

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

BATHGATE WATER REGENERATION PROJECT

REPORT BY HEAD OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform the Panel of the progress of the project to regenerate the Bathgate Water and improve the environment in the surrounding area.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Panel notes the contents of the report and officers intention to recommend that Council Executive approve the funding agreement of the project and the formation of Bathgate Water partnership and project board.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs, making best use of our resources and working in partnership.
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	A full strategic environmental assessment will be undertaken as the project develops.
III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None
IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators	None
V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	The project will contribute to the protection and enhancement of the built and natural environment.
VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	The project will be funded by the Scottish Government's Water Environment Fund (WEF) administered by SEPA and the Places for Everyone fund through Sustrans Scotland, subject to their programme processes. Funding through the National Lottery Heritage Fund is also being considered.
VII Consideration at PDSP	

VIII Other consultations

A report was presented to the Bathgate Local Area Committee on 23 August 2021. Other community engagement is detailed in the report.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 Background

The Bathgate Water Regeneration Project was initially part of the RiverLife project that included the removal of barriers to fish passage on the Almond. The progress of the RiverLife project has been reported to Council Executive on a number of occasions; see background papers for detail.

A design proposal for the Bathgate Water Regeneration Project was submitted for planning approval in January 2017. However, this proposal failed to satisfy flood risk management and planning requirements and was withdrawn.

In December 2017, SEPA stated that they were unable to continue to fund the project as it was, so the scope of the project was reviewed and a more holistic approach was adopted to provide multiple environmental benefits. These included:

- enhancing the quality of the watercourses that flow through the area;
- planting native species to attract and support wildlife;
- improving the management of flood water that will also enhance biodiversity; and
- providing a path network that will encourage active travel by creating an environment that the community will enjoy travelling to and through.

The delay in preparing the new scope and progressing the concept design for the project resulted in the project going beyond the timeline for funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The project was then removed from the overall RiverLife project.

With the project having being re-scoped and a concept design carried out, funding to progress the design has now been secured and the project has been re-energised.

D.2 Project Location

The project is located between a 144-hectare Wester Inch housing development and Bathgate Town Centre and between Blackburn Road and Glasgow Road. The area of the site has been impacted over the years by industries that have come and gone; from mining, to the ironworks and finally truck manufacturing.

The Bog Burn flows through the heart of Bathgate but for large sections of its length it is hidden from view and inaccessible to the community. The watercourse has been heavily degraded over the years through human intervention and no longer supports the aquatic life it could.

D.3 Vision

The vision for the Bathgate Water Regeneration Project is to work with local people to create a large, high-quality, accessible and wildlife-rich nature park on former industrial land, regenerating the rivers that run through the town, creating new direct connections between Blackburn, Wester Inch and the historic town centre and its transport hubs. It is hoped that this will help inject new life into the town centre, galvanise the town's newfound role as a thriving suburb and provide a natural space where wildlife can prosper and people enjoy.

D.4 Working in Partnership

A partnership group was created under the RiverLife project that included the Council, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Forth Rivers Trust. The re-scope of the project attracted additional interest in the form of which saw Sustrans (Scotland) and Green Action Trust. It is, therefore, intended that a specific Bathgate Water partnership be formed through a partnership agreement from these parties with the Council taking on the lead partner role and partners providing financial funding, knowledge and expertise.

It is also intended that a Project Board will be convened to provide direction, leadership and support.

D.5 Funding

Funding for the re-scoped project will come from the Scottish Government's Water Environment Fund administered by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, and Places for Everyone funding through Sustrans (Scotland), subject to their programme processes.

The Water Environment Fund is used to create a better environment for wildlife and people by restoring damaged river corridors, to enhance the ecological value of the river and improve public amenity and well-being, including the reduction of flood risk.

Places for Everyone funding aims to create a safe, healthy and enjoyable environment that will encourage active travel and access for all by incorporating equality of opportunity in public space.

The holistic approach to the project enables these two funds to complement each other and will ensure the partnership vision is achieved.

Currently, an expression of interest has been submitted to seek funding through the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to enhance the overall outcome and maximise the benefits of its delivery. Other sources of funding may be sought during the term of the project.

D.6 Community Engagement

Community engagement was carried out by consultants in the early stages of the project, to get views how the project could be delivered. This engagement highlighted the communities' desire for improvements to benefit the natural environment and encourage active travel.

A representative from Forth Rivers Trust met with councillors and community council members in December 2018, to discuss what the main constraints were on the community enjoying and benefiting from the space.

Further online engagement was carried out during 2020 on the re-scoped design to reconnect with the community and identify any changes in views from the early engagements. Over 700 responses were received.

A masterplan is now being developed that will put the community at its heart by focusing on its aspirations. It will also include river restoration, community stewardship, sustainable travel and larger urban-rural green networks.

Further engagement with the community will take place throughout the development of the project.

At its meeting on 23 August, Bathgate Local Area Committee agreed that the report should be presented to the next meeting of the Environment PDSP.

E. CONCLUSION

The Bathgate Water Regeneration project is an exciting and much need environmental project. The successful delivery of the project will:

- Restore the Bog Burn, making it a functional part of the landscape and environment again. Making it more accessible to the local community and improving its ability to support a range of functions from helping manage surface water run off to supporting a wider variety of local wildlife.
- Create better-quality amenity and green space, with improved pathways and walking routes.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Council Executive on 10 March 2015 – Bathgate Water Restoration Project

Council Executive on 11 October 2016 – RiverLife: Almond and Avon Programme

Council Executive on 13 November 2018 – RiverLife: Almond and Avon Programme

Appendices/Attachments: None

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