

# Neighbourhood Services & Enforcement Committee

22 June 2023



<b>Title</b>	240m boardwalk down the eastern bank of the River Ash improvement site
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report Author</b>	Andi Roy, Biodiversity Officer, Neighbourhood Services
<b>Ward(s) Affected</b>	Ashford Town
<b>Exempt</b>	No
<b>Exemption Reason</b>	n/a
<b>Corporate Priority</b>	Environment
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p><b>Committee is asked to:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Authorise the Group Head of Neighbourhood Services to go out to tender for the procurement of the River Ash Boardwalk</li> <li>2) Delegate authority to the Biodiversity Officer, Group Head of Neighbourhood Services and Chair of Neighbourhood Services and Enforcement committee to select the chosen supplier</li> <li>3) Authorise the Group Head of Corporate Governance to enter into the contract with the selected supplier</li> </ol>
<b>Reason for Recommendation</b>	Within the River Ash Restoration Scheme, a circular path was created around the river to improve access but is subject to flooding. There is over £225,000 in the Bronzefield Reserves for expenditure on environmental enhancements. We propose a 240m long boardwalk to improve access, costing approximately £180,000 inc. VAT.

## 1. Summary of the report

- 1.1 This report proposes that the Council engages in a tender exercise for the construction of a new boardwalk along the southern side the River Ash in Woodthorpe Recreation Ground, Ashford, to benefit residents through the provision of an accessible circular route around the river while maintaining existing habitat for wildlife.

## 2. Key issues

- 2.1 The River Ash Restoration Project took place in 2020 with two main aims: to increase biodiversity by restoring the river to its natural state and to improve access for residents and visitors. The restoration project has met the first aim by creating excellent wetland habitat but visitors are not able to fully access

the site as intended in the second aim. A path was established on the southern bank from Woodthorpe Road to the A308 (Staines Bypass), however since the project finished we have noticed that there is significant (ankle-deep or more) standing water along this path for much of the year which turns to thick mud when water levels are lower. After discussions with HMP Bronzefield and the Environment Agency there are no definitive explanations as to why there is so much standing water, suggestions are that it may be this area has always had high water levels which were previously concealed by overgrown vegetation before the restoration project.

- 2.2 A raised boardwalk would provide safe access for visitors, allowing the circular route around both sides of the river to be used as it was originally intended. Moreover, by encouraging people to keep to the boardwalk it would support the wildlife of the area by keeping human and dog disturbance to a minimum. This will provide safety for nesting and feeding animals. It would improve opportunities for the public to observe and learn about wildlife because they are more likely to see animals in a wetland environment that is undisturbed and undamaged.
- 2.3 Spelthorne Borough Council has over £225,000 from a historic planning agreement called the Bronzefield Reserves which we can spend on environmental enhancements in this area. Cost estimations of a 240m long boardwalk are calculated at £180,000 based on the price of a 90m boardwalk installed elsewhere, which was sourced via a tendering exercise and where the most economically advantageous tender was selected. This boardwalk would be made of recycled plastic, as per the previous boardwalk, as this has high durability and requires little further maintenance. The boardwalk would be 1.5 metres wide with a handrail and would have at least two passing places.

### **3. Options analysis and proposal**

- 3.1 Option 1 (Preferred): Enter into a procurement exercise for a contractor to construct a 240m long boardwalk down the southern bank of the River Ash. Under this proposal:
  - (a) Park users will enjoy improved access to the circular walk, which is regularly flooded throughout the year.
  - (b) Contractors carrying out maintenance around the site will be able to access all areas more easily.
  - (c) A significant portion of money of the Bronzefield Reserves will be used for its intended purpose.
  - (d) Value for money is ensured by going out to the market and running a tender exercise.
- 3.2 Option 2: Do nothing and leave the path in its current state. Under this option:
  - (a) The path will remain unusable to most park users for much of the year due to flooding underfoot.

### **4. Financial implications**

- 4.1 The Council already has the sum of £225,994 in the Bronzefield Reserves to spend to spend on environmental improvements to this area.

- 4.2 The budget for the tender will be £180,000, with the estimated cost based on previous similar works. This is a capital project and it is estimated that this will leave us with approximately £45,000 to spend on continued maintenance.
- 4.3 There will be revenue costs associated with maintenance of the new boardwalk, which will be met from the remainder of the Bronzefield Reserves money as with current maintenance of the site.

## **5. Risk considerations**

- 5.1 The risks are conducive with any tender exercise in that tendered prices may be higher than expected. To reduce this risk we have limited the value of the proposed contract to £180,000.
- 5.2 The correct procurement process will ensure that we get best value from the potential suppliers.

## **6. Procurement considerations**

- 6.1 Procurement has been supporting the project to date and will continue to support the tendering exercise for a suitable contractor to meet the project requirements, to ensuring value for money is achieved from a compliant tender process.
- 6.2 The value of the works is well below the threshold at which the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 apply. For this value of works a tender with a minimum of three contractors is required.
- 6.3 It is noted that any contractor design will need planning approval, prior to the works commencement.

## **7. Legal considerations**

- 7.1 Under an Agreement dated 27 January 2000 the Secretary of State for the Home Department agreed to transfer to the Council Bronzefield open space and to pay the Council a commuted sum. The commuted sum received in 2012, was £319,000, of which £287,292 related to the maintenance of the open space.

## **8. Other considerations**

- 8.1 Due to buried utilities on-site, the exact route of the boardwalk is not yet precisely defined and will be determined by contractors at the design stage, although it will largely follow the route of the existing footpath. It could therefore end up being slightly longer or shorter than 240m.
- 8.2 Some small trees may need to be removed to facilitate construction.
- 8.3 The existing pathway (not a legal right of way) will need to be closed to the public during construction works. As the path is currently extremely inaccessible this should not impact on users and it will be much enhanced when works are complete.

## **9. Equality and Diversity**

- 9.1 The boardwalk will enable people with mobility problems to access the entire circular route envisaged as part of the restoration project where access is currently limited to those willing to walk through standing water and mud.

## **10. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications**

10.1 Our rivers are predicted to flood more frequently in the coming decades due to climate change so this raised boardwalk will become even more necessary in the future. The sustainability of the material used to make the boardwalk has been considered and plastic was chosen because although wood is cheaper, it will rot away quickly in the damp environment and need frequent maintenance.

## **11. Timetable for implementation**

11.1 The tender process will begin as soon as approval is gained from committee to commence the procurement exercise.

11.2 Ideally the installation of the boardwalk will take place in Autumn/Winter 2023 but this will depend on contractor availability and suitable ground conditions. The Environment Agency's permit may specify a time period when work should be avoided but this is unlikely given the habitats on site.

## **12. Contact**

12.1 Andi Roy [a.roy@spelthorne.gov.uk](mailto:a.roy@spelthorne.gov.uk) 01784 446415

**Background papers:** There are none.

## **Appendices:**

### **Appendix A: Boardwalk route**

A map setting out the basic route for the boardwalk (specifics of which will be decided in design phase).