



**Council Cabinet**  
**12 September 2023**

# ITEM 9

Report sponsor: Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Transport and Sustainability and Strategic Director of Communities and Place  
Report author: Environment Strategy Delivery Manager

## Update on Darley Abbey Mills Bridge.

### Purpose

- 1.1 To seek approval to purchase the existing prefabricated footbridge and access ramps, to maintain accessibility.

### Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the purchase of the existing prefabricated bridge and access ramps (Walters Walkway) using existing capital funding from the Council's Highways and Transport Programme.
- 2.2 To approve the addition, to the 2023/24 Capital programme, the purchase of the prefabricated bridge and access ramps at a value of £0.266m, as outlined in section 7.2.
- 2.3 To note a Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) revenue pressure that will need to be considered of £0.044m for maintenance and inspection of the bridge from 2026/27 following the use of the remaining one-off budget that has been previously allocated.

### Reasons

- 3.1 A prefabricated bridge was urgently installed in 2022 to support the local community and businesses. Uncertainties around ownership as well as a lack of available funding for a long-term solution now mean the prefabricated bridge will need to be in place to provide accessibility in the medium term, for approximately six years, or until such a time as a long-term solution can be delivered.
- 3.2 Previously approved revenue funding for the hire of the prefabricated bridge is forecast to run out in October 2024. As the bridge is a medium-term solution it is capital expenditure.

## Supporting information

- 4.1 Darley Abbey Mills Bridge was a privately owned structure and is not part of the public highway network. Having remained ownerless for some years the bridge has fallen into disrepair. In 2022, concerns were raised about its condition and an emergency inspection confirmed that the bridge represented a serious risk to public safety. The Council used emergency powers to close access to the bridge to all users on 13 May 2022.
- 4.2 Due to the importance of the link to the community, on 13 July 2022, Cabinet, using powers under the Localism Act 2011, approved installation of a structure that provides access across the river for walking, wheeling, and cycling. In September 2022, a prefabricated footbridge, named Walters Walkway, was installed over the existing Darley Abbey Mills Bridge. Re-establishing connectivity for pedestrian and cyclists has provided time for consideration and development of a medium-term solution. Officers have investigated the option to purchase the prefabricated bridge and compared this to the cost of on-going hire.
- 4.3 **Current short-term solution**  
The current costs of hire of the prefabricated bridge, inspections and maintenance have been paid for from an approved £0.500m use of revenue reserves. The identified reserves funding will be exhausted in Autumn 2024. If we apply the medium-term solution below there will be £0.120m remaining from this reserve to utilise below.

### **Option 1 – continued hire**

A further option would be continued rental of the bridge. In comparison, on-going rental, maintenance and inspection of the prefabricated bridge would result in an approx. £0.111m unfunded annual revenue pressure once the one-off budget has been exhausted in 2025/26.

The on-going revenue implications for the rental of the bridge of £0.111m compares to an on-going revenue pressure to buy the bridge of £0.044m.

### **Option 2 - Medium-term solution**

To maintain the re-established connectivity, beyond Autumn 2024 and into the medium term, it is proposed that the Council purchases the prefabricated bridge using £0.266m of capital from existing Highways and Transport programme funding, rather than continuing with the 'current' hire arrangements. There would be on-going revenue costs for 5 years for inspections and maintenance and staff time, a total of £0.221m which would be paid for using £0.120m remaining from the identified reserves one-off funding, leaving a future annual revenue pressure in the MTFP of £0.044m from 2026/27.

### **In conclusion**

The total cost reduction to purchase the bridge compared with continued rental is £0.068m.

4.4 The initial funding agreed enabled the Council to act quickly and provided a solution up to Autumn 2024; however, due to the complexities involved in finding a long-term option, we have identified a funded solution that would, should Cabinet decide to approve, provide accessibility in the medium term. There would then be an opportunity to consider long-term options, which will be presented to Cabinet in a future report. Revenue funding has not been identified, therefore, the option to purchase the prefabricated bridge will reduce the unfunded financial pressure on the Council's revenue budgets and provide flexibility in the medium term for the duration this arrangement is in place. When the medium-term solution is no longer required, we would investigate options to reuse or sell the prefabricated bridge. A comparison of the cost to hire the prefabricated bridge, option One, and cost to purchase the bridge, option Two, are set out in the financial implications section.

4.5 Key risks:

- Taking ownership of the prefabricated bridge compared to a hire arrangement could enhance the perception that doing so further symbolises that the Council is taking on responsibility for securing continuity of access and, potentially, liability for the existing structure.
- The preferred option, to purchase the prefabricated bridge, generates an on-going revenue cost of £0.044m for inspections and maintenance that would need to be considered within the MTFP process but this has not yet been approved. If this pressure were not approved in the MTFP process the alternative funding would have to be identified within the service which could mean a cut in service provision or non-delivery of another project for example.

## **Public/stakeholder engagement**

5.1 We engaged with residents and businesses following emergency closure of Darley Abbey Mills Bridge and prior to and during the installation of the prefabricated footbridge. We continue to keep residents and businesses informed.

## **Other options**

6.1 In a report to Cabinet, on 13 July 2022, an option to 'do nothing' and close the bridge without providing an accessible river crossing for residents, businesses and leisure users was considered unacceptable. It was unlikely any other organisation would take action to provide a solution to retain accessibility in the short to medium term. As a result, the Council, using powers under the Localism Act 2011, provided the pedestrian and cycle facility.

6.2 A 'do-more' option, to provide a long-term solution will need identification of a responsible owner for the bridge and an agreement in place for funding to be found from appropriate sources. The risk a responsible owner will not be found and the complexities of a project to restore or replace the permanent bridge will be the subject of future reports to Cabinet.

## Financial and value for money issues

7.1 On the 13 July 2022, Cabinet approved £0.500m revenue reserves funding for the temporary hire of the prefabricated bridge. Officers have investigated options for continued hire or to purchase the prefabricated bridge. It will be more cost effective to purchase the current prefabricated bridge arrangement with a reduced total revenue and capital cost of £0.068m over the 5-year period. Costs in Option One and Two below do not include the cost of removing the prefabricated bridge.

7.2

<b>Option One Revenue Expenditure</b>	
Hire – using revenue for a medium-term solution providing the prefabricated bridge for a further 5 years from October 2023 to October 2028.	
<b>Current one-off Budget</b>	<b>£0.500m</b>
Spend (actual to July 2023 and estimated to October 2023)	£0.380m
One off Budget Remaining	£0.120m
<b>Option One Costs:</b>	
Estimated on-going cost of hire and maintenance of the medium-term solution for 5 years from October 2023	£0.555m
Actual Costs incurred to date	£0.380m
<b>Total cost of medium-term solution in hire scenario</b>	<b>£0.935m</b>
<b>Total revenue pressure further funding required</b>	<b>£0.435m</b>

## 7.3

<b>Option Two Capital and Revenue Expenditure</b>	
Purchase – this option allows for capital purchase of the prefabricated bridge from October 2023 and on-going maintenance	
<b>Capital</b>	
Capital required to purchase the medium-term solution bridge using budget proposed from Highways and Transport programme in 2023/24.	£0.266m
<b>Revenue</b>	
Budget	£0.500m
Spend (actual to July 2023, and estimated to October 2023)	£0.380m
<b>One off Budget Remaining</b>	<b>£0.120m</b>
Estimated revenue required for inspections and maintenance and staff time for the medium-term solution to October 2028	£0.221m
<b>Total cost of medium-term solution in purchase scenario</b>	<b>£0.867m</b>
<b>Total revenue pressure between October 2024 to October 2028</b>	<b>£0.101m</b>

### Legal implications

- 8.1 The Walters Walkway prefabricated bridge arrangement has been implemented and will remain in place under the Localism Act 2011.
- 8.2 By continuing to intervene in this manner, there is a risk that the Council could become the owner of the existing structure and responsible for demolition and replacement of the existing bridge.
- 8.3 For the reasons set out in the preceding paragraph, it is important that this report reflects the continuing advice that invoking its Localism Act powers as a medium-term solution is in no way suggestive of the Council assuming perpetual responsibility to maintain access over the prefabricated footbridge, nor ownership or liability for the condition, repair and maintenance or replacement of the original bridge.

### Climate implications

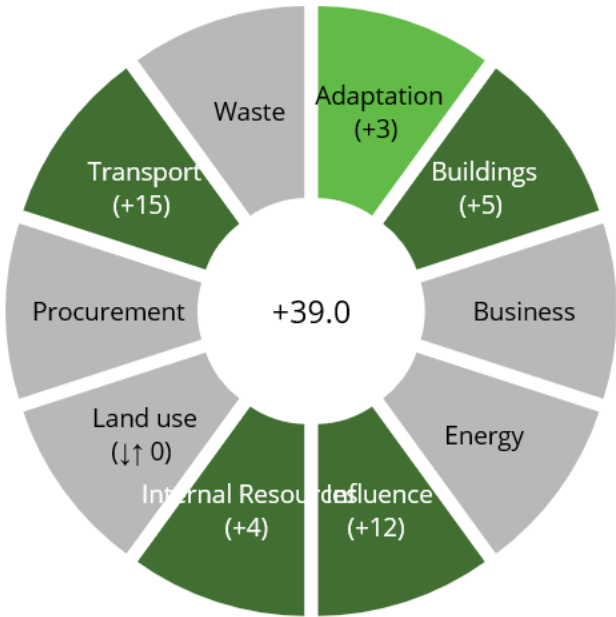
- 9.1 The climate implications for the provision of the prefabricated medium-term solution have been considered for this report and included in the appendices.

The prefabricated bridge provides the local community with cycle and pedestrian access across the River Derwent and an alternative exit point should the area flood.

The bridge accommodates active travel users and maintains and provides accessibility to the north of the city and retains an important link on the national cycle network. Work to retain the link through the provision of the prefabricated bridge has provided opportunities to engage with the local community and promote low carbon travel modes.

Installation of the bridge has required the use of timber, steel, and concrete pads; however, waste will be managed through the reuse of materials where possible, will be recycled where reuse is not possible reducing waste. If purchase of the bridge is approved, it would be possible to sell on for reuse or reuse the structure elsewhere in the city.

9.2



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**Socio-Economic implications**

10.1 Closure of the bridge would sever an important community link and have negative social and economic impacts, including reduced physical activity and accessibility within the World Heritage Site. The recommendations within this report support an accessible medium-term solution and acknowledge that social and economic implications would need to be considered in full by the organisation progressing a permanent solution.

**Other significant implications**

11.1 None.

This report has been approved by the following people:

<b>Role</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Date of sign-off</b>
<b>Legal</b>	Olu Idowu	16/08/2023
<b>Finance</b>	Janice Hadfield (Revenue)	21/08/2023
	Toni Nash	21/08/2023
<b>Service Director(s)</b>	Verna Bayliss	21/08/2023
<b>Report sponsor</b>	Councillor Swan	21/08/2023
<b>Other(s)</b>		

<b>Background papers:</b>	
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Climate Impact Assessment Report