

# **Title of report: 2023/24 Budget Setting – ADDENDUM – extra recommendation**

**Meeting: Council**

**Meeting date: Friday 10 February 2023**

**Report by: Leader of the council**

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

Budget and policy framework

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

To include an additional recommendation to the budget recommended by Cabinet.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That: Council approves:**

**j) the additional government grant of £680k confirmed in the final local government settlement announced on the 6th of February to fund:**

- **£480k For Phosphate Commission to deliver a robust process to achieve scientific, legal and regulatory certainty on river restoration and achieve earliest lifting of the Lugg catchment development moratorium; and**
- **£200k For parish grants to fund PROW ( Public Rights of Way) structures (bridges, gates, styles, etc.) for installation, in liaison with Herefordshire Council’s PROW team.**

## **Key considerations**

### **Phosphate Commission Briefing**

1. The Cabinet Commission for the Restoration of the Wye has been progressing its work since the autumn of last year.

2. The Commission was brought into being to undertake a more strategic and systems review of river quality and to consider, in particular, how Herefordshire, Powys, Monmouthshire and Forest of Dean Councils could accelerate progress in the restoration of the Wye.
3. Herefordshire Council has been undertaking a lead role in efforts to support the restoration of the Wye, developing the UK's first development Phosphate Calculator and delivering Integrated Wetlands. The Council has been a driver of river improvement through its set-up and chairmanship of the Nutrient Management Plan Delivery Board (NMP-DB). However, the voluntary Nutrient Management Plan is failing to deliver the scale and pace of improvement now needed.
4. There is a need for a new approach which provides CERTAINTY – regulatory, scientific and legal. This is what Natural England (NE) require in order to lift the damaging development moratorium imposed upon the Lugg catchment.
5. NE have recently accepted that a scheme on the Solent with the kind of regulatory and testing framework being proposed by the Commission does deliver the certainty they need. NE have also confirmed that once the Levelling-Up Bill puts in place through statute the intended treatment works upgrades, this also meets their 'certainty' requirements.
6. Consequently, the Commission's work programme will deliver the upgraded farming software tools, monitoring, testing and oversight – along with the consent order approach to achieve that framework of certainty. Design, development and implementation will take ~3 years. The programme provides a clear route-map to deliver certain river improvement, to manage the legacy build-up, to create the conditions which lift the moratorium and to provide ongoing oversight of development and farming practices.
7. In addition to funds proposed to be committed by Herefordshire, the Commission is making funding submissions to Welsh Government, DLUCH, DEFRA and expects other Council's with a stakeholding in the river catchment will also commit resource to the project alongside funds from the business community. The design and development phase of the restoration programme is scoped to cost ~£1m to deliver to the presently proposed timescales.

### **Additional Funding Allocation**

8. This week (7 February) the Council's funding settlement was finally confirmed by government. This includes an uplift of £680,000 to the originally proposed Rural Services Grant. The Council's thanks are due to Cllr Roger Phillips for the pivotal role he has continued to play in securing the enhancement to this important grant for Herefordshire. This uplift reflects the erosion in real terms to this grant over the last three years.
9. The administration proposes that this one-off additional money, £680,000 be added to the 2023-24 budget for E&E.
10. It is proposed that £480,000 be used to provide the funding needed to resource and continue to lead the important work of the Commission as it enters its critical design and delivery phase. This funding will ensure the pace of progress is maintained to achieve the key objectives of river restoration and the lifting of the development moratorium. A properly resourced project team is required to continue this work. This team is also important to provide capable support to the Nutrient Management Plan Delivery Board, whilst its work transitions to a new and more rigorous restoration model.
11. In addition it is proposed that the remaining £200,000 is used to help improve the condition and accessibility of the Public Rights of Way Network across the county. With over 3000km of PROW the service has identified a need to invest in new bridges (less than 8m span), stiles, and accessible gates. The PROW team will use its links with Parish Footpath Officers to determine where the new assets are to be placed and will work with local groups to create a

Grant Scheme that will allow for the free of charge delivery of the material required to install and repair.

**Background papers**

None