

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 8 January 2020

Public Document: Yes

Exemption: None

Review date for release None



Subject: Seaton Wetlands Link Project

Purpose of report: The purpose of the report is to advise members of a series of masterplan project interventions that are either in progress, or could be taken forward, and that if all completed, would deliver a new circular walking/cycle route from Seaton Jurassic and Seaton Tramway up to Seaton Wetlands.

Seaton Wetlands, Seaton Jurassic and Seaton Tramway are run by different organisations but collectively offer a combined environmental, heritage and educational experience. From the point of view of the visitor, it is one experience that could use up a whole day where people can combine visits to all three attractions from one starting point. It would present an almost unique offer, including transport, education, natural history, wildlife watching and refreshment.

The report provides information on the masterplan projects, their locations, status and who is currently involved in progressing or delivering them. It identifies an approach for managing and delivering the Masterplan, through which the associated costs will be identified and funding sought. This process will enable the opportunity for local member involvement.

Recommendation: **That Cabinet:**

Notes the report and that an Officer Delivery Group will be established to co-ordinate this masterplan project for the Seaton Wetlands Link project with a focus on delivering a masterplan of project interventions that will create a circular walking/cycling route linking Seaton's key attractions. Quarterly updates will be provided to the Asset Management and Environment portfolio holders and local ward members.

Reason for recommendation: To enable a corporate approach to progress the feasibility of delivery of these project interventions working with external partners as required and securing necessary funding.

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Financial implications: This report is to note progress and there no direct financial implications from the recommendations.

Legal implications: There are no specific legal implications requiring comment

Equalities impact: Low Impact

Climate change: Low Impact
The project proposals will boost opportunities for low carbon leisure options that can be linked together as part of a single trip and extend dwell time. The proposals further enhance the outstanding environmental leisure offer and a deeper understanding and appreciation of the local natural environment.

This further builds upon the excellent environmental educational offers from both Seaton Wetlands and Seaton Jurassic which is increasingly focussing upon climate change issues.

Risk: Medium Risk
There are risks associated with delivery of some of the projects, where land acquisition is required or the availability of funding. At this stage, there are no budget issues identified.
As the projects are developed, any budgetary implications (e.g. land purchase or changes in use of land) will be reported on, with necessary mitigation and approvals sought.

Links to background information: .

Link to Council Plan: Outstanding place and environment
Outstanding level of economic growth, productivity and prosperity

Report in full

1. Background

- 1.1 Seaton has been the beneficiary of a number of redevelopment opportunities over the last ten or more years which arose from the Seaton regeneration masterplan. The delivery of Seaton Jurassic, which opened in 2016 was the culmination of many years of work by a number of organisations to deliver this award winning visitor centre for the town. Built on council land, it remains within the ownership of the council and is let to and operated by Devon Wildlife Trust.
- 1.2 Following the regeneration masterplan, Seaton has benefited from both public and private sector investment which has helped to revive Seaton's fortunes following the closure of the Racal factory and the Warner Holiday camp in the early 2000's.

This includes:

- New Tesco store
- 220 new homes delivered by Bovis
- 75 bed Premier Inn
- New LED leisure centre (private sector investment)
- Seaton Wetlands (over the last 10 years)
- Seaton Jurassic (opened in 2016)
- Seaton Tramway new terminus (opened 2018)

- 1.3 The plans by the Countryside team to create an area of saltmarsh will specifically help to deliver the Council's ambitions for carbon reduction through carbon sequestration on the Sheep's Marsh land which lies to the west of the Axe, north of the new Bovis housing development. Seaton Tramway is already working with the council on delivering a new tramstop that can provide access to the Seaton Wetlands centre.
- 1.4 Devon County Council has been working on the Stop Line cycle route for many years now which will see a cycle route created linking the north coast of Devon to the south, at Seaton. Further work is required to complete this in the southern section, south of Colyford, but is subject to land acquisition.
- 1.5 At the time that Seaton Jurassic was being planned in 2011 – 2013, it was intended that the garden area would be larger offering the opportunity for more extensive external interpretation relating to the Jurassic coast and local and marine wildlife. Linking Seaton Jurassic to the Wetlands was always the intention of the Natural Seaton partnership and a large part of the sell to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the stage 1 bid made in 2013. The planning permission obtained in 2013 reflects this. (See appendix 3 attached) When detailed costings were being prepared for the main building however, it was identified that the external space should be reduced in line with the funding available at the time. Thus the decision was taken to postpone delivery of what would be a phase 2 external area until a later date. This land was returned for car parking use.
- 1.6 Complementary to this external garden it had been intended that there would be a footpath link through further outdoor wildlife gardens that would lead through to Sheep's Marsh and eventually up to Seaton wetlands. The illustration at appendix 4 shows this.
- 1.7 It was intended that this link would enable the creation of a circular route linking up with the Stop Line Cycle route which was being delivered by the county council. In recent years some of the cycle path has been delivered but other stretches also of the route have not made progress due to land acquisition issues.
- 1.8 Recent discussions between officers at Devon CC, DWT and internally have identified that there would be benefits in linking the various outstanding projects together under one overall masterplan that could create synergies enabling greater opportunities for securing external funding.

2. Project Benefits

- 2.1 The following benefits would arise from the circular link joining up Seaton Jurassic and Seaton Wetlands:
 - Tourists and visitors will benefit by being able to combine their visits to the two attractions from a single destination providing a seamless visitor experience on foot/bike or in part, tram from one destination to the other.
 - the creation of more green space could provide opportunities for carbon offsets or mitigation
 - combining the two offers should benefit both the council and DWT through an increased profile and through greater visitor numbers
 - for Seaton Jurassic the link will offer the centre the opportunity to direct and link visitors to the nationally award winning and Green Flag nature reserve of Seaton Wetlands, allowing more people to enjoy and take part in events that are run by the Council's Countryside Team

- for Seaton Wetlands the link will help to showcase the nature reserve to a new audience and provide an opportunity to run more high quality engagement events and as a result benefit from an uplift in donations and events income for the site that will enable the site become more financially self-sustaining.

- 2.2 There will be opportunities for cross promotion by each destination of what the other can offer the visitor. For example clear signage and wayfinding directing people along marked routes taking in the Seaton Wetlands and the Discovery points and surrounding landscape. Camera links to the Seaton Wetlands could be located in Seaton Jurassic promoting what people can see at the wetlands.
- 2.3 Devon Wildlife Trust is experienced in attracting external funding for its wildlife projects and was instrumental in securing the HLF and CCF funding for Seaton Jurassic. It would take a leading role in preparing feasibility and funding proposals for the phase 2 project for Seaton Jurassic.

3. Proposal

- 3.1 It is proposed that a group of officers and external partners form a project delivery group that will identify and report on the feasibility of delivery of these interventions, make recommendations for taking the projects forward (if feasible) and secure funding for their delivery, where funding is not already in place. The project delivery group would report to Seaton ward members on a quarterly basis and the Asset Management Forum.
- 3.2 The master schedule of project interventions is attached at appendix 1. The feasibility of each project will be considered to determine works costs, legal and planning requirements, any council asset requirements and potential increase/loss in revenue. The location of projects is shown on the illustrative plan at appendix 2.

Conclusion

The Seaton Wetlands Link project offers the opportunity to create a comprehensive tourism offer for Seaton that links the council's tourism assets in the town and will offer visitors a day long experience on foot, by bike or in part using Seaton Tramway. It will enhance the Seaton Jurassic offer enabling the visitor centre to maximise its potential as a key attraction along the Jurassic coast.

Creating a masterplan of projects and an officer group focussed on delivery will ensure that momentum is maintained in creating this important circular link for Seaton promoting its natural and cultural environment.

APPENDICES

1. Masterplan Schedule of Projects
2. Illustrative Masterplan of Projects
3. Planning permission for Seaton Jurassic
4. Extract from HLF submission illustrating external wildlife area linking to Sheep's Marsh from the rear of Seaton Jurassic and Underfleet car park.