

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 16 September 2019

Title: Newhaven Fort

Report of: Ian Fitzpatrick, Director of Regeneration and Planning

Cabinet member: Councillor Ruth O’Keeffe, Cabinet member for tourism and devolution

Ward(s): Newhaven South

Purpose of report: For Cabinet to note the issues regarding the existing Fort bridge and agree that funds be set aside for its replacement from the Council’s capital programme.

Decision type: Key

Officer recommendation(s): (1) To note the existing condition of the Fort bridge.
(2) To approve that up to £350,000 be allocated from the Council’s capital programme and ring-fenced to meet the cost of replacement.

Reasons for recommendations: Newhaven Fort bridge requires replacement at the earliest opportunity.

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Newhaven Fort was built in 1871 and decommissioned in the 1960’s, it is a Scheduled Ancient Monument situated on the cliffs overlooking Seaford Bay. The Fort was run as a tourist attraction briefly in the early 1980’s before the owner went out of business and in 1988 the property passed to the Council.
- 1.2 Since 2015 the property has been part of a management agreement with Wave Leisure Trust (WLT), the Council pays WLT £104,200 per annum for the agreement which ends in May 2025. It was entered into as a means of increasing visitor numbers and reducing the burden of property repairs on the Council. Under Wave’s management, visitor numbers for 2018-19 increased by 1.5% from the previous year to 30,720 people, annual income stood at £322,923, down from £335,141 the previous year. WLT’s costs were £290,752 (employees, premises related and supplies and services) resulting in a surplus of £32,171.

- 1.3 The property has received minimal investment from the Council for some time. A number of the gun emplacements have been fenced off from members of the public in order to ensure continued public safety, and other urgent repairs issues are being managed.
- 1.4 There is an immediate issue with regards to the stability of the bridge into the Fort that now requires attention. The bridge was identified as needing replacement in 2014 and designs for a new moat bridge were incorporated within a Scheduled Ancient Monument consent application, for which consent was granted. Installation of the bridge did not occur following the granting of consent, presumably due to costs, and the bridge has been propped up ever since.
- 1.5 It has now been 5 years since replacement of the bridge was recommended and there is no longer an option to delay decision due to the continued deterioration of the structure. Urgent additional propping has already been installed recently as a temporary measure in order to ensure that the bridge is safe for users and residents of Fort Rise who have to pass underneath the bridge in order to access their private garages.

2 Proposal

2.1 A number of options have been explored.

- Do nothing – this is no longer a viable option as the structure of the bridge is in serious decline. The cost of the additional propping recently installed is around £2500 per week and this solution has a limited 3-5 years lifespan.
- Remove the bridge – this would not be permitted by Heritage England without a new structure going in place due to the property being designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- Repair the bridge – the bridge was declared ‘beyond economical repair’ in 2014. Costs for repair are likely to be at least £160,000, with a 5-10 year life expectancy. However, this option comes with a lot of uncertainty as there are a number of unknowns and therefore there is considerable risk that the required budget would increase.
- Over-bridge could be installed. This would involve a new bridge being placed over the existing structure. The cost of this is likely to be at least £100k for the new over-bridge including costs for temporary light-weight propping and annual monitoring of the existing bridge, which would remain in situ with a 5-10 years life expectancy.
- New bridge –50-60 year life expectancy and costs are likely to be £300k-£350k. Officers would of course work to reduce costs wherever possible.

Having taken into account the various options, it is proposed that renewal of the bridge be undertaken. Cabinet is asked to authorise up to £350,000 from the

Council's capital programme for these works. Although this is the most expensive initial outlay, it is the most cost-effective solution long-term and would provide a permanent solution. Any other solution would just be delaying the inevitable.

- 2.2 Through Wave's event programming, the site is being used for history based talks, family events (festival, pirate fun day, outdoor cinema and spooky experiences) and special interest events (ghost walks and ghost hunting, classic car shows, service of remembrance and beacon lighting events). In order to increase visitor numbers and income generation, further investment will be needed in the future to improve the visitor experience and expand the offer, this could include virtual reality elements and guided tours, however, there are no budgets currently set aside for this expenditure.

3. Corporate plan and council policies

- 3.1 This proposal supports the corporate plan policy of 'Prosperous Economy'. Visitor numbers to the Fort have increased and over 89% of visitors rate their experience as excellent or good. It has a 4.5 star TripAdvisor rating and has been awarded a 'Certificate of Excellence'. The Fort has undoubtedly encouraged visitors to Newhaven who may not otherwise have visited the town. The extent to which visitors may have spent additional funds in the town is unclear though.
- 3.2 In line with the Corporate Plan and Corporate Asset Management Plan priorities, a review of further opportunities for how best to secure long term future of Fort will be explored by officers.

4. Financial appraisal

- 4.1 The existing revenue cost of £2,500 per week or £130k per annum is not considered sustainable. There is a sound financial case for a longterm solution and the capital work to take place. The Council's existing Capital Programme has sufficient budgetary provision to fund the replacement of the Newhaven Fort access bridge.
- 4.2 Additionally, there is a risk that debris from the bridge could cause damage to 3rd parties- either injuries to pedestrians or motor vehicles accessing the garages.
- 4.3 Assuming the recommendations set out in this report are accepted, the work should proceed apace.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Legal advice will be taken as the proposals are developed.

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6. Risk management implications

- 6.1 There are risks in not proceeding with the recommended option of renewal of the

bridge. An interim repair option could be explored, however, this in itself comes with risks as identified within the report.

7 Equality analysis

7.1 An equality analysis has been undertaken and has not identified any equality impacts.

8 Appendices

None

9. Background papers

None