



Cabinet report

Date **16 JUNE 2022**

Title **LEVELLING UP FUND – ROUND 2 – APPROVAL OF PROJECT PROPOSAL FOR SUBMISSION BY ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL**

Report of **CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS PFI, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE, AND CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION, TOURISM AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report seeks approval of the submission of a bid to the UK government's Levelling Up fund – round 2.
2. The report instructs The Director of Regeneration to arrange for the completion of the councils bid by the deadline of 6th July 2022.

RECOMMENDATION

3. That Cabinet instructs the Director of Regeneration to arrange for the submission of the "Island Green Link" project as the councils bid to the government's Levelling Up Fund - Round 2

BACKGROUND

4. The first round of the Levelling Up Fund was announced at the 2020 Spending Review to support communities in realising this vision. Focusing on capital investment in local infrastructure, building on and consolidating prior programmes such as the Local Growth Fund and the Towns Fund, the first round of the Levelling Up Fund supported £1.7 billion of projects in over 100 local areas across all corners of the UK. The Isle of Wight secured £5.8m from the first round under the programmes "regeneration" theme for the £8m East Cowes Marine Hub project.
5. Through this next round of the Levelling Up Fund, the UK government intends to continue to invest directly in communities across all parts of the UK. By increasing the impact of its investment, the UK government will seek to "unleash productive power and boost pride in place across every corner of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland" to support the levelling up agenda.

6. Levelling up is at the heart of the government's agenda to build back better after the pandemic and to deliver for citizens in every part of the UK. Levelling up requires a multi-faceted approach and the Fund is delivered as part of a broad package of complementary UK-wide interventions including: The UK Community Renewal Fund, The UK Community Ownership Fund, the Plan for Jobs, the Freeports programme, the UK Infrastructure Bank, the Towns Fund, and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).
7. Having secured a "constituency" based successful project under round 1, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has confirmed that Isle of Wight Council is only able to bid for the "transport" theme under round 2 and that the island remains a "Category 2" priority area as it was under round 1. Category 1 areas attract greatest priority. Up to £14m is technically available for an island bid and so the relevant managers have initiated the necessary preparatory work to achieve cabinet approval of an Island bid in June in time for the submission deadline for round 2 of 6th July 2022.
8. A long list of projects has been developed and appraised, against the LUF 2 prospectus in order to identify a package which has a reasonable prospect of success. Key factors such as permissions, ownerships and ability to commence in 22/23 will help identify which projects might form the substance of an island bid. The initial appraisal has been presented to the Regeneration Members board and Strategic Highways board with the "Island Green Link" project being assessed as the project with the greatest prospect of potential LUF2 approval.

Project Overview

9. The East-West Green Link project will create a comprehensive sustainable transport corridor from Ryde to Yarmouth. It will improve transport infrastructure along the entire route and create new links to existing infrastructure to ensure connectivity for all ports on to a sustainable transport network. These new routes and connections will provide low-carbon low-cost options that enable more visitors to access key tourist attractions while enabling more residents to commute to key employment sites, and both to enjoy the Island natural landscape.
10. The project comprises of three core components:
 - (a) Ryde - Yarmouth Public Transport Corridor
 - (b) West Wight Greenway
 - (c) Newport Hub and Spokes Scheme
11. Through these schemes IWC will deliver greater connectivity to the Island's gateways which will underline the Island's credentials as an environmentally sustainable destination and increased use of off-road networks will enhance connectivity to the more remote areas of the Island without the adverse impact of more motorised journeys.

Ryde - Yarmouth Public Transport Corridor

12. This will promote and deliver improved sustainability and accessibility across the transport back-bone of the Isle of Wight. It will primarily deliver a series of lower-level interventions to improve bus infrastructure (e.g. accessibility ramps, shelters and real time information) along the keys bus routes from the Eastern ferry port of

Ryde to the Western ferry port of Yarmouth. However, it will also involve small-scale mobility hubs along the route and a larger hub at the Yarmouth Ferry Port to compliment the transport interchange being built in Ryde. The project will also revisit proposals to improve accessibility for Hovertravel customer via an improved walkway or lift system over the rail track to the bus interchange. In addition to connecting with recent sustainable transport improvements in Ryde the scheme will aim to connect with the proposed highways improvements in the Ryde Heritage Action Zone in order to support on-ward active travel and micro-mobility hubs.

13. Although each will be different in scale and focus, the corridors mobility hubs will provide space and facilities for switching easily between different modes of transport. An example would be luggage lockers and hireable e-bikes at a rural bus stop so that a wider group of visitors and residents could enjoy nearby bridleways and cycleways without being entirely dependent on cycling or having to drive to a rural location with little or no parking. This will be particularly important in connecting bus routes to the West Wight Greenway.

West Wight Greenway

14. Stretching for 21.3 km between Freshwater and Newport, the route would be designed as a 'linear nature reserve'. Predominantly at a width of 5m with a central 3 meter path of a rural bridleway construction (generally a chalk subbase and appropriate gravel) and 1 meter verge both sides. A number of stopping areas and interpretation boards and signage will also feature. Some areas may have enhanced surfacing to improve accessibility but the extent and viability of this is still being established.
15. The route will mainly follow the dismantled railway line and make use of the existing Rights of Way network. It avoids farmsteads and the crossing of agricultural land under cultivation. Sections of quiet roads are included in the route. Importantly, the West Wight Greenway will link to the Gunville Greenway project to provide an onward access to the rest of the Island's off-road network.
16. Walking and Cycling tourism brings significant environmental benefits, compared to many other types of tourism. Cycle and Walking tourists tend to have a higher propensity to use public transport when reaching the start point for their tour, or for making onward connections. Not only do walkers and cyclists use personal motorised transport to a lesser extent, when they drive to reach starting points, the distance travelled tends to be shorter than ones made by more conventional holidaymakers
17. On completion the majority of the route will be adopted by the IW Rights of Way team who will be responsible for all ongoing maintenance to include hedge cutting. While highways improvements will be managed under the existing PFI contract.

Newport Hub and Spokes Scheme

18. Newport is key in ensuring that improved East-West connectivity also serves the rest of the Island, and improves East-West links through the town. This will be achieved by extending and improving established cycle routes such as the new Mews Lane to Newport Harbour route and supporting the development of new routes such as aspects of the Gunville Greenway. It is proposed that this includes the development of a new carriageway and segregated cycle path along Taylor

Road, Carisbrooke to support public transport and active travel while helping to unlock an important housing site.

19. Again, a mobility hub will be included to enable travellers to safely and securely switch from one mode of transport to another. Furthermore, signage and small-scale infrastructure will be improved to ensure the enhanced the Island Green Link connects intuitively with existing North-South sustainable transport routes. This work will also link with proposed pedestrian and bus routes improvements associated with the Newport People First Zone being championed by the Newport High Street Heritage Action Zone Steering Group.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

20. This project supports the Climate and Environment Strategy, Bus Service Improvement Plan, and the Corporate Plan.

The provision of affordable housing for Island residents

21. Increasing transport alternative transport links supports sustainable housing growth, and the improvements to Taylor Road could be used to unlock an important potential housing site which could help provide affordable housing for Island residents.

Responding to climate change and enhancing the biosphere

22. Improvements to bus services, and the expansion of the Island's Cycleway and Rights of Way network would help reduce the number of commuter and school trips in private vehicles by introducing more sustainable low-cost alternatives.
23. This approach to travel also supports the Island as a recognised UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, where local communities have found ways to live sustainably and healthily within their local ecosystems.
24. These proposals are also in line with developing national transport guidance and policy which encourages both active travel and the use of public transport. These include the Department for Transport's 2021 plan 'Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain' and the recent National Bus Strategy which was supported by the Isle of Wight Council through the recently adopted Bus Service Improvements Plan. This plan identifies the potential benefits that could come from improved East-West bus connectivity and infrastructure. All of which will make a significant contribution to achieving net zero emissions from transport by 2040.

Economic recovery & Reducing Poverty

25. Re-enforcing the branding of the Island as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and providing improve sustainable ways to enjoy key attractions and the Island's natural environment also supports the visitor economy as recognised by Visit Isle of Wight's Business Plan 2021-26.
26. The average length of journey on the Island is conducive to an increase in non-vehicle journeys. 9 per cent of the Island's working population is employed on the Island making commuter distances short and potentially suitable for dedicated cycling routes. Many residents live under 2 km from their workplace

27. Improved affordable transport options put more jobs within reach of local people and a wider potential employee base within reach of local businesses.
28. Supporting public transport infrastructure can reduce the cost burden on local businesses of supporting their own private vehicle transport infrastructure such as car parks.

Impact on Young People and Future Generations

29. The improved alternative transport options within the proposed project include active travel such as walking and cycling which bring added health benefits. These are particularly important in establishing healthy lifestyles for young people. These health benefits early in life can have significant impact on life-chances and quality of life long into the future.

CONSULTATION

30. The Economic Development Board Executive and Transport Infrastructure Board has considered the recommended project submission and have confirmed their support for the "Island Green Link".
31. The support of the island MP, a requirement of the bid prospectus has been sought and has also been confirmed

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

32. Match funding for the bid is required and will be confirmed from existing budget approvals
33. Specialist advice and support in submitting the bid, costing approximately £30k, will be required, at risk, and will be drawn for existing budgets set aside for such purposes.
34. The bid is anticipated to be for c. £14M which will include all additional costs associated with developing and delivering the project e.g. surveys, feasibility studies, design, project management, procurement, construction, and monitoring and evaluation.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

35. Various land ownerships along the line of the proposed "West Wight Greenway".
36. If successful, the funding award and its terms will be governed by a legally binding contract.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

37. The council as a public body is required to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equal opportunities between people from different groups and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

38. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
39. It is not considered that the proposed bid will have any direct adverse implications to any of the protected characteristics groups. The improvements to accessibility are likely to have a positive impact on those with some disabilities and reduced mobility often associated with ageing.

PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

40. Improvement for the Ryde-Yarmouth Public Transport Corridor and Newport Spoke and Hub Scheme can be delivered on Highways land or IWC land adjoining the Highway. However, IWC will explore if additional value can be gained through working with neighbouring landowners without creating an undue burden to the council.
41. IWC land required for highways improvements associated with Taylor Road is already allocated for a similar use.
42. The West Wight Greenway is nearing completion of negotiations with landowners so as to ensure a continuous right of way.

OPTIONS

43. The options considered by the Cabinet are:

Option 1 - That Cabinet instructs the Director of Regeneration to arrange for the submission of the "Island Green Link" project as the councils bid to the government's Levelling Up Fund - Round 2.

Option 2 - That Cabinet does not commit the necessary resources to preparing a submission and does not authorise the submission of a bid.

RISK MANAGEMENT

44. Risk of not bidding (Option 2) is that no other suitable or significant funding becomes available for these improvements and so little or no progress is made in bringing these important projects forward and therefore fail to realise the potential benefits.
45. There is also potential reputational risk in not bidding (Option 2) as the Island and IWC should be presenting itself as proactive and capable in order to attract further potential funding in the future.
46. If a bid is submitted (Option 1), as noted earlier, the funds and resources applied to making the submission are entirely at risk as there is no guarantee of a successful outcome.
47. If a bid is submitted (Option 1) and is successful, capacity to deliver is a risk which is why the bid will include funding to buy-in additional capacity and will be designed at a sufficient scale to attract mainland contractors if necessary.

EVALUATION

48. As this opportunity is the only known significant funding source for these projects at this time and the majority of the work required will be necessarily to progress the projects and seek funding via any source now or in the future, Option 1 is recommended.

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