

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee
DATE	10 January 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Denburn Restoration – Project Continuation
REPORT NUMBER	COM/23/024
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	David Dunne
REPORT AUTHOR	Sue Cumming
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1 and 6

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 We are seeking committee approval to explore funding for the continuation of the Denburn Restoration project and to report back to committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee:-

- 2.1 Agree that the principles of the Denburn Restoration project would improve biodiversity and increase people's connection to nature via active travel, and in turn this will improve health and wellbeing for people, whilst taking steps to towards tackling twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.
- 2.2 Approve the continuation of the Denburn Restoration project subject to external funding being obtained to deliver the project; and
- 2.3 Instruct the Chief Officer Strategic Place Planning, following consultation with the Chief Officer Operations and Protective Services, to explore opportunities for external funding to cover the costs of delivering the project and report back to committee on 7th March on next steps.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 A Denburn restoration feasibility study was carried out by Aberdeen City Council flooding team and Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) to consider flood alleviation in the area from Maidencraig and Kingsgate in 2018. Committee reports regarding this project were given committee approval in 2015 (report number CHI 15207 and CHI 17165). This project was then put on hold due to Covid-19 and work restarted in 2021. Following flood modelling work carried out in 2021, it was concluded that sufficient flood relief would not be achieved to warrant this as a project for Aberdeen City Council Flooding team, to develop further to obtain funding. However, it was agreed by Aberdeen

City Council project team and SEPA that the project still has many benefits for nature and people; and should be developed further. The Natural Environment Policy team within Aberdeen City Council are proposing that this feasibility study is progressed to obtain revised costings, prioritise and re-evaluate scope of works to minimise maintenance and delivery cost; and to deliver the Denburn restoration. Funding for the full capital costs of the project will be obtained using external sources. Approximately 50% could be obtained through the Water Environment Fund (WEF) managed by SEPA. The other 50% could be obtained from other external funding sources.

- 3.2 This project aims to:
- Improve the burn by re-meandering the burn to remove current straight sections, returning it to a more natural course.
 - Create an enhanced wetland habitat.
 - Improve biodiversity for the area.
 - Reconnect people with nature.
 - Provide sections of path to link communities and improve recreational use.
 - Improve the aesthetics of the blue/green infrastructure network.
- 3.3 The feasibility study of the Denburn reach considered a 2.3km stretch from Maidencraig to Kingsgate running through Aberdeen City Council land, with sections of NHS Grampian land on the north bank and some private development around Maidencraig, Craighden and Denwood . Surrounding this reach of the Denburn are four primary schools, an academy and a hospital. In the vicinity of the burn are low-income households and national research has shown these households are more likely to be disadvantaged by not having the same opportunities as higher earning households to connect with nature. In addition, the Denburn has the potential to be an outdoor community facility and already has a pond dipping area used by schools at Den of Maidencraig.
- 3.4 The project proposes to create a natural meandering burn, new wetland planting, new boardwalks and re-aligned paths to allow users to experience/ interact with nature. Community engagement will also be undertaken and linked with work from the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Depending on the revised costs this project may take several years to complete. See Appendix A and B for current and predicted visual interpretations after the project has been completed.
- 3.5 Approval is sought to develop the project further in January 2023 in order for SEPA to consider this project for the WEF for 2023/24. If successful for the WEF, Aberdeen City Council would apply for external funding for the other 50% of the project, with the aim to deliver this project within the next 3 years.
- 3.6 If successful this project will help deliver Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) targets, restoration work detailed within the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and provide essential stepping-stone habitat for nature to move around the city and to adapt to climate change.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Estimated costs for the six different phases of the project were obtained in 2021. These will need to be revised to inform delivery and a decision on whether all phases are undertaken from the feasibility or if some phases are selected.
- 4.2. The WEF provided by the Scottish Government and managed by SEPA could fund this project. This is a competitive funding source for projects across Scotland and allocates money to projects every year. This is an annual fund that is approximately 5 million in total in each year which is recognised by Scottish Government and SEPA to deliver projects to provide resilience to the three crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and health and wellbeing. The WEF like a spread of projects across Scotland and prioritise projects that benefit a sizeable population. SEPA like projects where they can work with Local Authorities and partnerships and the Denburn restoration project has a sizeable community within a 20-minute walk (and larger community for wheeling travel) in an area where there are significant low-income households and would be seen in a positive light. SEPA have said verbally they are committed to this project and have requested we submit our project proposal before the start of the financial year to increase the likelihood of being awarded funding. They can provide technical support and source funding in the region of 50% of the project cost. This can include funding towards a project coordinator as part of an overall funding package. If we are unsuccessful with being awarded this funding, we would not pursue alternative streams of funding as the WEF is a significant funding source which we would struggle to find to deliver this project.
- 4.3 Maintenance of the area once works are completed will be required and this will have an impact on revenue budget and front-line operational resources for Aberdeen City Council Environmental Services team who manage the majority of the area. The proposal has been discussed with Environmental Services and although they are supportive of the overall benefits of the project, they would not be in support of this project unless adequate revenue budget is allocated for long-term maintenance. If this project is progressed, further discussions regarding the design to reduce maintenance costs as far as possible will involve Environmental Services.
- 4.4 It is proposed that approximately 50% of the proposal is funded via the WEF. The remaining approximately 50% of the budget could come from a variety of mainly external funding sources with potential options including, but not limited to, NESTRANS, Esmee Fairburn Foundation, National Lottery Grant for Heritage and Bus Lane Enforcement.
- 4.5 The Denburn is a tributary of the River Dee and Aberdeen City Council are involved as a partner in the Dee Catchment Partnership. Initial discussions with the Dee Catchment Partnership are supportive of the proposal as it fits within the Delivery Plan for the Dee Catchment Partnership. They have also indicated they could help run and coordinate the project, potentially via hosting a project officer. At this stage project officer costs are unknown but can be obtained

during the revised costing for this project, this cost can also be sought from external funders.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 It is proposed to complete the project in phases to take advantage of external funding whilst also minimising the impact on wildlife. In the short term there will be some habitat loss whilst creating meanders in the burn's channel but in the medium to long term it aims to improve biodiversity.

6.2 The project aims to be nature positive and will contribute to our LOIP Stretch Outcome 15 of protecting/managing 26% of Aberdeen area by 2026.

6.3 As part of works adapting to climate change and a changing climate, Aberdeen will need to undertake work that provides high quality blue/ green infrastructure within the city to provide resilience to nature and people. This proposal fits within Aberdeen Adapts: Climate Adaptation Framework by providing a nature-based solution in protecting water quality and creating high quality habitat for nature.

6.4 Where possible local materials will be used such as fallen dead trees and plants from local nurseries to ensure that sustainability has been considered and carbon emissions are kept low.

7. RISK

7.1 There is a risk of not being awarded the WEF managed by SEPA which is anticipated to fund approximately 50% of the project, however, SEPA have stated they are committed to this proposal therefore we are reasonably confident in obtaining this funding. If funding was not obtained by SEPA the project would likely not be able to proceed. Obtaining the remaining 50% from other external funding sources is also required for the project to proceed and is therefore a risk although there are various options which give confidence that this funding can be acquired. This project is currently an active project with SEPA. If we decide to delay by 12 months or longer the project will no longer be considered active resulting in increased competition for the WEF, and reducing our chances of being awarded funding to Aberdeen City Council. Therefore, our best chance of securing the WEF is by applying in 2023/2024.

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No significant risk but not delivering project would risk commitment to our Biodiversity Duty and Nature Conservation Strategy	We have had several meetings with SEPA about this project and they are happy we are meeting the WEF objectives.	Low	N/A
Compliance	No significant risk but not delivering project would risk commitment to our Biodiversity Duty and Nature Conservation Strategy	Local Authorities are being encouraged to be nature positive by 2030. To achieve this, we need to be proactive and take opportunities to improve biodiversity when they arise, such as delivering this project, especially when there are multiple benefits that can be achieved.	Low	N/A
Operational	No Significant Risk	Design to reflect no/low maintenance options	Low	N/A
Financial	Funding may not be granted by SEPA or other external sources required to fund the project	Project would not go ahead unless WEF is awarded but we consider this low due to it being a current project with SEPA and it satisfies project objectives	Low	Yes
Reputational	No Significant Risk but not being seen to	Ensuring we work collaboratively internally with	Low	N/A

	deal with the nature crises/biodiversity loss whilst also enhancing the local environment for recreation etc may have a negative reputational risk	different ACC departments to ensure it delivers multiple benefits both internally and externally.		
Environment / Climate	Short term impact on nature during construction	Once project is complete there will be a medium to long term benefit of improved biodiversity level.	Low	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2022-2023</u>			
			Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>			<p><i>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement:-</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>We Strive to achieve Net Zero to ensure a Just Transition is fair, both economically and socially for the citizens of Aberdeen.</i> <i>Improving active travel infrastructure.</i> <i>Seek to make Aberdeen a UNICEF child friendly City by creating outdoor spaces that they can enjoy and help with their health and wellbeing.</i>
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</u>			
Prosperous Outcomes	Place	Stretch	<p>The proposals within this report impact in two areas of the delivery plan. The proposal will support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 14 Increase sustainable travel: 38% of people walking and 5% of people cycling as main mode of travel by 2026.</p> <p>and 15 – Addressing the nature crisis by protecting/ managing 26% of Aberdeen’s area for nature by 2026.</p> <p>The paper seeks approval for progressing and delivering the Denburn Restoration to improve biodiversity whilst improving people’s experience</p>

	of active travel to help maintain the habit of active travel.
Prosperous People (Children & Young People)	<p>The proposals will support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 4 95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026. Through Key Driver 4.3 Improving health and reducing inequalities.</p> <p>Stretch outcome 5 90% of children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026. This is reflected in interactions, activities, supports and services. Through Key Driver 5.2 Increasing children’s knowledge and understanding of their own physical and mental wellbeing and take an early intervention and prevention approach.</p>
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p> <p><i>Regional Strategies: Aberdeen Adapts, Regional Transport Strategy)</i></p> <p><i>City Strategies and Strategic Plans (Local Development Plan)</i></p> <p><i>Council Strategies (LOIP)</i></p>	<p><i>The proposal of the Denburn restoration within this report supports Net Zero Aberdeen, Aberdeen Adapts, the Strategic Development Plan and Local Development Plan by creating blue/green infrastructure within the city to provide resilience to climate change for nature and people. In addition, this proposal promotes active travel and aims to enhance user experience to create and maintain long term active travel habits, supporting the Local Transport Strategy.</i></p> <p><i>Supports LOIP as referred to in above table.</i></p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Not required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	Not required

- 10. BACKGROUND Information**
BEGIN Project CHI15207
Flooding Mitigation Projects CHI7165
Denburn Project Start Up Sheet

11 APPENDICES

Appendix A Denburn Feasibility

Appendix B Appendix F extract of an Artistic Visualisation of Restoration Options

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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