

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 27 July 2020

Title: The Ravenside Gateway Roundabout Improvement Project

Report of: Ben Hook, Head of Service Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration

Cabinet Members: Councillors Field and Timpe

Ward(s): Pebsham and St. Michaels

Purpose of Report: To introduce the Ravenside Roundabout Project, to make significant improvements including a bespoke gateway to Bexhill sculpture.

Decision Type: Non-Key

Officer Recommendation(s): **Recommendation to COUNCIL:** That the cost of the Ravenside Roundabout Project be met from external sponsorship and the Bexhill Community Infrastructure Levy, capped at a total contribution of £150,000, and the Capital Programme be amended as appropriate;

AND

It be **RESOLVED:** That, subject to the approval of the funding:

- 1) the Ravenside Roundabout Project, including the installation of a bespoke gateway sculpture to Bexhill-on-Sea be supported;
- 2) the Executive Director be authorised to enter into a Section 96 Agreement with Highways England; and
- 3) officers be authorised to commission the sculpture through a tender process with invited Sussex-based professional sculptors and a Ravenside Roundabout Sculpture Panel be established, comprising the Leader of the Council, the Lead Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Tourism, the Pebsham and St. Michaels' District Ward Members and the East Sussex County Councillor for East Bexhill to manage the tender, consultation, design stage and delivery.

Introduction

1. The Highways England (HE) roundabout at Ravenside is situated at an important gateway into Bexhill-on-Sea. Its unkempt appearance makes a poor first impression on visitors and has been a cause of resident dissatisfaction for many years. Appeals to HE to improve the appearance of the roundabout and increase the frequency of maintenance have been unsuccessful.

2. In recent months, officers, along with the Leader of the Council, have met with HE to discuss the opportunity to enhance the appearance of the roundabout and put a sustainable management solution in place. HE are agreeable in principle to Rother District Council (RDC) taking on responsibility for improving and maintaining the roundabout and RDC Officers have been charged with exploring the options to do so.
3. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has a successful roundabout sponsorship scheme administered by Keegan Ford Ltd. Their experience in securing the sponsorship and expertise in traffic management, plus health and safety for works on the Highway, mean that they will need to play a key role in facilitating the project, as RDC does not have that level of expertise.
4. Officers are therefore working in conjunction with HE and ESCC to investigate options and costs for improvements to the roundabout, including a possible two-phase approach involving a phase 1 clearance followed by a phase 2 installation of a sculpture and hardstanding. It is envisaged that this will be at least an 18 month project with phase 1 potentially commencing in autumn 2020.

Suggested Proposal and Actions

5. In order to make changes, secure sponsorship and take on responsibility for specific aspects of future maintenance of the roundabout, RDC will be required to enter a Section 96 Agreement with HE. A similar agreement exists for the roundabout at Little Common, another HE roundabout which RDC maintains, with the costs being recovered through a sponsorship agreement.
6. The design of the Ravenside roundabout, access to it and the health and safety implications for working on it make it a more complicated situation than at Little Common. A traffic management plan will be needed to support any work carried out. Officers are currently taking advice from HE and ESCC in this regard as the expertise does not exist in-house.
7. The proposed two-phase approach would see a one-off tidy up of the roundabout involving strimming of the weeds, removal of the arisings and litter and an application of herbicide. This could proceed in the autumn but, the effect would be short-term only. HE have advised that this could be done ahead of the Section 96 Agreement being in place, subject to a traffic management plan which could potentially be as little as the use of a traffic management trucks to slow traffic on the approaches. Any further access would need the Section 96 Agreement to be in place.
8. Phase 2 would see the installation of a sculpture and the construction of a hard surface across the roundabout with provision for drainage and taking into account access to existing services. This would require a road closure to be in place.
9. The option of improving the roundabout through a soft landscaping scheme, such as laying it to grass or planting, has been considered but dismissed due to weed management issues and the on-going maintenance implications. The roundabout is rife with horsetail, an invasive, deep-rooted weed that spreads

rapidly and is extremely difficult to eradicate. To successfully treat it, a programme of herbicide application over at least two years would be required. Furthermore, the existing stone covering across the surface of the roundabout is likely to harbour a bank of weed seeds which could germinate over many years.

10. The sculpture would be commissioned through a tender process with tenders invited from Sussex based professional sculptors. A Ravenside Roundabout Sculpture Panel comprising the Leader of the Council, the Lead Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Tourism, the Pebsham and St. Michaels' District Ward Members and the East Sussex County Councillor for East Bexhill would be set up to manage the tender, the consultation, design stage and delivery. HE would be engaged in respect of the health and safety implications.

Financial Implications – Estimated Cost of Project and Funding

11. Officers will liaise with ESCC who will bring in Keegan Ford Ltd to present a sponsorship plan to support the costs of making good the roundabout and the cost of the sculpture. Keegan Ford Ltd work with ESCC to secure sponsors for ESCC-managed roundabouts within the county.
12. Other funding sources that could provide match funding for the sculpture against RDC's committed funding would be investigated. Officers will liaise with HE regarding the possibility of the current HE maintenance budget for the roundabout being used to support the project.
13. At this stage, prior to investigations into traffic management and underground facilities having been made, the total cost of the project is estimated to be around £150,000-£200,000 including the clearance of the roundabout, traffic management and the installation of a gateway to Bexhill sculpture.
14. These costs will need to be met from other funding sources as the Council's reserves are under considerable pressure and uncertainty, especially through the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.
15. It is, therefore, suggested that the project progresses, based on the allocation of the use of the Bexhill Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts. These receipts currently amount to £174,709 and therefore it is proposed that the project be capped at £150,000.

Conclusion

16. The Ravenside roundabout has been an eyesore for many years with HE only doing the bare minimum to comply with health and safety. HE are receptive to RDC taking forward a project to improve the appearance but the Council will need to take the lead and fund it.
17. It is therefore recommended to visibly improve the appearance of the Ravenside Roundabout and to install a bespoke gateway sculpture to Bexhill. The costs of up to £150,000 are proposed to be met from external sponsorship and funding from the Bexhill CIL.

Implications

Legal Implications

18. Officers will need to ensure works are complaint with HE's transport legislation.

Human Resources Implications

19. Staff will be taken off other duties in order to facilitate this project and will need to be mindful of working with HE and ESCC H&S requirements.

Environmental Implications

20. This project seeks to improve the physical environment of a key gateway roundabout welcoming visitors and residents to Bexhill-on-Sea.

Risk Implications

21. On the basis that hard landscaping is adopted, ongoing maintenance should be minimal and is expected to be met from any sponsorship deal. However, there will be a risk that should the sponsorship not be sufficient, or the sponsor withdraws at any point, this cost will fall to the Council. Compensatory savings would then have to be found from elsewhere in the Revenue Budget until such time as an alternative solution is found, that may require handing back responsibility of maintenance to HE.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Sustainability	Yes	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	Yes	Exempt from publication	No

Executive Director:	Dr Anthony Leonard
Proper Officer:	Malcolm Johnson, Head of Paid Service
Report Contact Officer:	Donna Hall - Cultural Development & Events Officer
Appendices:	None
Relevant Previous Minutes:	None
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None