Subject: Bear Junction Pedestrian Safety and Capacity Upgrade, Smethwick (Key Decision Ref. No. LR12)

Presenting Cabinet Member: Leader of the Council Highways and Environment

1. Summary Statement

1.1 Approval is sought for the third phase of a staged project to secure a comprehensive and integrated series of improvements along the Cape Hill/Bearwood Road corridor in Smethwick, for which funding of £2,000,000 was earmarked from the Council's 2013/14 revenue surplus.

1.2 The objectives of this project are to:

- promote healthy lifestyles by encouraging walking;
- improve safety for pedestrians and other road users;
- understand and tackle issues around poor air quality;
- invest in essential infrastructure within the adopted highway;
- reduce litter and encourage recycling;
- undertake greening initiatives and environmental improvements;
- improve confidence within the business and retail community.

1.3 The first phase of works was implemented in 2015-16, to repair and renew highway infrastructure along the 2km length of Bearwood Road corridor, at a cost to the capital programme of £210,760.

1.4 A second phase of works was undertaken at Cape Hill, with a capital programme contribution of £651,000.
1.5 A third phase of work, which is the subject of this report and is detailed elsewhere, involves redesigning the Bear junction to improve pedestrian safety, expand vehicle capacity and operational efficiency and secure environmental benefits. It will also secure the upgrading of a zebra crossing outside Bearwood school to a signal-controlled puffin crossing.

1.6 Further phases will secure the creation of landscaped public open spaces with seating and events areas, additional street tree planting; the establishment of a high-quality Bearwood gateway around the Kings Head clock; and improved interchange facilities at Bearwood bus station and linkages to Lightwoods Park.

1.7 Approval is sought to undertake this third phase of works, at a total cost of £691,515. Of this, £591,515 is sought from capital sources, to be supplemented by £100,000 from the Local Highway Maintenance Challenge Fund Grant. Work would begin in August 2016 and be substantially complete within the 2016-2017 financial year, leaving just contractor retention sums, amounting to £10,000, carried forward into 2017-18.

1.8 This third phase of works, for which approval is now sought, is confined to the adopted public highway and requires limited consultation with outside agencies. Ahead of works commencing, notices were placed on privatised utility companies, requiring them to bring forward any planned maintenance or renewal ahead of the proposed resurfacing, to prolong the life and integrity of the public asset and reduce the likelihood of third party excavation / damage.

1.9 Some aspects of the scheme are subject to Traffic Regulation Orders and, following statutory consultations with local residents, emergency services and other stakeholders, any objections will be reported to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment.

1.10 The procurement requirements of the Council will be fully met. The lead civil engineering contractor is selected from the approved West Midlands list of framework term contractors and the signal contract is procured in partnership with regional authorities.
1.11 The proposals have been brought forward in full consultation with ward members. Public consultation and feedback events have been held on several occasions, confirming broad public support for the course of action now proposed.

1.12 The project makes a positive contribution to financial sustainability, as a one-off capital investment aimed at renewing, upgrading and modernising a range of highway infrastructure, the provision and upkeep of which is the statutory responsibility of the Council.

1.13 An Equality Impact Assessment screening has been carried out and this has indicated that a full assessment is not required, as the works currently proposed and detailed elsewhere in this report will bring about improvements to the safety and functionality of the highway and pedestrian environment and cater for the needs of all members of the community.

1.14 A full appraisal has been undertaken by Strategic Finance. A copy of the report can be found at Appendix 1. Risks have been identified as a result of the appraisal and action points recommended to mitigate these risks.

1.15 A risk assessment has been undertaken and, following the identification of appropriate mitigation measures, there are no red risks associated with the project.

Further details are attached for your information

2. **Recommendations**

2.1 That the third phase of Streetscape and safety improvements along Bearwood Road, Smethwick be implemented at a total cost of £591,515,

2.2 That in connection with 2.1 above, the Chief Finance Officer be authorised to allocate a total sum of £591,515 from earmarked balances to the Capital Programme.
2.3 That subject to 2.1 and 2.2 above, the following action points identified within the appraisal report be implemented to reduce any risk to the Council:

- Review Risk Register to ensure all risks are identified and adequately mitigated.
- Continue discussions with National Express in regard to the use of low-emission buses dedicated to routes through Bear Junction.
- Identify suitable resources to ensure that adequate post project evaluation can be undertaken.

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3. **Strategic Resource Implications**

3.1 The capital cost of this phase of works will be £591,515 and will be funded from earmarked balances in 2016-17 (£581,515) and 2017-18 (£10,000). Approval for the use of £2,000,000 from the Council’s 2013/14 revenue surplus for road improvements on Cape Hill / Bearwood Road corridor, Smethwick was given by the Cabinet Member for Strategic Resources in June 2014, subject to a positive SIU appraisal of the scheme. This first phase of works costing £210,760 took place in 2015-16. A subsequent phase of work was undertaken in Cape Hill, also during 2015-16, at an approved cost of £651,000. The cumulative approval total for the three contracts referred to above is therefore £1,453,275, which is within the £2,000,000 allocation.
3.2 There are no implications for the workforce and no additional revenue costs resulting from the proposed project. Planned interventions in maintenance, upgrading and renewal will lead to reduced revenue liabilities over the coming years, based on the Council not having to undertake unplanned reactive remedial works in response to the failure of signal systems and components or the degradation of elements of highway and footway infrastructure for which it is responsible.

3.3 The main implication of not carrying out the proposed course of action would be to defer the timely review, upgrading and renewal of highway infrastructure, for which the Council has responsibility. Failure to invest at this time would increase the Council’s exposure to unplanned interventions and to the higher revenue costs these inevitable bring. A series of forced and unplanned interventions around this busy junction will inevitably cause congestion, inconvenience and potential danger to road users and pedestrians as well as bringing reputational damage to the Council.

4. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

4.1 The proposals outlined in this report relate to securing improvements to Council-owned infrastructure within the adopted public highway and, as such, there are no legal highway implications for the Council.

4.2 The contract to carry out works has been procured in accordance with the public contracts regulations 2015 and the Council’s procurement and contract procedure rules.

5. **Implications for the Council’s Scorecard Priorities**

**Great Place:**
Cleaner streets, more recycling
Parks and green spaces to enjoy

**Great People:**
Healthy lifestyle

**Great Prospects:**
A better deal for Smethwick
5.1 **Great Place**

An improved public realm will contribute to the vibrancy of Bearwood commercial centre through investment in renewed and rationalised infrastructure acting as a public statement of faith in the future of the centre through a capital investment programme, which includes key elements such as better footways, reduced pavement clutter and more user-friendly pedestrian crossings. The programme will deliver a more fit-for-purpose junction configuration, deal with existing traffic more efficiently, reduce delays, improve bus reliability and accessibility and, in turn, deliver additional customers to shops in Bearwood, so reducing retail leakage to other competing shopping areas out of the borough.

5.2 **Great People**

The Bear junction and Bearwood School crossing improvements will deliver against statutory responsibilities. Upgrading the Bearwood School crossing from uncontrolled zebra crossing to signal-controlled puffin specification contributes towards achieving highway safety objectives and this is a key objective when it involves the safety of schoolchildren and their families and helps towards the Council’s priority for “Safer, cleaner, more active communities”. Improving the functionality of the Bear crossing by increasing the amount of green man time allocated to pedestrians will also contribute towards the aim of encouraging healthy activity of walking. Reducing queue lengths and tackling congestion will support corridor measures to reduce the levels of air pollution. Recent studies have measured worryingly high levels of pollution here and any reduction in NOx and particulates will bring significant benefits to the health of pedestrians and nearby residents.

5.3 **Great Prospects**

A better deal for Smethwick will be provided through significant environmental, capacity and safety improvements to Bearwood shopping area together with a restored and enhanced environment. This will contribute to the economic prosperity of the centre.
6 Background Details

6.1 Approval is sought for the third phase of a staged project to secure a comprehensive and integrated series of improvements along the Cape Hill / Bearwood Road corridor in Smethwick. Funding of £2,000,000 has been earmarked from the Council’s 2013/14 revenue surplus for these improvements.

6.2 The first phase of works, which received Cabinet approval in January 2015, sought to achieve the following detailed objectives: review, rationalise and renew footway paving and associated highway infrastructure; extend infrastructure life by preventing vehicle access and parking on footways; secure safety improvements to a number of pedestrian crossings; install additional safety signage near a primary school and plant a number of street trees. This first phase of works costing £210,760 began in 2015 and is substantially complete.

6.3 A second phase of works was undertaken at Cape Hill, at a total cost of £1,002,000, with a Council Capital contribution of £651,000 and the balance of £351,000 secured from the Local Transport Plan. This comprised a safety scheme designed to mitigate the second largest concentration of road traffic accidents in Sandwell. The safety measures also included a self-enforcing 20mph zone through the use of speed tables, safer pedestrian crossing points at the principal desire lines, better lighting, safer positioning of bus stop and rationalisation of other infrastructure, all the while maintaining on-street parking. The project also secured the renewal of key elements of streetscape, including footways, drop crossings, pedestrian crossings, signs and street furniture, drainage channels, service box covers and protective bollards. This work began in 2015 and is also complete.

6.4 The third phase - which is the subject of this report - involves redesigning the Bear junction to improve pedestrian safety, expand vehicle capacity and operational efficiency and secure environmental benefits. In detail these works involve:
6.5 Implementing improvements to reallocate crossing time at this busy junction in favour of pedestrians, in order to accommodate crossing demand, reduce pedestrian congestion that currently occurs and hence alleviate the circumstances that contribute to pedestrian / vehicle conflict.

6.6 Providing safer pedestrian crossing facilities at a location used by schoolchildren and other vulnerable pedestrians to cross Bearwood Road, by upgrading the uncontrolled zebra crossing at Ethel Street, by Bearwood primary school, to a signal controlled puffin crossing.

6.7 Improving performance and efficiency at the Bear junction, in order to increase storage capacity and remove impediments to traffic flow. The signal control system will be replaced with a more sophisticated system that can manage peaks and troughs in demand more effectively and responsively and reduce traffic queue lengths on approaches to the junction. These improvements in junction performance will contribute to reducing the high levels of traffic-derived air pollution that have been proven to occur along Bearwood Road corridor.

6.8 Reinstating a high quality and durable town centre infrastructure by renewing and rationalising underground plant, services and ducting; traffic signals and control equipment; highway and footway surfaces; signing and lining.

6.9 Reducing and managing future Council risk and liability to maintenance revenue budgets, insurance claims, public safety and the associated consequences of fulfilling statutory duties.

6.10 Complementing a series of safety, streetscape and greening initiatives that are either complete, ongoing or planned along the entire 2km length of Bearwood Road commercial centre.

6.11 A £100,000 contribution will be made from the Local Highway Maintenance Challenge Fund Grant, to supplement capital funds. In addition, major resurfacing works scheduled for Bearwood Road in 2017-18 are being advanced to take place in the final quarter of 2016-17, following completion of the Bear junction upgrade.
6.12 The Council has been able to secure from bus operator National Express a provisional commitment to upgrade certain key routes that pass through the Bear junction to low emission Euro5 / Euro6 vehicles during 2016. This represents a £2m+ investment by the company and will help alleviate the problems of poor air quality.

Source Documents
None
Appendix 1

Date: 25th June 2016
To: Cabinet
From: Strategic Finance
Subject: Approval of capital project for Bear Junction road and safety improvements.

Content: Appraisal Report undertaken by Strategic Finance.

Regeneration & Economy are seeking approval for the third stage of a capital project to implement road and safety improvements on Cape Hill/Bearwood Road corridor in Smethwick.

Strategic Finance has been asked to carry out an appraisal of the proposal, which has been evaluated against HM Treasury Green Book guidance. The Capital Project Appraisal Form and supporting documents have been used to undertake the appraisal.

The appraisal process recorded a score of 75%, with some areas of risk identified.

The appraisal covered the following areas:

Strategic Case

There is a clear need to improve traffic flow and improve air quality along Bearwood Road in Smethwick, as it is a heavily congested high street, with a large number of buses and pedestrians using the junction.

Air quality along the road is poor, with some of the highest nitrogen dioxide concentrations in the borough, exceeding both the annual and hourly mean Air Quality Objectives. Long term exposure to high concentrations of NO\textsubscript{2} are known to contribute to respiratory and lung diseases.

In order to address health issues, Phase 3 of the project aims to improve the performance of the junction in order to increase capacity of traffic and therefore reduce congestion. Further pedestrian safety measures and improvements to the condition of the footpaths and highway at Bear Junction will also be undertaken.
The project will consist of the following measures:

- Implementation of safety improvements through the upgrade of an existing pedestrian crossing and the installation of an additional controlled pedestrian crossing
- Improvements to the signal controlled junction and links to five signal controlled pedestrian crossings
- Renewal and rationalisation of highway infrastructure, e.g. guard rails, signs etc.
- Renewal of road surface and footway paving

Public consultation has been undertaken on the proposals in the form of ‘drop in’ events with ward councillors and council officers. However, no supporting evidence was provided to determine the level of support from residents/businesses. The Appraisal Panel were informed that further communication with stakeholders will be undertaken following project approval.

If approved, the third phase of the project will commence in August 2016 with completion by December 2017.

The project will contribute to the Sandwell Scorecard by providing safer, cleaner streets, with improved highway safety and by securing a better deal for Smethwick.

**Economic Case**

An alternative option to improve crossing facilities for pedestrians was examined but it was found that simply increasing time at the existing pedestrian crossing in favour of pedestrians would significantly worsen congestion and air pollution. The Appraisal Panel were advised that the proposed solution is the only one that offers improved efficiency along with additional crossing allocations for pedestrians.

A feasibility study on improving the air quality within the Bearwood Road area was undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory in 2016. The report recommended that all buses should meet Euro VI standard by 2020. The Appraisal Panel were informed that discussions have taken place with the principal bus operator in the area who is committed to upgrading their fleet to low emission buses. However, no evidence
was provided to confirm this and it is not clear as to when this will be fully implemented.

The project should result in a reduction in planned maintenance and all future asset management and maintenance requirements will be managed within Regeneration & Economy’s existing resources.

The project aims to deliver additional benefits to the Council through reduced air pollution, a reduction in accident related insurance claims, along with making a positive contribution to road safety targets.

A basic corporate Risk Register has been completed which identifies the main risks to the project being increased costs, time delays, disruption and safety issues. It was considered that the Risk Register could be more comprehensive in detail.

**Commercial Case**

Procurement for the project will be undertaken through the Council's current framework agreements for minor works and signal upgrades.

There should be no State Aid implications for the Council, providing proper procurement processes are followed.

**Financial Case**

The capital cost of phase 3 of the project will be £0.692m, which will be funded by £0.100m from the Local Highway Maintenance Challenge Fund Grant, along with £0.592m from earmarked balances.

Approval for the use of £2m from the Council’s 2013/14 revenue surplus for road improvements on Cape Hill / Bearwood Road corridor, Smethwick was given by the Cabinet Member for Strategic Resources in June 2014, subject to a positive appraisal of the scheme. In January 2015, Cabinet gave approval to utilise £0.211m of this funding for Bearwood Road, with subsequent approval in March 2015 for Phase 2 of the project. This resulted in a further £0.651m being utilised.

Estimated costs for Phase 3 of the project have been based on current schedules of rates from approved contractors. Contingency of 10% has been included in the project costs.

There are no VAT/tax implications for the Council from this project.
The financial monitoring of the capital project will be supported by the Capital Finance Team.

**Management Case**

The project will be managed by Highway Services and project outputs and outcomes have been determined.

Post project evaluation will be undertaken by the Senior Planner but the Appraisal Panel were advised that the impact of the project on traffic volumes, queue lengths and pedestrian movements across the junction will only be assessed if sufficient funding is available.

**Action Points**

The following action points have been identified which should be managed in order to reduce any risks to the Council:

- Review Risk Register to ensure all risks are identified and adequately mitigated.
- Continue discussions with National Express in regard to the use of low-emission buses dedicated to routes through Bear Junction.
- Identify suitable resources to ensure that adequate post project evaluation can be undertaken.

**Conclusion**

From the information provided and with the full implementation of the above action points, it is concluded that the project does not present a major risk to the Council’s resources.

External Funding Team  
25th June 2016