



Agenda item:

Summary

Report for:	Strategic Planning & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	15 June 2021
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Presentation by Environment Agency - Restoration of River Gade and Environmental Improvements to Gadebridge Park
Contact:	Cllr Graham Barrett, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services Author/Responsible Officer: Bill Buckley, Interim Assistant Director (Neighbourhood Delivery)
Purpose of report:	1. Provide an opportunity for Members to consider the restoration and diversion scheme of the river Gade channel to prevent flooding within Gadebridge Park and the improved environmental amenities 2. Members views to be considered for a future report to Cabinet.
Recommendations	1. Consider and give support to the river restoration scheme within Gadebridge Park 2. Members to express their views.
Corporate objectives:	<u>A Safe, Clean and Enjoyable Environment</u> A good understanding of natural and open space assets and infrastructure requirements will enable to Council to supports a safe, clean and enjoyable environment.
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> None directly with this report The Environment Agency are seeking a contribution of £100-120K towards the cost of the scheme from the Authority for environmental amenity improvements. These being for a footbridge, footpaths, signage and information boards etc.
'Value for money' implications	<u>Value for money</u> None with this report.
Risk implications	None with this report

Community Impact Assessment	None with this report
Health and safety Implications	None with this report
Consultees:	Portfolio Holders
Background papers:	None
Historical background <i>(please give a brief background to this report to enable it to be considered in the right context).</i>	The Environment Agency (EA) intend to change the course of the river Gade back to its original course, to reduce the risk of flooding, improve the river flow & water quality and improve the environmental amenities of the park. Reconnecting the river to its floodplain to reduce the pooling of floodwaters on the park and allow it to recede naturally into the channel. The restoration scheme is part of larger river improvement project up and down stream of Gadebridge Park.
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	EA – Environment Agency DBC –Dacorum Borough Council JBA – Jeremy Benn Associates MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

1. Background

- 1.1 Several projects have taken place or are currently in progress on the River Gade, both upstream and downstream of Gadebridge Park. The details of which have been provided such as: access improvements at Great Gaddesden; upper Gadebridge Park Restoration project, fish passage at Noake Mill; channel restoration at Box Moor, weir restoration at Bulbourne Moor and flood relief structure at Bury Mill etc.
- 1.2 As part of the draft local plan, Dacorum Borough Council have listed the importance of protecting chalk streams and mitigating and adapting to climate change. In addition, the scheme addresses the EA and DBC obligations for compliance with the Water Framework Directive, as the Upper Gade water body is classified as Poor. This project addresses several 'Reasons for not achieving Good', such as Physical Modification and Flow.
- 1.3 In 2020 the Portfolio Holders Cllrs Anderson, Banks and Sutton supported by senior managers met representatives of Herts & East London Area EA to discuss, clarify the proposals, flood risk, value for money, costings and consider the financial request. Members supported the project in principle at this informal stage and the previous Portfolio Holder for Environment has been actively seeking chalk stream improvements within the borough.

2. Environmental Improvement Scheme

- 2.1 The works will comprise of 250 meters of the river Gade being restored, 1.1 kilometres will be opened up to fish and eel passage and 6.1 kilometres improved with the provision of spring flow downstream. Plus the associated bridges, footpaths, dipping platforms, beaches, signage, landscaping and recreational amenity etc.
- 2.2 The most up to date schematic concept plan is attached to visualise the changes and improvements to the Park and its use. The presentation will update Members further regarding detail designs.

- 2.3 The scheme may be split into two phases, restoration and amenity. The timeline indicates detailed designs by mid to late April/May 21 with early stakeholder involvement including this authority. Once detailed designs have been produced, early contractor involvement (ECI) will give a clearer indication on construction works and costings. Approvals, planning application and construction phase will follow. At this stage, further delays may occur due to slippage and ensuring the park is available for public use at its busiest times. Therefore, the scheme will be phased over two years.

Start works- first phase (channel creation) 2021.

Start works- second phase (diversion of flow, infilling old channel and decommissioning of EA gauging station) 2022 (To be confirmed).

- 2.4 The benefits and risks are highlighted at Appendix 1. The majority of these have been mitigated in clarification points raised with the EA by Members and officers.

3. Project Costs

- 3.1 The Environment Agency has spent £130k to date on the feasibility study, investigations and outline designs for this project. Detailed designs are awaited and are due in mid to late April/May 2021.
- 3.2 The construction phase of the project is estimated to cost £750k plus the provision of bridges, footpaths and landscaping.
- 3.3 EA has £300,000 allocated funding in this financial year. Similarly, Affinity Water have contributed £250k. A similar sum is being requested in the EA financial bidding process.
- 3.4 EA have a shortfall in the region of £100-120k of additional funding to include amenities such as a bridge, footpaths, beaches, sidewalk boards etc. which is being requested from DBC.
- 3.5 If funding contribution is not available from the Authority, the work could start without the amenity element.
- 3.6 Despite this, the EA believe that it is important that the council contribute towards the scheme, as well as the site being located on council land, it will help the authority fulfil its obligations under the Water Framework Directive. The EA are unlikely to be able to fund the amenity aspects of the project such as additional bridge, footpaths, dipping platforms, beeches, hedges and signage. These are the parts of the scheme that will provide real benefits to people and will increase the amenity use and value of the park.
- 3.7 Whilst they believe the project could go ahead without these components it would not deliver the full benefits to the wider community and the use of the park.

4. EA are requesting

- 4.1 Seek assurance that, subject to relevant assessment and approvals, the river restoration project at Gadebridge Park has the support of Dacorum Borough

Council as landowner and facility manager, to proceed in 2021. EA would like specific agreement on:

- 1) whether the project should be split in to two phases restoration/amenity
 - 2) support for the project and funding contribution
 - 3) the project timeline
 - 4) assigned roles and responsibilities for each partner
 - 5) access to the park to undertake river works
- 4.2 There is a draft agreement document to support the project between the EA and the authority for internal consideration. If approval is given by the Authority the agreement would take the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) followed by a legal collaborative agreement which both parties sign.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 EA have a shortfall in the region of £100-120k of additional funding to include amenities such as a bridge, footpaths, beaches, sidewalk boards etc. which is being requested and a report will be presented to Cabinet for consideration. This funding cannot be contained within existing budget provision and would need to come from Council funds.

6. Presentation

- 6.1 Representatives from the EA and Jeremy Benn Associates (JBA) will present the up to date scheme to Members, seeking their views, clarifications and to answer questions. These views will be part of a wider EA stakeholder engagement process and feed into the future Cabinet report.

Appendix 1 Benefits & Risks of the scheme

Benefits of the scheme:

- Increased river flow due to incorporation of spring water which currently does not go into the river.
- Improve Biodiversity.
- Public will be able to interact with the river more.
- Reduced Flood Risk.
- Could bring more visitors to the park, which should have a positive effect on the local economy.
- Maintenance of the river should be easier in the long term and short term potentially, and there by save on resources.
- Removal of exiting gauging station and freeing up of the site for use by authority.

Potential Risks:

- Funding shortfall would mean some aspects of the project are not delivered such as amenities.
- River project does not obtain planning approval or the support of the members, and local ward councillors.
- River closer to sewage line which does have a tendency to over flow in adverse wet weather conditions. This may lead to the river being potentially polluted. Scheme should mitigate.
- Timings could affect the park when it is the height of the summer and the park is at capacity. This could be due to poor planning or project overrun due to climatic or unknown reasons.
- Flooding and proximity of the river to the new play area and splash park. (Mitigated in the scheme).
- Potential to flood the bowls club due to proximity. (Mitigated in the scheme).
- May have an impact on the existing biodiversity in the current river location?
- New location of the river will cut through the high use area of the park, and cut the park into two areas. Hence why new bridges, and infrastructure are essential.
- Loss of revenue income during construction because of events not being able to take place. (Depends upon timeline).
- Overall impact on the parks aesthetics because of the project and the construction works.