

To: Cabinet
Date: 13 July 2022
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Oxford Waterways Project Update

| Summary and recommendations | |
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| Purpose of report: | To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision |
| Key decision: | No |
| Scrutiny Lead Member: | Councillor Dr Chris Smowton, Scrutiny Committee Chair |
| Cabinet Member: | Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks |
| Corporate Priority: | Support Thriving Communities |
| Policy Framework: | Council Strategy 2020-24 |
| Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report. | |

| Appendices | |
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| Appendix A | Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee |

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 08 June 2022, the Scrutiny Committee considered an update report on the progress made against the Scrutiny Committee's previous recommendations in relation to the Oxford Waterways Project, which it made in November 2020. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Munkonge (Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks), Mish Tullar (Head of Corporate Strategy) and Michael Woods (Oxford Waterways Co-ordinator) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

2. The Oxford Waterways Co-ordinator introduced the report and highlighted that the project priorities had shifted because a number of health and safety issues had been identified and taken a high priority. He advised that an asset management

system was being established, but that it was difficult to determine riparian ownership.

3. The Committee noted that parts of the waterways were deteriorating and there were issues around anti-social behaviour, bio-diversity and accessibility. It suggested that there was a need for the university, colleges and adjacent landowners to play a role in contributing to the improvement of the waterways and the Council should improve communication with those stakeholders and work with them on the Oxford Waterways Project.

Recommendation 1: That the Council works with the university, colleges and adjacent landowners to encourage them to contribute to the Oxford Waterways Project, both in terms of financial and strategic contributions (e.g. considering how to utilise growth funding).

4. The Committee requested details of the timeline for completion of the improvement works, particularly as the summer months usually saw an increase in usage of the waterways and there was a need to ensure safety for those entering and exiting the water. It suggested that communications should be produced to inform Councillors and residents of the projected timeline for completion.

Recommendation 2: That the Council produces communications for Councillors and residents setting out the timeline for repairs to Waterways infrastructure.

5. The Committee noted that the discharge of sewage into the waterways was a serious concern and Thames Water had accepted some responsibility. It was suggested that water quality data which the Council was already collecting should be used to lobby the Government and Environment Agency to hold Thames Water to account.

Recommendation 3: That the Council uses appropriate data which it is already collecting to lobby the Government to ensure it is holding water regulators to account on matters of water quality.

6. The Committee discussed issues relating to biodiversity along parts of the waterways and highlighted a need to ensure any work on the Oxford Waterways Project was joined-up with other work being undertaken by the Council related to wildlife and wetland habitats.

Recommendation 4: That the Council ensures the work of the Oxford Waterways Project is aligned with other work related to wildlife and wetland.

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