

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Audit and Governance Committee
Date of Meeting:	24 March 2021
Subject:	Tewkesbury Garden Town – Ashchurch Bridge Project
Report of:	Programme Manager
Corporate Lead:	Programme Director
Lead Member:	Lead Member for the Built Environment
Number of Appendices:	Two

Executive Summary:

The report offers a brief update regarding the progress of the Ashchurch Bridge Over Rail (ABoR) project, including expenditure incurred to date, the impact of the programme delays caused by COVID and a review of the specific risks featured within the Corporate Risk Register. However, with a planning determination imminent and a formal request being positively considered by Homes England to extend the contractual delivery period for the project, the delivery team, which includes Gloucestershire County Council, is confident that the project can be successfully delivered, albeit over an extended timeframe. As it stands, the Council is yet to drawdown any of the committed grant funding for the project and full commitment to the detailed delivery phase remains dependent on planning. Consequently, current financial exposure for the Council is limited and reasonably contained.

Recommendation:

To CONSIDER the project update information set out and to review progress against the planned mitigations and actions.

Reasons for Recommendation:

To offer assurance that the project specific risks featured within the Corporate Risk Register are being robustly and effectively managed.

Resource Implications:

None arising from this report.

Legal Implications:

None arising from this report.

Risk Management Implications:

Regularly reviewed by both the Garden Town Programme Board and ABoR Project Board, which includes senior representatives from Homes England, Network Rail and Gloucestershire County Council, as well as TBC. A detailed Project Risk Register is also held and routinely updated by the project delivery team, in order to keep the Project Board well informed on any issues.

Performance Management Follow-up:

Regularly reviewed by both the Garden Town Programme Board and ABoR Project Board.

Environmental Implications:

None.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1** In September 2017, in order to support the delivery of the JCS housing numbers and preparatory work being undertaken on the Ashchurch Masterplan, the Council successfully submitted a Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) 'Marginal Viability Funding' (MVF) bid to deliver a new road bridge over the railway line at Ashchurch. Promoted by MHCLG to support housing delivery, it was intended that the £8,132,465 capital grant awarded (February 2018) would help to unlock development in the wider Ashchurch area.
- 1.2** The proposed ABoR will be located approximately 150m north of the residential area of Northway and will cross the Bristol-Birmingham main rail line. The scheme will provide a 7.3m wide vehicular carriageway, as well as 3m wide Shared Use Paths (SUPs) on each side, within the bridge parapet, providing high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure across the railway line as a contribution to the promotion of active travel, as well as the wider sustainability principles of the Garden Town.
- 1.3** The location and footprint of the proposed ABoR is illustrated in Appendix 2. This presents the red line boundary for the scheme which also includes the haul roads that will provide temporary access to the ABoR site during construction.
- 1.4** The ABoR is being funded by the Homes England sponsored Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) as it is considered key to unlocking land for development through the enablement of a road to the north of Ashchurch that will provide access to potential residential land on either side of the railway. At present, the only link between the eastern and western sides of the railway, to the north of the A46, is via a level crossing on Grange Road which is not considered a sustainable access route, longer term, due to safety concerns.
- 1.5** Following designation in March 2019, this key infrastructure initiative will now help to unlock delivery of the first phase of the Tewkesbury Garden Town.

2.0 PROGRAMME PROGRESS

- 2.1** With the Grant Funding Agreement with Homes England signed in December 2019 and working closely with Gloucestershire County Council and its technical consultants Atkins, steady progress has been made with the preparatory technical design work for the bridge, including essential liaison with Network Rail and other key stakeholders, culminating in the submission of a planning application last Autumn (Application reference – 20/00896/FUL). This is now due for formal consideration by the Council's Planning Committee in March.
- 2.2** It should be noted however, that the ABoR scheme, as proposed in the planning application, is purely the bridge structure itself and does not include a permanent connection to the public highway. The associated link road and residential development to be enabled by the new bridge will be the subject of future separate planning applications, in due course, each to be supported by their own discreet impact assessments, as required.
- 2.3** The planning application for the ABoR is submitted in advance of these associated infrastructure and potential land use developments due to the expenditure deadline associated with the HIF grant funding.
- 2.4** As the planning application progresses, attention is now turning to the bridge structure construction phase with preparatory work continuing with GCC/Atkins to identify the overall timing schedule and the process of selection of a construction partner. In parallel, negotiations are underway with the relevant landowners, either side of the rail line, in order to assemble the necessary land for construction and the associated site access licencing arrangements.
- 2.5** Finally, with clarification as to how the construction phase of the project will be managed, detailed work will need to commence to secure the necessary consents and clearances required from Network Rail in order to access the rail environment. This is potentially quite an involved workstream which will run for many months, which will also prompt further scoping and detailed project planning work to determine the future of the Grange Road level crossing, plus the process and timeframe for the formal adoption of the bridge structure and in time, a new operational highway, running over it, by GCC, in due course.

3.0 FINANCIAL UPDATE

- 3.1** To date, expenditure on the preliminary design and planning application preparatory work for the project totals £609,979.14 against a HIF grant award of £8,132,465. The Council is carrying this cost currently, supported through the Borough Growth Reserve, pending satisfaction of one of the conditions in the HIF Grant Funding Agreement which requires evidence of clean land title before the first drawdown of grant funding can be claimed. However, with the land assembly/licencing requirements for the project in the process of finalisation, the project team is working closely with Homes England to facilitate a first drawdown of HIF funding to the value of £466,400 this financial year. This will effectively replenish the initial Borough Growth Reserve borrowing, leaving an expenditure balance for the project, carrying forward into the new financial year, as £143,579.14.
- 3.2** As the project moves through the planning process, over the next few weeks, the team will undertake a comprehensive project review, including risk and finance issues, which will update the key project milestones, clarify emerging new risks and importantly, re-set the HIF claim profile to help minimise the ongoing financial exposure to the Council.

4.0 SIGNIFICANT RISK ISSUES

4.1 The table set out at Appendix 1 outlines the project risks featured within the Corporate Risk Register, the proposed mitigations, plus an additional column which indicates progress as at 1 March 2021.

5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 None.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 None.

7.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

7.1 Tewkesbury Borough Council Plan 2020-2024 and the Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy 2011 - 2031 Adoption Version (Dec 2017).

8.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

8.1 None.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

9.1 None arising from this report.

10.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

10.1 None.

11.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

11.1 None.

12.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

12.1 In June 2019, the Council Executive Committee provided the necessary approvals for the project to proceed with delegation awarded to the then Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the s151 Officer and Borough Solicitor, to enter into the Grant Funding Agreement with Homes England, plus when required, appropriate agreements with contractors, including Gloucestershire County Council and third party landowners, to support delivery of the project.

Background Papers: None.

Contact Officer: Tewkesbury Garden Town Programme Manager
Tel: 07458 068202 Email: Claire.Edwards@tewkesbury.gov.uk

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Significant Risk Summary Table.
Appendix 2 – Site Plan.