

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	11 March 2019
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Camber Western Car Park Ground Reinforcement

Recommendation to COUNCIL: That:

- 1) the improvements to the surface of Camber Western car park as outlined in the report be approved;
 - 2) the 2019/20 Capital Programme be updated to make provision for £330,000 for these works funded from the Car Parks Earmarked Reserve; and
 - 3) the financial forecast for 2020/21 be amended to increase income by £19,000 and reduce maintenance costs by £6,500.
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Head of Service: Joe Powell

Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Mrs Hart

Introduction

1. Camber Western Car Park is the largest of three car parks owned by Rother District Council in Camber. There are 1,800 spaces, and the car park measures approximately 35,000sqm in total.
2. The car park surface is primarily laid to grass on a thin layer of topsoil. Beneath the topsoil is a mixture of sand and rocks. During the summer season the entire area of the car park is open to visitors from seven days before Good Friday until the first Sunday in October and is filled to capacity on Bank Holidays and peak summer days when the weather is good.
3. The resulting high volume of traffic has a detrimental impact on the grassed areas resulting in a high level of degradation. In the winter months, these same areas of the car park are prone to localised flooding which further destabilises the surface and substructure. A map of the car park is included at Appendix 1.
4. Each summer season the uneven and unstable composition of the car park surface leads to areas of the car park surface breaking up. This results in vehicles becoming trapped in the sand with Council staff assisting the public to extricate themselves. In addition, areas of the car park become unusable, leading to a loss of car park income, alongside an increasing cost of maintenance.
5. This report proposes to make an investment of £330,000 to upgrade Camber Western car park which will reduce the annual repair costs and the loss of income. The proposed repairs will also ensure the Council better meets its

obligations under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, to take reasonable steps to minimise risks of harm to the public and Council staff.

Impact of the poor surface conditions

6. The Council is regularly required to lay aggregate onto the worst affected areas of the car park surface. Despite this action, Council officers are increasingly required to extricate vehicles trapped in sand and increasingly large areas of the car park have to be cordoned off as unusable. As a result, there are a number of negative impacts on the Council and the public, alongside a number of risks being posed:
 - Damage to vehicles and a risk of insurance/personal injury claims.
 - An avoidable risk to public and staff health and safety when cars have to be extricated.
 - A loss of income as closures to large areas of parking increase.
 - The cost of temporary repairs, which are increasing annually.
 - Reduced parking spaces available have led to customer complaints and exacerbate already high levels of traffic congestion.
7. These issues result in lost income to the Council and increased repair costs.

Benefits and Costs

8. Following separate site visits during October 2018 with three companies who specialise in ground reinforcement, three main areas within the car park were identified where the surface structure is severely damaged and the substructure is unstable. Each area measures approximately 1,500 square metres.
9. All companies independently recommend reinforcing the ground in the three affected areas with heavy duty grass blocks for maximum longevity – a plastic grid system which interlocks and allows grass to grow through, preserving the aesthetics of the car park.
10. The work would involve levelling the affected areas and either removing or reusing the soil that has been removed. A plastic mesh would then be imbedded over the area and filled with soil and grass seed. This would prevent the ground from breaking up and support vehicular traffic. All three companies recommend using heavy duty grass blocks which should last for 20 to 25 years. This will minimise the need for further maintenance costs over the period. The improvement to the surface will also reduce the risk of personal injury or damage when extricating vehicles trapped in the sand.
11. The indicative costs of the works given by the companies plus an allowance for contingencies and other associated costs amount to £330,000. Provision will need to be made in the Capital Programme for this amount. It would be possible to spread the works over a three year period. However, this would increase the total cost by an estimated £15,000. As such, if Members are supportive of the proposal, the works would be completed during October 2019 to March 2020.
12. As indicated above the investment would reduce annual maintenance costs and lost income totalling £25,000 annually. Over the expected life of the

works, savings of £625,000 would be realised compared to the £330,000 investment.

Continue to undertake temporary repairs annually

13. Should Members not be supportive of the proposal then the Council would need to maintain its current approach in trying to minimise the impact of the poor car park surface. Previous experience demonstrates that during the summer season areas of the car park will become unusable and require cordoning off and vehicles will continue to become trapped in sand requiring extraction by Council staff and the public.
14. It is likely that car park usage will increase in future as summer periods similar to that seen in 2018 are predicted to increase. The damage caused by increased usage may result in larger areas being closed in the car park, increasing congestion on the surrounding highway infrastructure and further reducing income.

Procurement

15. The estimated cost of the improvements is below the current EU limit for works. The procurement will follow the Council's procurement process and tenders will need to be invited for these works.

Financial Considerations

16. The Capital Programme agreed by Council at its February meeting included provision of £360,000 for these works, spread over three years. At the time of approval, funding had not been identified and therefore further Council approval is required before this project can be progressed. It is now proposed that the works be undertaken in one year which will reduce the cost of £330,000 including a £30,000 contingency.
17. There is sufficient funding available within the Car Parks Earmarked Reserve to meet this cost. As indicated above the improvements to the car park are expected to increase income by £19,000 and reduce maintenance costs by £6,500. As such it is proposed that these adjustments are made to the financial forecast for 2020/21, thereby reducing the amount of reserves being used to balance the Budget.

Conclusion

18. The report sets out the reasons for undertaking improvements to the surface of Camber Western car park. The improvements will secure the future of the car park, reduce the risks associated with its current operation and provide additional income and reduced costs to the Council.

Malcolm Johnston
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

As described in the report, if the works are not approved there will be avoidable revenue costs to the Council over twenty five years, totalling an estimated £625,000. There is also a risk that the Council fails in its obligations to take reasonable steps to

minimise the risk of harm to the public and Council staff under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

IMAGE 1 – AERIAL VIEW OF CAMBER WESTERN CAR PARK

