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| Report to | Cabinet |
| Date of meeting | 23 rd November 2021 |
| Lead Member / Officer | Cllr Brian Jones, Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment / Tony Ward, Head of Highways and Environmental Services |
| Report author | Tim Towers, Highways Risk and Asset Manager |
| Title | Llannerch Bridge |

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. This report is about Llannerch Bridge, located between Trefnant and Tremeirchion, which was lost in January 2021 during storm Christoph.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1. To seek in-principle support from Cabinet for replacing the bridge, subject to securing the necessary funding to do so. Such in-principle support will allow Officers to seek funding to progress the potential replacement of the bridge.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1. That Cabinet confirm support for the principle of replacing the bridge, subject to securing the necessary funding to do so. This will include making an approach to Welsh Government to request external funding.

4. Report details

Background

- 4.1. Prior to Storm Christoph, Llannerch Bridge formed part of a well-used route. Traffic counters show that it was used by an average of around 1,600 vehicles per day.

These high usage figures are partly due to the fact that it was utilised by local traffic seeking to avoid St. Asaph en route to / from the A55.

- 4.2. Not only did the bridge form an important link for the communities in the area, but it was also cherished by many people due to its almost unique shape, configuration and stonework, being a listed structure.
- 4.3. Since the bridge collapsed, officers have been working with consultants to consider what might be possible in terms of replacing the bridge and also how much this might cost. The early indications are that a replacement bridge may cost between £6million and £7million in total. It is likely that a significant element of this (up to £1million) would be need to be spent in the pre-construction phase to carry out works such as ground investigation, river modelling, land acquisition and detailed design.
- 4.4. This is obviously a significant capital commitment for the Council, and it is considered that approaches should be made to seek external funding, particularly to Welsh Government. Prior to making that approach, there may be value in the council undertaking some preparatory work to enable a more robust business case to be developed, thereby increasing the potential of attracting external funding.
- 4.5. In order to gather evidence of how important the bridge/route is to the community, we have recently undertaken a public engagement exercise to seek the views of residents and users. This was carried out over a five week period that ended on 25th October, 2021. The format of the exercise was designed to ascertain what people felt about the bridge, and what was most important to them in terms of its potential replacement.
- 4.6. There was a significant response to the survey, with 750 people/organisations responding, which demonstrates that this is a very important issue in the local community. A quarter of the responses came from residents in Tremeirchion; a further quarter were from those living in Trefnant; and the remainder were from the wider community.
- 4.7. Although it was not a specific question on the survey, almost 100 people took the trouble to write a comment to the effect that the bridge should be replaced as soon as possible, which supports the view that this is a vital local link for the community.

- 4.8. The overwhelming main message coming back from the survey is that the community want us to replace the bridge, and to do it as soon as possible. Ninety five per cent of respondents want the bridge to be replaced, but this is perhaps not surprising given that 93% of Tremeirchion respondents use the bridge at least weekly and 65% of all other residents were also very regular users of it. We are still analysing the data in terms of peoples' views on how they feel the new bridge should look.
- 4.9. Replacing the bridge will be dependent on securing the relevant funding, which will take time. If the funding can be secured, the delivery of a new bridge is a complex and time consuming project.
- 4.10. Given that the bridge was very heavily used on a daily basis, and the volume/nature of survey responses received from the community, it would seem reasonable for the council to try to seek the necessary external funding to restore the route by rebuilding a bridge in this location.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1. A project to replace the bridge would support the council's current Corporate Priority to improve connectivity between communities.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1. As stated earlier, replacing the bridge is likely to cost between £6million and £7million, in total. It will therefore be important to develop a robust business case to assist in seeking the necessary external funding for the project. There is no significant impact on other council services, although some support from Communities and Customer Services will be required to ensure that communications with our communities are appropriate and effective.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1. A Well-being Impact Assessment has not yet been undertaken, but this will form part of the further work to develop the business case which will then be used to support any bids for external funding.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1. In addition to the public engagement exercise, discussed in section 4 of this report, informal discussions have taken place with the local Ward Members and statutory stakeholders such as Natural resources Wales and Cadw. The issue is on the agenda for the Elwy MAG on 2nd December, 2021.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. The whole project is currently estimated to cost £6-7m. However, it should be noted that these are initial estimates provided by an external source and liable to change. Approximately £1m of that cost would relate to the pre-construction phase as detailed in section 4. It is important that any commitment to expenditure and the procurement approach goes through the agreed Council processes. Any in-year commitment of Council funds would need to be approved by Cabinet.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1. There is a risk that the council is unable to attract external funding for the project. The chances of attracting external funding may be enhanced by undertaking some further work (e.g. ground investigation; modelling, feasibility etc.) to enable a more robust business case to be developed.

10.2. There is a risk that the reputation of the council is impacted if the attempts to secure external funding are protracted or indeed unsuccessful. This could be mitigated by clear and effective communication with our communities to ensure that residents are kept informed of the steps we are taking to progress this matter.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. The Council's highway authority functions are the responsibility of the Cabinet in accordance with the Council's Constitution and the Local Authorities Executive Arrangements (Functions and Responsibilities) (Wales) Regulations 2007.