Lottery Fund in April 2017.**
- 1.2 Union Chain bridge has substantial historical significance as it was the longest suspension bridge in the world when opened in 1820 and is currently the oldest operational suspension bridge in the world to have been designed to carry wheeled vehicles. It is a Grade 1 structure in England and a Category A listed building in Scotland the highest designations.
- 1.3 Northumberland County Council and Scottish Borders Council are working in partnership to pursue Heritage Lottery Funding for a restoration project to repair and continue the usable lifespan of the bridge.
- 1.4 Additional work has been undertaken in advance of the Stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund application, but it has not altered the programme aspiration of completing the works for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020.

#### **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 I recommend that the Executive Committee:-**
- (a) Notes the progress of the project to date.**
  - (b) Agrees that a report is presented to Council prior to the submission of the Stage 2 Heritage lottery Fund in May 2018, to approve final budgets (capital and revenue) and the delivery programme.**

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Union Chain bridge has substantial historical significance as it was the longest suspension bridge in the world when opened in 1820 and is currently the oldest operational suspension bridge in the world to have been designed to carry wheeled vehicles. It is a Grade 1 structure in England and a Category A listed building in Scotland the highest designations.
- 3.2 The bridge has become structurally unsafe and may only be accessed by one light vehicle at a time. Scottish Borders Council and Northumberland County Council are jointly working up a project to refurbish the bridge to mark its 200th anniversary in 2020.
- 3.3 The current funding of the bridge maintenance is based on a 50/50 contribution between both Authorities, based on a maintenance agreement that dates back to a report of October 1996.
- 3.4 The draft Roads Asset Management Plan indicates that the condition of bridges and structures are continuing to deteriorate. Without significant investment within the next few years these assets will be more expensive to repair in future and it may result in the managed decline of the bridge. Over time the risks are:
  - Future repairs will be more expensive;
  - There is risk of increase claims being made against the Council;
  - The safe condition of these assets will be an issue;
  - Loss of an infrastructure connection between communities; and
  - There will be a loss of reputation.
- 3.5 The opportunity was identified in 2014 by Northumberland County Council to look at external funding opportunities to fully refurbish the bridge, targeting funding that promoted culture and heritage.
- 3.6 Northumberland County Council, as lead agents, have committed £550k from their budget to act as leverage to seek to pull together a funding package of not less than £4.6m. Scottish Borders Council are responsible for half of the structure and committed £550k of capital in 2015/16 as match funding to maximise the possible leverage.
- 3.7 The Heritage Lottery Fund are supportive of the project due to its substantial heritage value, but also the international significance and educational opportunities that can be achieved through a potential project.
- 3.8 It was originally programmed to submit the stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund application in Summer 2016, but investigation works were brought forward to increase the level of certainty and agree restoration principles with Historic England and Historic Environment Scotland prior to the application. This has not affected the programmed aspiration of opening the refurbished bridge for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020.

### **4 PROPOSED PROJECT**

- 4.1 When the project was identified with Heritage Lottery Fund the two Authorities were targeting a project not less than £4.6m. The current project objectives are as follows:
  - Re-open the refurbished bridge by Summer 2020 to coincide with the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary;

- Engage the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge through the delivery process;
  - Create opportunities for education through a coordinated strategy and on site information; and
  - Increase the awareness of the bridge and the visitor provisions on site to make it a valuable addition to the other visitor attractions in Berwickshire.
- 4.2 The current project estimate is £5.643m to deliver the refurbishment of the bridge and the Heritage Lottery Fund requirements for culture/heritage and education. The high level breakdown is as follows:
- £5.06m– delivery of refurbishment of the bridge;
  - £84k project development costs; and
  - £490k for the community activities, research, education, interpretation and associated visitor infrastructure.
- 4.3 The refurbishment of the bridge includes the following areas of work:
1. Strengthening of anchorages
  2. Replacement of deck timbers
  3. Replacement of coupling links
  4. Replacing hangers
  5. Repairs to masonry
  6. Re-painting
  7. Alterations to handrail (to improve safety)
  8. Car parking at either end (will not be included in bid, but long term aspiration)
  9. Site interpretation and signage
  10. Community Event programme
  11. Research
  12. Education workshops and activities
  13. Interpretative leaflet and website
- 4.4 From discussions with Heritage Lottery Fund it is still the understanding that the £1m contribution (combined from both Authorities) is sufficient to leverage the £4,643m of funding (22%/78%). The remaining £50k from both Authorities is being committed to pay for consultants and surveys through the two stage application process.
- 4.5 Discussion will commence with Historic Environment Scotland regarding the potential to match fund the Scottish Borders Council contribution to the project, to reduce the Heritage Lottery Fund Contribution and increase the acceptability of the application. Unfortunately, Historic England does not match fund projects with Heritage Lottery Funding.

## **5 PROGRESS UPDATE**

- 5.1 It was originally programmed to submit the Stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund application in summer 2016. Through discussions with Historic England it became apparent that we did not have enough information to define a strategy to refurbish the bridge, therefore they could not support the Stage 1 application.

- 5.2 Over the last six months Northumberland County Council have led an investigation and analysis strategy, which has increased the teams knowledge of the issues with the bridge and how they can be resolved. During this period discussions have been ongoing with Historic England to get to an agreement on refurbishment/conservation principles to allow them to support the Stage 1 Application.
- 5.3 It is currently planned to submit the Stage 1 application in April 2017 follow the agreement of conservation principles with Historic England, Historic Scotland and the two Authorities Heritage Officers.
- 5.4 Although there has been additional work undertaken in advance of the Stage 1 application there has been no time lost in the overall programme as this is work that would have been undertaken in advance of the Stage 2 application. This report proposes that a report is brought back to a Council Committee to approve the Stage 2 application prior to the programmed date of May 2018. The delivery programme is provided in **Annex 1**.

## 6 IMPLICATIONS

### 6.1 Financial

- (a) **Table 7.1** –Current Approved Capital Plan with Allowances for Timing Movements.

	2015/ 16 £000s	2016/ 17 £000s	2017/ 18 £000s	2018/ 19 £000s	2019/ 20 £000s	2020/ 21 £000s	2021/ 22 £000s	TOTAL £000s
<b>Current Estimate</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>550</b>

- (b) As the project detail develops in 2017 through the Heritage Lottery Fund Stage 2 process the costs and the profile will be refined, as it is likely that the 2018/19 estimate will need to be profiled over a longer period with a programmed completion date of summer 2020.
- (c) The submission of the Stage 1 application to Heritage Lottery Fund does not commit the partnering Authorities to the project. A successful Stage 1 application allows the development of the design and leverages budget from Heritage Lottery Fund towards this stage prior to the Stage 2 application. It is proposed to obtain Council Approval for the Submission of the Stage 2 application.
- (d) Through the Project Business Case process there was no information provided in relation to ongoing revenue commitment following the completion of the project. Unfortunately, this information is not available at this point in time as it will be determined by the agreed principles of the conservation/refurbishment defined by Historic England and Historic Environment Scotland. Heritage Lottery Fund will expect the refurbished bridge to be maintained to a high quality for 10 years after the funding period, so depending on how the project is permitted to repair the bridge by the historic bodies it will affect the future maintenance requirement of the partnering Authorities. This information will be analysed following further development of the design and prior to the Authorities approving the submission of the Stage 2 application in May 2018.

## 6.2 Risk and Mitigations

- (a) The Project Business Case highlights that the Union Chain Bridge is deteriorating and without the intervention of a large scale restoration project there is a risk of future closure and managed decline. The Heritage Lottery Fund provides an opportunity to leverage up to 90% funding for the refurbishment of the bridge, not only to secure its long term future, but also turn it into an important visitor attraction in the region.
- (b) There is a risk that the Stage 1 application may not be successful. However, the project team have had several meetings with Heritage Lottery Fund representatives who continue to be positive about the prospect of the project and we have work hard over the last twelve months with Historic England to gain their support for the project.
- (c) There is a risk that the project budget will exceed the current estimate and require additional funding by the partnering Authorities. Based on the current funding by the partnering Authorities the budget estimate would have to increase to more than £10m for it to exceed the Heritage Lottery Fund minimum of 10% Client contribution. This risk has been mitigated by the robustness of the current construction estimate, which has had an early contractor due diligence audit. Also, discussions will commence with Historic Environment Scotland to identify opportunities for funding to reduce the Heritage Lottery Fund intervention and make the project more attractive at the Stage 2 application.

## 6.3 Equalities

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on this proposal and it is anticipated that there are no adverse equality implications.

## 6.4 Acting Sustainably

There are no economic, social or environmental effects at this stage of the project.

## 6.5 Carbon Management

There are no effects on carbon emissions at this stage of the project.

## 6.6 Rural Proofing

Not applicable.

## 6.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes to be made.

## 7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and any comments incorporated into the final report.
- 7.2 The Chief Executive-Place, the Service Director Neighbourhood Services, Chief Officer –Roads, Service Director Assets & Infrastructure and Communications and Marketing Manager have also been consulted.

**Approved by**

**Philip Barr**  
**Depute Chief Executive - Place**

**Signature .....**

**Author(s)**

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Ewan Doyle	Project Management Team Leader – 01835 825124

**Background Papers:**  
**Previous Minute Reference:**

**Note** – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Jacqueline Whitelaw can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at Jacqueline Whitelaw, Environment and Infrastructure, Scottish Borders Council, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose, TD6 0SA, Tel 01835 825431, Fax 01835 825071, email [e&itranslationrequest@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:e&itranslationrequest@scotborders.gov.uk).

**ANNEX 1**  
**Current Delivery Programme – version dated 12/01/17**

