



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**



**Environment Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

5th July 2022

Report of: Councillor Trollope-Bellew

Cabinet Member for Culture and
Visitor Economy

Update on the Witham/Slea Blue Green Corridor Project

To provide the Committee with an update on the projects within the Witham/Slea Blue Green Corridor.

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Corporate Priority:

Administrative

Decision type:

Administrative

Wards:

Two or more Wards

Debbie Roberts, Organisational Development
Manager

21 June 2022

Alan Robinson, Deputy Chief Executive

21 Jun. 2022

Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew, Cabinet
Member for Culture and Visitor Economy

24 June 2022

Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s)

- 1. The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the update regarding this project.**

1 The Background to the Report

Introduction

- 1.1 The Witham/Slea Blue Green corridor project is a co-funded partnership project funded by South Kesteven District Council (SKDC), North Kesteven District Council (NKDC), Environment Agency (EA), and National Trust (NT), with matching funding being received from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) at 60%. Section 106 monies are also being made available from developers in Sleaford (Sleaford West Sustainable Urban Extension development).
- 1.2 This provided a unique opportunity for SKDC to improve the natural environmental infrastructure and regenerate the urban conurbations of Grantham and Sleaford via partnership grant funding. The objective is to improve ecological connectivity by regenerating the rivers and riverside habitats running through Grantham and Sleaford, for the adaptability and resilience of the ecosystems, biodiversity, and the local and visiting populations, and to foster the creation of better habitats. The result will be an attractive, centralised and environmentally enriched river corridor for residents, visitors, and wildlife.
- 1.3 South Kesteven District Council received a grant in-principle of £743,831 from the ERDF in April 2019 to deliver 14 environmental and habitat improvement projects along the River Witham and River Slea.
- 1.4 South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) is acting as the lead partner in this ring-fenced programme. The total operating budget of this programme is £1,239,268. SKDC acts as the financial body for the project, managing all income and expenditure. This was presented to Cabinet on 10 September 2019 and can be accessed at <http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s23871/ERDF%20Grant%20Agreement%20Final.pdf>
- 1.5 To accept the funding from ERDF, a contract was required to be entered into with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for the maximum amount of £743,831. Approval to enter contract was obtained from Cabinet in September 2019. The contract was entered into on 9th October 2019.
- 1.6 The MHCLG administers the grant defrayal and delivery for the European Union (EU) funded programme.
- 1.7 The table below details the funding profile:

Funders	Totals	Percentage Funding	of Payment Terms
South Kesteven District Council	£182,922 (plus in-kind support)	15%	Yearly Budget agreed
North Kesteven District Council	£156,300	13%	Once schemes procured by SKDC money recovered
Environment Agency	£140,000	11%	Quarterly
National Trust	£16,486	1%	Upon contracting
European Union Regional Development Fund	£743,560	60%	Quarterly arrears
Total:	£1,239,268	100%	

Delivery, Rationale and Outputs

- 1.8 Delivery is managed by a two-person team employed by SKDC who manage procurement, grant claims, surveying and reporting. The team is funded by SKDC, who can reclaim a proportion of the funding from the grant. The funding reclaimed is utilised within the programme for further delivery of projects. The project sits within Organisational Development and Change.
- 1.9 The overall project will achieve **7.05 hectares** of land rehabilitated and a total of **5.29 hectares** of habitats supported to attain better conservation status. Therefore, the projects total measurable outputs equal **12.34 hectares**.
- 1.10 The wider direct benefits for the towns and partners are much more important to project partners: health benefits (well-being & active-lifestyle), supporting sustainable travel, visitor economy and place-making for South Kesteven.

Governance and Partners

- 1.11 The project is overseen by the project board. The board is responsible for reviewing the costs, programme and approving the course of action to be undertaken where a collective decision is brought forward for voting. A Councillor from SKDC and NKDC is represented alongside representatives from the Environment Agency and National Trust. These four stakeholders being the main funding partners of the programme. The Regeneration Project Manager is required to report quarterly to the board on items from: delivery, communications, finance, and any significant matters which require the attention or a key vote from the members. The Board members are as follows:
- Cllr Rosemary Trollope-Bellew – SKDC – Chair
 - Cllr Mervyn Head – NKDC - Vice-Chair
 - Natalie Wren – Environment Agency Representative
 - Ian Cooper – National Trust Representative
- 1.12 Terms of reference have been agreed and updated to include a delegation from the Board to the Project Manager and Directors of the Council for decision making to align to the Councils contract and financial regulations.
- 1.13 The Regeneration Project Manager and Support Officer continue to liaise closely with the Partners, and other stakeholders to ensure smooth delivery. To this end a delivery working group consisting of representative from the partner organisations has been formed and remains actively involved in providing expertise and support for the delivery of the programme. The working group meet fortnightly.
- 1.14 Communications meetings are being set up monthly to ensure that there is a continuous message and positive press regarding the project.
- 1.15 Wider partners who support the project and its board include local landowners, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and Lincolnshire Rivers Trust.
- 1.16 The programme and projects align with the shared plans of:
- Lincolnshire Rivers Trust - Urban Opportunities Study
 - Environment Agency – Urban River & Wetlands Plan
 - Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust – River, Wetland and Wildlife targets
 - North Kesteven District Council – Local Plan and NK Plan (Environment)

- South Kesteven – Local Plan 2018 to 2036 (Policy: EN1 and EN2)

Funding

- 1.17 The funding from EU programmes, including ERDF, are guaranteed, and underwritten by HM Treasury for the project lifetime.
- 1.18 The funding ratio is 40% from the local partners and 60% from the ERDF. The funding impact is: for every £1 contributed from the partnership, £1.50 will be matched from the ERDF programme.
- 1.19 The funding from the ERDF will be paid back to SKDC at 60% match funding in arrears. As such, Claims will complete in Q2 of 2023/2024.
- 1.20 The table below outlines the projects:

In-channel Works	Wetland Creation and Improvement	Meadow Creation	Other works
Berm Creation Gravel Introduction Bank Softening	Queen Elizabeth Park Belton Park Lollycocks Field	Sedgwick Meadows Dysart Park Queen Elizabeth Park	Tree works as required Footpath creation Public Engagement / Website development Volunteer and Leaner opportunities

Project Delivery and Progress

- 1.21 The following projects have been awarded:
- Dysart Park (Completed)
 - Meadow installation
 - Tree Planting
 - Bird Box installation
 - Sedgewick Meadows (scheduled for completion October 2022)
 - Hedge laying for habitat creation
 - Stock fence installation to facilitate conservation grazing
 - Spot Spraying of invasive species
 - Meadow preparation and installation
 - Lollycocks Field, Sleaford (Scheduled for completion October 2022)
 - In-channel works – 5 projects (scheduled to complete October 2022)
 - Wyndham Park, Grantham
 - St. Catherine’s Road, Grantham
 - Queen Elizabeth Park, Grantham
 - The Hub, Sleaford

Procurement

- 1.22 Welland Procurement are supporting on procurement. The following projects will be finalised for open tender procurement over the next month:
- Sleaford Footpaths - one contract, three footpaths
 - Lollycocks field footpath

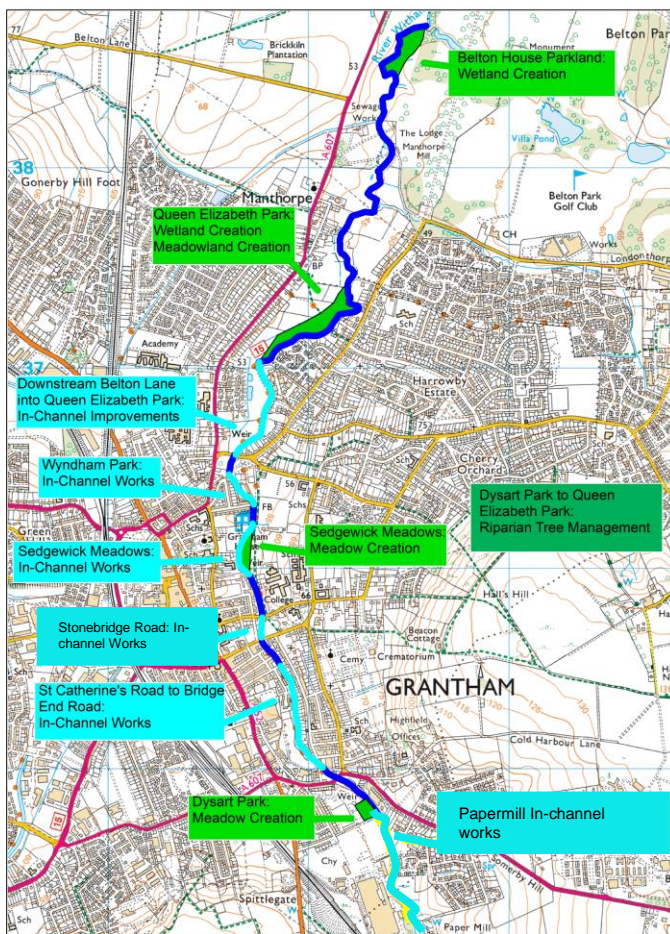
- Footpath upgrade upstream of Sleaford
- Footpath installation upstream of Sleaford
- Design and Build Contract

We will be precurring a contractor/s to deliver four projects under two contracts. The first contract is to design and build the wetland in QEP only, and the second contract is to design and build three in-channel projects. All three project are in Grantham.

- QEP Wetland
- Stonebridge Rd - In-Channel Works
- Sedgwick Meadows – In-Channel Works
- Papermill – In-Channel Works

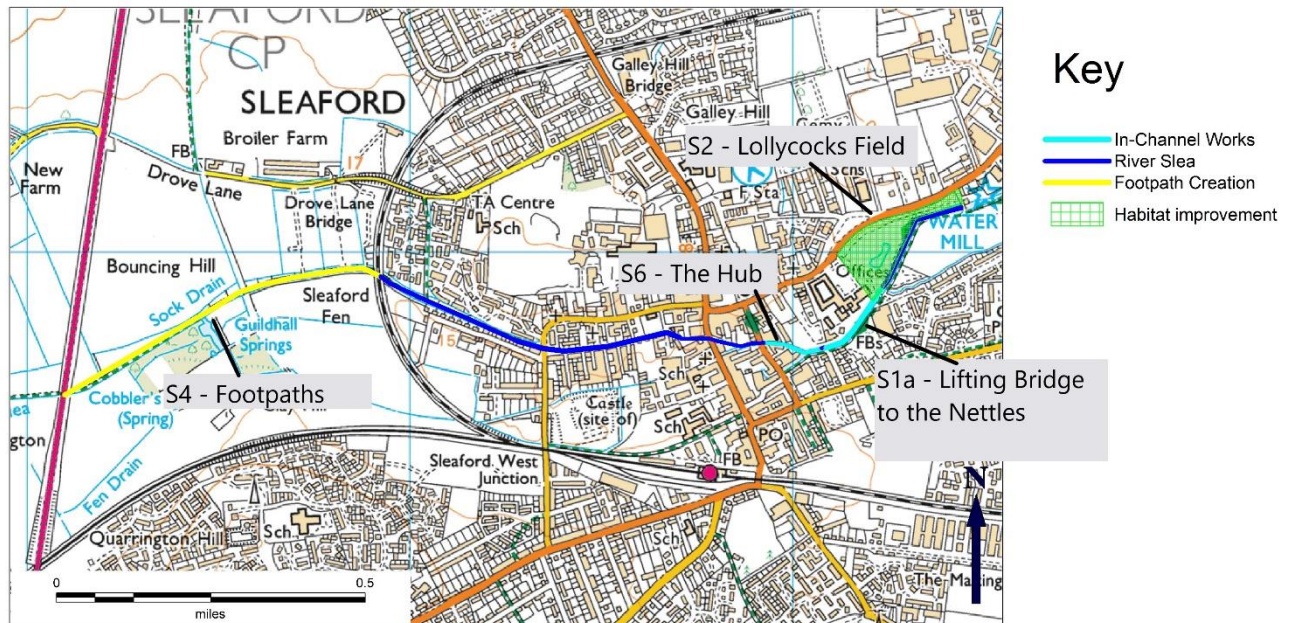
1.23 The two maps below detail where the works will be undertaken in both Grantham and Sleaford:

Grantham Works Overview



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Sleaford Works Overview



2 Consultation and Feedback Received, Including Overview and Scrutiny

- 2.1 A report was presented to the Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 13th December 2017. This presentation took place between the 1st stage of bidding and preceded the 2nd stage bid which was submitted in June 2018. The Committee welcomed the initiative and recognised the opportunity to obtain funding in order to provide better links and water management along the Witham Corridor.
- 2.2 A second representation was made to the Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 14th February 2018 in which the 2nd stage bidding process was outlined.
- 2.3 A key-decision was made by Cabinet on 10th September 2019 to enter into contract with the MHCLG to secure the ERDF grant funds. The contract was entered into on 9th October 2019 for a fixed-term of 2 years. A project change request is going to be submitted to the MHCLG for an extension of 9 months due to delays at the start of the project due to Covid. The two posts will be extended once approval from the MHCLG is obtained.
- 2.4 Individual projects received consultation with members of the public who represent local interest groups such as: Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park, Friends of Wyndham Park and Dysart Park Action Group.
- 2.5 Formal public consultation was undertaken in May 2021. Proposed works were generally well received.

3 Available Options Considered

- 3.1 The project is in the delivery stage, this report is to brief the Committee of progress, the Project Board are responsible for detailed decision making.

4 Preferred Option

- 4.1 The project is in the delivery stage, this report is to brief the Committee of progress.

5 Reasons for the Recommendation (s)

5.1 The project is in the delivery stage, this report is to brief the Committee of progress.

6 Next Steps – Communication and Implementation of the Decision

6.1 The Project must adhere to strict ERDF branding requirements, which have been communicated to all partners and other agencies involved, including contractors.

6.2 A Communications plan is being formulated between both District Councils and Communications meetings are being set up monthly to ensure that there is a continuous message and positive press regarding the project.

6.3 The project has a web-page (<https://www.withamsleablegreencorridor.co.uk/>) and social media presence.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 A revenue budget bid was submitted to Council which approved the expenditure of this programme over the 3 years of delivery. The total amount of £180,000 has been approved for the period of 2019/20 – 2021/2022.

7.2 The total operating budget of this programme is £1,239,268. Each of the 14 projects has been allocated a budget for delivery. The 14 projects are at various stages of procurement and delivery, with project budgets being released into the public domain at the point of procurement.

7.3 The additional staffing costs required to extend the project are being met through the current total project budget. Monitoring and reporting on the project will continue throughout the duration until the project deliverables have been completed.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Richard Wyles, Chief Finance Officer

8 Legal and Governance Implications

8.1 Delegation was made at Cabinet to the Board for decision making, this is now included within the Terms of Reference to include a delegation from the Board to the Project Manager and Directors of the Council for decision making to align to the Councils contract and financial regulations.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance

9 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

9.1 A broad statement relating to the Council's responsibilities on ensuring equality of opportunity and the elimination of discrimination was developed as part of the bid to the ERDF. The duty will require that this Council ensures that equal access is created or maintained wherever possible along the river corridor.

10 Risk and Mitigation

10.1 The projects have been planned in partnership with the Environment Agency, who also hold the authority to grant flood consent on all in-channel projects. To mitigate any negative environmental impact a full ecological and species survey has been carried out along each stretch of the river route where projects are planned. Furthermore, the project team have undertaken MoRPH River Conditional Assessments prior to the commencement of works, to evaluate the current river conditions for each stretch. The team and partnership have full confidence that this will support the river system in the urban conurbations and also in the downstream reaches of the river.

- 10.2 An ecological clerk has been retained to advise and mitigate for any protected species which are evident within the river system. Project plans have also taken into account the ecological constraints of the seasons, nesting birds, hibernation and active wildlife sites.
- 10.3 Each of the 14 set projects have a 10% contingency built in should any matters arise during works and the financial commitment from partners have included the cost for contingency.
- 10.4 Individual project packs for procurement have been developed for each project outlining the works and consideration for access, materials and constraints on-site. These have been created by all involved in the partnership including supporting partners: SKDC, EA, NKDC, Lincolnshire Rivers Trust and Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and the Ecological Clerk of the Work.
- 10.5 Press and publicity opportunities must follow EU branding guidelines to include the appropriate EU and ERDF branding. Communications teams within the partner organisation and contractors have been fully briefed on branding requirements.
- 10.6 SKDC will need to adhere to document retention guidelines, provide financial transparency for the programme to MHCLG and complete a suitable completion report. These matters will be completed within the project programme.

11 Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 In all instances, the safety of the public will be paramount during the works with a full health and safety assessment being undertaken for each site.
- 11.2 Any relevant permissions will be sought within project delivery for items which affect the highway or walking routes along the river to safeguard members of the public.

12 How will the recommendations support South Kesteven District Council's declaration of a climate emergency?

- 12.1 The Witham/Slea Blue Green Corridor Project is an environmental improvement project, with the primary aim of improving and creating habitat to increase biodiversity and species richness.
- 12.2 The project is carbon positive, and as such has the potential to offset carbon emissions generated by both District Council and to contribute towards the Council's ambition to reduce the Council's carbon footprint by at least 30% by 2030.
- 12.3 Furthermore, the project has the potential to springboard other environmental improvement initiatives (potentially through partnership approaches), particularly relevant in light of the Environment Act 2021, which requires all new developments to improve or create habitats for nature.

13 Other Implications (where significant)

- 13.1 Non-Available

14 Background Papers

- 14.1 SEG56 report and minutes 13th December 2017 as follows: <http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=631&MID=3446>
- 14.2 Growth Overview and minutes 14th February 2018 is as follows: <http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=631&Mid=3447>

- 14.3 Full Council Minutes 1st March 2019 approving Budget 2019/20: A district that works for everyone, delivering opportunity: <http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=261&MId=3622&Ver=4>
- 14.4 Cabinet Key Decision Witham Sleas Blue/Green Corridor 11/09/2019: <https://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=26131&optionId=0>
- 14.5 Full Council Appendix B which outlines the recurring SKDC budget for 3 years 2019-2022: <http://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s22388/Appendix%20B%20Capacity%20Bids.pdf>
- 14.6 HM Treasury Funding guarantee for European Union Exit (July 2018): <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-from-eu-programmes-guaranteed-until-the-end-of-2020>
- 14.7 North Kesteven District Council report to Executive Board 8th May 2018: <https://democracy.n-kesteven.gov.uk/documents/s87011/01%20Exec%20Report%20PA6%20Funding%208th%20May%202018%200003.pdf>
- 14.8 North Kesteven District Council – Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (Adopted 2017): <https://www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=54815>
- 14.9 North Kesteven District Council – Environment (Low Carbon NK): <https://www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/your-council/how-the-council-works/key-plans-strategies-and-policies/policies/environment/low-carbon-nk-charter-and-plan/>
- 14.10 Lincolnshire Rivers Trust - Urban Opportunities Study (March 2015): <https://www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/resources/assets/attachment/full/0/20215.pdf>

15 Appendices

15.1 n/a

Report Timeline:	Date of Publication on Forward Plan (if required)	6 June 2022
	Previously Considered by: Cabinet	11 September 2019
	Final Decision date	5 July 2022