

Report of: City Works Business Manager

To: Executive Board

Date: 3rd December 2007

Item No:

Title of Report : Thames Towpath Risk Assessment

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: A risk assessment on the Towpath and riverside walks which pass through Oxford City boundaries was submitted to the Environment Scrutiny Committee on the 6th August 2007, who have subsequently asked that the Executive Board endorse the 15 recommendations made in the report.

Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jean Fooks

Scrutiny Responsibility: Environment Scrutiny

Ward(s) affected:

Report Approved by

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jean Fooks

Legal: Jeremy Thomas

Finance: Nichola Stretton

Strategic Director: Sharon Cosgrove


Policy Framework: None

Recommendation(s):

That the Executive Board approves the recommendations that the author considers most appropriate.

That the City Works Business Manager submit a further report to Environment Scrutiny Committee in 6 months time, on the implementation of the recommendations approved by the Executive Board.

Riverside walk risk assessment resource implications report

1. A risk assessment on the Towpaths and riverside walks which pass through Oxford City boundaries was submitted to the Environment Scrutiny committee on the 6th August 2007, who have subsequently asked that the Executive Board endorse the 15 recommendations made in the report. In addition a key point regarding temporary signage in time of flood was raised as a further recommendation from Environmental Scrutiny, and is referenced in this report.
2.  City Works and Built Environment Business Managers were asked to submit a joint report to the Executive Board setting out the resource implications against current budget allocation. The attached table also includes officer comments on the feasibility and suitability of the recommendations.
3. City Works and Built Environment officers have considered the risk assessment through objective analysis and after discussions with the Portfolio Holder, are in agreement with recommendations, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15.
4. It should be noted that Item 15 will have ongoing financial implications for the City Council (£6k per annum) but is supported by officers as a reasonably practicable safety consideration.
5. Officers do not support recommendations 5, 7, 12 or key point (c) as recommended by Environment Scrutiny. The reasons for this are that they are not reasonably practicable, have no definitive scope and would have ongoing revenue implications.
6. The Environment Scrutiny Committee also requested that the City Works Business Manager submit a further report to them in 6 months time, on the implementation of the recommendations approved by the Executive Board.
7. The Executive Board is therefore asked to approve the recommendations that the author considers most appropriate and summarised in points 3 to 5 above.

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Item	Assessment Recommendation	Officer Comment	Cost	Budget	Proposed Implementation Date
1	That full closure of the Towpath was not viable in the event of flooding due to the open nature of the Towpath and the number of both official and unofficial access points, which would make full closure an unmanageable task.	City council officers agree with the recommendation	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	That the possibility of closing smaller sections of the Towpath could not be achieved as this was an unrealistic goal and difficult to manage safely	City council officers agree with the recommendation	N/A	N/A	N/A
3	That the seasonal closure of historically flood affected areas, was not a suitable solution	City council officers agree with the recommendation	N/A	N/A	N/A
4	That the use of a non-physical closure system such as pictorial warning signs be provided at all official access points to the Towpath which should be placed in well-lit areas wherever possible as this was considered to be reasonably practical to achieve.	City council officers agree with the recommendation, which includes the Installation of 24 new fixed signs on access points to the Thames and Cherwell.	£6k	City Council budget. Essential repairs under Health & Safety	January 1 st 2008
5	That a specific officer be appointed to be responsible for riverside walks within Oxford City.	City council officers do not support this recommendation as the health and safety issues are covered in current inspections and are to be enhanced under recommendation 9	A post would cost £50k	No current budget. This initiative would be subject to a funding bid	N/A

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Item	Assessment Recommendation	Officer Comment	Cost	Budget	Proposed Implementation date
6	That the City Council, County Council and other agencies worked together to ensure that workable safety codes are developed for all legitimate users and that a 'Safety First' message is delivered to schools, and via other mediums to the general public.	City council officers recommend that the County Council lead on this issue to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted throughout the county. City officers to speak with County representatives on this issue.	None - Current liaison between City and County already occurs.	N/A	April 2008
7	Engineering solutions such as widening towpaths to reduce conflict between users, piling of eroded banks, encouraging the path to run at least a metre away from the rivers edge, ensuring paths are level and free from loose material and the raising of any towpath which historically floods should be the long term objective. Any engineering changes made to the towpath should remain in keeping with the area.	City council officers do not support the recommendation, as the issues are too onerous. Interim work currently due for completion in January 2008 at Fiddlers Island.	Estimated to be Thousands	No current budget. This initiative would be subject to a funding bid	To follow
8	The installation of short sections of edge protection works at 'Hot Spots' such as on the towpath leading towards Fiddlers Island from the north as the towpath is reduced in width and other places as identified in the Sitesafe UK Ltd report, and the identification of edge protection which is already in place but requires remedial works.	City council officers support the recommendation and will discuss with other agencies involved. Areas which have been identified have been passed to British Waterways and County Council	Will depend on whether these works are done as part of the current repair work	County and other agency funding	Follow up discussion with agencies January 2008

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Item	Assessment Recommendation	Officer Comment	Cost	Budget	Proposed Implementation date
9	Formal interim inspections and reports are made of the towpath as sink holes can appear without warning, under both summer and winter conditions and these inspections should be carried out in between biannual inspections	City council officers support the recommendation. A revision of lifebuoy station inspection sheets, training of staff. 6 extra lifebuoy stations including the River Cherwell and Oxford Canal	£1000	City Works existing budget	January 1 st 2008
10	The types of surfaces of the towpath should be officially graded in conjunction with the County Council and specific statements made against each grade to aid the inspector and confirm the level of action required when a specific type of defect has been identified.	City council officers support the recommendation and will produce a joint good practice note in conjunction with the County Council.	N/A	N/A	April 2008
11	That the temporary fence line from Rainbow Bridge to just short of Fiddlers Island remains in position until the permanent repairs are made to this section of the towpath.	City council officers support the recommendation. Maintenance of temporary fence line until permanent repairs complete	N/A	City Works existing budget	Follow up discussions January 2008 when County Council & Contractor have completed.

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Item	Assessment Recommendation	Officer Comment	Cost	Budget	Proposed Implementation date
12	That future repair works planned for Fiddlers Island consider the raising of the towpath in this area above the flood plain and improving the drainage system back into the main channel and that if the path is not raised that any material used in the repair should have its longevity under flood conditions considered.	City council and County council officers do not support the recommendation, as it will create other problems. (For example, divert flooding to another area.)	Estimated to be Thousands	No current budget. This initiative would be subject to a funding bid	To follow
13	That temporary text signage should be exchanged for permanent information material that should be primarily in pictorial form.	City council officers support the recommendation. This item is covered by the installation of permanent signs reference recommendation 4	See item 4	City Council budget. Essential repairs under health and safety	January 1 st 2008 with item 4
14	That any temporary signs warning of a specific hazard awaiting repair should be taken down immediately the hazard has been rectified, as leaving such signs in place can lead to the public becoming desensitized to such warning in the future.	City council officers support the recommendation, as it is simple to achieve in conjunction with remedial works.	N/A	N/A	As and when required

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15	That thoughtful vegetation management can reduce the risk to visitors by exposing known hazards whilst taking into account the bio-diversity objectives, wildlife and local flora and fauna.	City council officers support the principle of the recommendation but as ownership varies, any council budget would be spent on other land owners (riparian owners) responsibilities. Hence no consistency can be achieved.	Approx £6k per year	No current budget. This initiative would be subject to a funding bid	Annually 3 x during the growing season. Commencing April 2008.
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Item	Key Point Raised by Scrutiny Committee	Officer Comment	Cost	Budget	Proposed Implementation date
(c)	Environment Scrutiny also recommended that whilst permanent signage was useful, that extra signs should be placed near the river when the Environment Agency release a flood warning to remind people of the imminent danger.	City council officers do not support the recommendation, as the current signage supported by the Environment Agency flood warning system should be sufficient. Endorsement of this recommendation would have revenue implications	Estimated £2000 - £3000 per annum	No current budget. This initiative would be subject to a funding bid	January 1 st 2008 (If required)

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Recommendations

1. That the Executive Board approves the recommendations that the author considers most appropriate.
2. That the City Works Business Manager submit a further report to Environment Scrutiny Committee in 6 months time, on the implementation of the recommendations approved by the Executive Board.

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Background papers: None

