
Agenda Item: Bridge Street – Desilting

Meeting Date: 9th June 2025

Contact Officer: Operations Manager

Background

The purpose of the report is to update Members on the increased costs of this extra-ordinary project previously approved by the Town Council. The work was agreed upon to benefit the community, beyond the statutory duties and remit of the Council.

In January 2024 Officers submitted a report to the Council on Riparian and Watercourse Works. The purpose of the report was to update the Council on its progress with the management of the watercourse that fell under its responsibility, riparian management. Council approved the purchase of a portable winch so that the Council's maintenance team could remove trees from the watercourses.

The report also explored the opportunity for Witney Town Council to organise the de-silting of the bridge street - bridge. The Council approved the allocation of funding so officers could instruct contractors to make assessments and proposals for the works.

Current Situation

Update on Bridge Street Bridge De-Silting

The assessment of the bridge had been delayed by the high river levels throughout 2024 and then the scheduling of companies over the summer of 2024. However, the assessment for the works has now been completed and a full programme of works has been received along with costings.

The traditional method of de-silting the bridge would have been to use floating barges with excavators on top. This method did present issues as access to the bridge is restricted through high banks and buildings. The other problem it presented was that they wouldn't have been able to reach under the bridge to fully remove the silt. Fortunately, a contractor has been found that has proposed completing the work in another method. This would involve using grab lorries from the bridge to remove the majority of the silt and then floating a pontoon beneath the bridge to remove the remaining silt by hand and then anything remaining would be jetted.

The cost of these works has come in higher than the funding allocated against the project by the Council. Additionally, the works would also require a road closure that has not been

quoted in these works by the contractor. Officers will still proceed with getting a final quote from companies that use excavators to fully understand if these companies can complete the project or not.

There is still a large amount of work to do before the works can get underway, an application for a permit will need to be made to the Environment Agency (EA), works need to be approved by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) who own the bridge and approval for the road closure would need to be obtained.

Update on watercourse management

A portable winch has been purchased, and Members of the maintenance team have been trained in its use. As well as clearing the fallen tree at Riverside Gardens, the team have worked up the stretch of the Windrush from the leisure centre up to the Bishops Farm Mill flats. They also cleared the section of the Windrush on the west side of Mill Meadow up to the A40.

The purpose of this equipment and training was so that Town Council staff could remove fallen trees without the use of contractors and better fulfil its riparian responsibilities. To ensure Witney Town Council is seen as setting a good example we are clearing both sides of the river which is outside of our riparian responsibilities.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Biodiversity – The work would need a permit from the Environment Agency which would assess the risk posed to plants and animals.
- b) Environment & Climate Emergency - The areas surrounding Bridge Street are within the flood zone, with the changing climate these are may become more susceptible to increased flooding frequency.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

- Reputational risk if not completely resolved
- Delays and congestion caused by a road closure
- EA & OCC approval

Financial implications

- Witney Town Council have a fund of £8,000 to help cover the costs of the de-silting works.
- The works detailed in the report have been quoted £9,800 exVAT this does not include the disposal of the silt or the road closure costs.

- Officers have requested quotes from traffic management companies but are still awaiting final costing.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report