

Management Committee

11 July 2017

Proposals for a review of the Esplanade lighting scheme in Weymouth

For Decision

Portfolio Holder:

Cllr Richard Kosior – Tourism, Culture & Harbour

Senior Leadership Team Contact:

M Hamilton, Strategic Director

Report Author:

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Statutory Authority

Localism Act 2011 – ‘general power of competence’.

Purpose of Report

1. To re-present to the committee options for reviewing the lighting scheme on Weymouth Esplanade and taking forward a process for developing a new scheme with funding from the Dorset Coastal Connections project.

Officer Recommendations

2. That Management Committee allocates £50,000 from the reserves set aside for one-off projects to enable:
 - a) the commissioning of specialist reports to review the existing Esplanade lighting scheme and assess the impact on the Conservation Area and landscape of any proposed new scheme;
 - b) consultation with the community and key stakeholders on options for a new lighting scheme for the Esplanade;
 - c) the council to benefit from a £200,000 grant from Dorset County Council as part of the Dorset Coastal Connections project.
3. That a report setting out the results of the specialist conservation assessment reports and public consultation (as referred to in recommendation 2 (a)) be submitted to Management Committee later in 2017 accompanied by a request for further funding to enable the commissioning of costed designs for a new lighting scheme on the Esplanade from specialist artists and a contribution to the costs associated with the planning and installation.

4. That the council agrees to enter into a funding contract with Dorset County Council, as the accountable body for the Dorset Coast Forum's Dorset Coastal Connections project, in order to benefit from a grant of £200,000 towards the development of a new lighting scheme for Weymouth Esplanade and that the Strategic Director and Corporate Manager Legal Services are given delegated authority to agree the terms of the contract.
5. That the council collaborates with the Dorset Coast Forum as part of the Dorset Coastal Connections project on the development of a new lighting scheme for Weymouth Esplanade.

Reason for Decision

6. To enable Management Committee to make progress with the implementation of its Action Plan and to provide the Strategic Director with the authority to enter into a partnership agreement with Dorset County Council for the £200,000 grant towards the project.

Background and Reason Decision Needed

a) Background

7. Although the current lighting scheme on the Esplanade is the product of a comprehensive programme of environmental enhancements there is still considerable public interest in the reinstatement of catenary or 'fairy' lights along the frontage to enhance the experience of visitors. To reflect this public interest in such a lighting scheme, the Action Plan adopted by Management Committee sets out a project to develop a business case for illuminations on the Esplanade in Weymouth.
8. The Esplanade was illuminated with fairy lights until 2011 when they were removed as part of major seafront regeneration scheme – one which was to place greater emphasis on illuminating the historic buildings and structures along the front in order to emphasise the 'sweep' of the bay.
9. The previous fairy lights installation cost approximately £8,000 per annum in electricity costs to operate and £10,000 in repairs and were subject to regular break downs and vandalism. The lights were also considered to contribute to the cluttered appearance of the Esplanade during the daytime and were generally 'dated' as a concept. The lights were, therefore, taken down in 2011 as part of the seafront regeneration programme.
10. A petition to reinstate the fairy lights along the Esplanade - initially from the Pier bandstand to the Pavilion, was submitted to the council in March 2012. The petition claimed that the lights had been a 'source of joy' for residents and visitors since the 1950's. The petition attracted 1,691 signatures and was presented to Full Council in July 2012. At the meeting the council agreed to commission an investigation into the reinstatement of the catenary lights.

11. A report to Management Committee in October 2012 presented the results of this further investigation. As a result, it was decided not to pursue the reinstatement of fairy lights for the following reasons:

- they would conflict with recent lighting improvements including the illumination of key buildings and structure, and the 'veil' of laser lights;
- they would impact on the Conservation Area (partially due to the need for new posts);
- the lack of capital funding (between £155k and £211k was required) along with on-going revenue costs (c. £4,000 p.a.) – estimates based on similar schemes in Torbay and Paignton;
- the old lighting columns (Victorian Columns) had been removed as they were not sufficient to light the highway to the Highways standard required.

12. **Previous studies and works.** The current lighting scheme on the Esplanade is the result of a series of studies and substantial capital works – these can be summarised as follows:

- Seafront Regeneration Programme and Design Guide.
- Urban Landscape Appraisal & Masterplan (2005).
- Watkins Dally report setting out improvements to the setting of historic buildings.
- WPBC lighting strategy (2007) – this recommended the removal of festoon lighting but did propose the refurbishment and relocation of the Victorian lighting columns (repositioned between Pier Bandstand and Greenhill) with grant-aid from English Heritage.
- Dorset County Council replaced all the highway lighting along this length of the Esplanade. This was supplemented by the borough council providing further promenade lighting, together with the uplighters for the shelters and statues. This work has resulted in the promenade being much better lit at night.
- Installation of the *Veils of Light* (lasers) scheme led by Atopia and Parsons Brinckerhoff with funding from by Historic England and Arts Council England.
- The new 'white' highways lighting the similar pedestrian lighting for the Esplanade promenade, together with uplighters to the shelters and palm trees, meant that the Esplanade is now better illuminated for its whole length than it has been for at least 30-years.

13. **Existing laser installation.** The laser scheme ('Veils of Light') is highly innovative but has, perhaps, not made the visual impact that was first hoped. The scheme comprises lasers mounted on pylons along the Esplanade and was installed with funding from Arts Council England. The lasers chosen were not the most powerful available, but, at the time, members wanted a more subtle look. However, the lasers have a limited life-span due, in part, to coastal weather conditions.

14. It has been estimated that the existing modules will reach the end of their operating life within approximately the next 5 years. In terms of replacing the laser units, various options could be considered:

- to replace the existing laser units to a more powerful green light source (10 watt) it would cost £12,220 per unit or £85,540 in total for all 7 units;
 - to replace the lasers for more powerful (10 watt), colour-changing units it would cost £10,550 per unit, or £73,850 in total for all 7 units;
 - replacing the units would provide another 7-years of relatively maintenance free Esplanade lighting and, based on experience, the annual running costs may be less than for fairy lights.
15. It should be remembered that the laser modules are designed to operate in unison in order to create a coherent 'veil' across the bay. If individual modules fail and are not replaced, then the overall effect will diminish. At present, the council has no specific earmarked reserves to pay for the replacement of the laser modules. It is understood that laser technology has improved since the columns were installed and, if the modules were replaced, stronger beams of light could be achieved that would have an extended operational lifespan.
16. It is important to remember that the Esplanade lies within a Conservation Area and in an important coastal landscape. Any changes to the appearance of the area as a result of new lighting infrastructure (posts and cables) and additional illumination, will have an impact on the environment and its setting and will require planning permission and consultation with statutory agencies.

b) Opportunity to develop a new lighting scheme

17. An opportunity has arisen to review the current lighting scheme and develop artist-led lighting proposals including a catenary design. This opportunity is as a result of a funding secured by the Dorset Coast Forum and Dorset Coastal Communities Team (hosted by the county council) from the government's Coastal Communities Fund and developed with the support of the local arts organisation Bounce Back Arts (community interest company). The grant of £200,000 will contribute to the design and installation of an innovative and attractive new lighting scheme on the Esplanade.
18. The opportunity to bid for this funding via the Dorset Coast Forum became apparent at short notice in late 2016 and officers took the decision to apply for funding in consultation with the briefholder. At that point, it was agreed to include in the bid a provisional commitment of £50,000 of match funding from the borough council in order to increase the chances of the overall bid succeeding. However, it was made clear that this match funding would be subject to Management Committee approval.
19. The funding that has been secured via the Dorset Coast Forum gives the council the opportunity to develop a modern lighting scheme. This could be in the form of catenary (fairy) lights along the Esplanade, or an alternative lighting option, e.g. the illumination of buildings and structures. Either way, a lighting scheme on the Esplanade would only be successful if it compliments the existing infrastructure, is not detrimental to the Conservation Area and is supported by the community. However, the funding should, if matched with additional resources from council reserves, enable an artist-led approach and the utilisation of the latest lighting

technology in order to both reduce running costs and create visually exciting proposals.

20. It is proposed, therefore, that the council takes the opportunity afforded by the grant from the Coastal Communities Fund to commission specialist landscape and heritage assessments to inform the artist-led design. These specialist studies can't be funded by the grant and will need, therefore, to be paid for from council reserves. In addition, it is not clear what the total cost of the scheme will be and the extent of the installation along the Esplanade.
21. If, as recommended, Management Committee allocates £50,000 from reserves then this will enable the following:
 - a) the commissioning of specialist reports to review the existing Esplanade lighting scheme and assess the impact on the Conservation Area and landscape/townscape of any proposed new scheme;
 - b) consultation with the community/residents and key stakeholders (e.g. local businesses/Historic England) on a new lighting scheme for the Esplanade;
 - c) contribute towards the cost of implementing the new scheme.
22. A subsequent report will then be submitted to Management Committee setting out the results of the specialist conservation assessment report and public and stakeholder consultation. The report will also set out a process for the commissioning of costed designs for a new lighting scheme from specialist artists if this is deemed to be the most appropriate way forward following consideration of the studies and consultation results. The report will, therefore, ask Management Committee to establish a budget, to be matched with the Coastal Communities Fund grant to cover the cost of design work and also the fabrication and installation of the new lighting infrastructure.

c) Issues to consider in developing a new lighting scheme

23. If Management Committee agrees to progress the development of a new lighting scheme, then there are several key areas that will require particular attention – these are outlined below.
24. **Environmental issues.** Possible future changes to the environment of the Esplanade may include flood defence works, e.g. wave return wall, filling in the gaps between planters to provide flood defence and raising the height of promenade.
25. **Technical issues.** Any new scheme would need to address significant technical issues:
 - removal of laser columns – the costs of removal would need to be investigated and whether any of the original grants for installation would need to be repaid;
 - any new catenary lighting scheme could not be attached to the new DCC street columns and would therefore not follow the previous route along the kerb edge;

- the resultant mix of DCC lamp posts and new catenary lighting posts would be cluttered and aesthetically displeasing. Any design would need to avoid reversing the 'de-cluttering' programme that has been pursued over the last decade;
 - if catenary lighting was preferred, any new installation would require approximately 50 new eight metre support columns placed every thirty metres, with each column requiring a new electricity supply. The columns would need to be electrically linked so that the whole necklace of lights can be switched on and off simultaneously.
 - the extent of any new scheme - the old catenary lights ran from the Ferry Terminal to Lodmoor and a like-for-like replacement would require permission from Historic England, which have contributed to the new lighting scheme at Greenhill and other work on the Seafront based on the package of measures that have been implemented. Likewise the Arts Council has helped to deliver the lasers and these were not designed to co-exist with catenary lights.
26. **Officer capacity.** The Coastal Communities Fund grant will enable the council to benefit the services of Bounce Back Arts (via a contract with DCC) to assist with community consultation and the selection/briefing of artists. However, it is inevitable that a project such as this will involve significant officer time in the commissioning of specialist studies, statutory consultations, securing statutory permissions and the letting of a substantial infrastructure contract. The committee will need to consider the impact on existing officer capacity particularly at a time when the council will be going through a period of major change.
27. It should be noted that this matter was first reported to Management Committee in April 2017 but that a decision on the project (in terms of both accepting the grant and providing match funding) was deferred until after the member workshop in May at which the allocation of council reserves to one-off project was considered. However, given that the council now needs to decide whether or not to enter into a partnership agreement with Dorset County Council for the £200,000 grant (and give the Strategic Director authority to sign the agreement), there is now a requirement for Management Committee to reconsider the project.

Implications

28. **Corporate Plan.** *Improving Quality of Life: Safeguarding and providing opportunities to enjoy the natural and built environment now and in the future.* The need to develop proposals for a new Esplanade lighting strategy is also identified in the Management Committee's Action Plan.
29. **Financial.** Any financial support for this project will need to be derived from the reserves already earmarked for one-off projects. If agreed, this will result in less resources being available for other schemes and projects. In order to draw down the grant from the Coastal Communities Fund the council will need to enter into an agreement with Dorset County Council, the local accountable body for the Fund.

30. If a new lighting scheme is installed on the Esplanade then the council will need to allow for operating and maintenance costs in future revenue budgets from 2018-19 onwards.
31. **Equalities.** Consideration will need to be given to ensuring that any revised lighting scheme on the Esplanade is compatible with the needs of users with visual impairments.
32. **Economic Development.** Enhancements to the Esplanade can make a significant contribution to tourism and economic growth.
33. **Risk Management (including Health & Safety).** The primary risk is the council's ability to make a commitment to future running costs of any new lighting scheme given that this is a discretionary service.

Consultation and Engagement

34. The proposals for developing a new lighting scheme for the Esplanade will involve significant community engagement and consultation with key stakeholders (including local businesses). This will be carried out in consultation with the Dorset Coast Forum and Bounce Back Arts as a condition of the Coastal Communities Fund grant. The proposals outlined in this report have been discussed with the briefholders for: Culture & Tourism, Finance & Assets, and Environment & Sustainability.
35. In addition, at its meeting in April 2017, Management Committee approved the establishment of a Member Arts Advisory Panel and tasked it to oversee the implementation of the Esplanade Lighting project.

Appendices

36. None.

Background Papers

37. The various studies previously commissioned to inform enhancements to the Esplanade, as referred to in this report, can be provided on request. In addition, the bid to the Coastal Communities Fund, submitted via the Dorset Coast Forum with support from Bounce Back Arts, provides information on the process for community involvement in an artist-led lighting scheme.

Footnote

38. Issues relating to financial, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

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