

REPORT TO THE CABINET

28 June 2016

Cabinet Member: Councillor Dafydd Meurig

Subject: Lôn Las Ogwen

Contact officer: Dafydd Wyn Williams - Head of Regulatory Department [acting]

The decision sought/purpose of the report

The support of the Cabinet to complete the project in the 2016/17 financial year.

Local member's views

Not a local matter.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 There were discussions with Cabinet Members in November 2015 regarding the intention to develop a tunnel and other structures which are part of the former railway in Tregarth as part of the Lôn Las Ogwen path. There was desire at the time to support the proposal in principle but further information was requested regarding the financial element and the benefits which would arise from implementing the scheme. Also, as the Recreational Routes had been listed as a possible cut at the time, the members were eager to be certain of the decision of the Full Council regarding the cuts in March 2016, prior to making a decision on the matter. By now the situation is clearer, and as a result of the Gwynedd Challenge consultation on the possible cuts, it was resolved not to cut the budget for managing and maintaining the Recreational Routes.

2. PROJECT FUNDING AND MAINTENANCE

- 2.1 The intention is to create a new, 800m long section in order to complete the Lôn Las Ogwen route between Bangor and Bethesda and on to Capel Curig. Though a short section, the work includes securing a rock at the side of the ravine, illuminating the tunnel which is 275m long and steps to safeguard users on the viaduct over the Ogwen River. In addition, we must install a surface which is suitable for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 2.2 During 2015 / 16 the Regulatory Department managed to identify one off resources and, after consultation with the relevant Cabinet Members and Head of Finance, £200,000 was set aside in a departmental reserve, earmarked to finance the Council's contribution towards this project and enabled the Department to secure a £230,000 grant from the Welsh Governments' 'Local Transportation Fund.

- 2.3 A funding package of £430,000 has been secured for the project. We must of course await the outcome of the procurement process in order to obtain the actual figures but it is anticipated that the budget is sufficient to implement the scheme.
- 2.4 The other element is the revenue costs for maintenance. The budget for maintaining the Recreational Routes network is £17,000 within the budget of the Countryside and Access Unit. It should be noted that this budget has been included within the Gwynedd Challenge proposals. 37.6% of those who had responded to the consultation supported protecting the budget and the final decision was not to include the sum within the cuts programme.
- 2.5 The maintenance budget is used mainly to manage seasonal growth, responding to the effects of inclement weather, collecting litter and cases of vandalism. It is believed that including the tunnel area itself would not be too much of a burden on the budget but what is extraordinary in this case is the costs associated with illuminating the tunnel.
- 2.6 It is estimated that the costs associated with the lights would be approximately £1,200 per annum, namely £600 for the electricity and £600 for inspection. It is not anticipated that equipment would need to be upgraded for several years; however, unfortunately we must take into account the effects of vandalism. It is intended to have a contract with the Council's Street Lighting Unit to look after the lighting system.
- 2.7 Llandyngai and Bethesda Community Councils have expressed their willingness to cover the maintenance costs including the lighting costs. The level of contribution and arrangements can be agreed when confirmation is obtained of the annual costs involved with the lighting.

3. THE OUTCOMES OF IMPLEMENTING THE SCHEME

- 3.1 The development of Lôn Las Ogwen over recent years has happened due to the enthusiasm and support of the local community and since opening the latest section in 2014 many enquiries have been received asking "when will the tunnel open".
- 3.2 Recently, Bethesda and Llandyngai Community Councils have stated that they are very eager to see the section through the tunnel being completed and have expressed their willingness to contribute towards the maintenance costs.
- 3.3 Reference is also made to the public consultation undertaken in 2012; at the time 94% of the responses supported the intention to create a path between Tregarth and Bethesda. 79% said that they would be willing to use the tunnel provided it was well lit. Counters on the path show over 100,000 journeys on the Lôn Las annually.
- 3.4 It is clear that there is local support for the project and awareness of the resulting benefits of implementing it:

- **Active Travel:** the Active Travel Act 2015 places a duty on Local Authorities to provide resources which allow the public to walk and cycle to a place of work, school or college, to use public services such as surgeries, post office, library etc. By completing the Lôn Las through the tunnel, the residents of Bethesda and the area (a population of approximately 24,000) can take advantage of a resource to travel without having to use a vehicle which brings benefits in terms of the well-being of the individual and the environment. In implementing the scheme, the Council meets the objectives of the Active Travel Act.
- **Safety:** as there is no direct link between the two sections of the Lôn Las at present, users must follow the highway between Tregarth and Bethesda. A direct route through the tunnel would reduce the risk of accidents between users of the Lôn Las and traffic on the highway.
- **Well-being / recreation:** the Recreational Routes network is already a resource which is used a great deal by local residents who wish to keep fit. Medical evidence shows that moderate physical activity such as walking and cycling leads to improving physical and mental health. Developing the tunnel would provide a better resource which is convenient for the residents of Tregarth and Bethesda including members of sports clubs and societies such as the Bethesda Rugby Club which is adjacent to the existing path. It is believed that the development complies with the objectives of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which is linked with a healthier Wales and cohesive communities.
- **The economy / Tourism:** the Council and Visit Wales focus marketing efforts on the outdoor sector with walking and cycling being prominent in their campaigns. Lôn Las Ogwen has the potential to be an effective medium to attract walkers and cyclists to Bethesda and on to Nant Ffrancon and Llyn Ogwen. Developing the tunnel and the viaduct would not only make travelling easier for visitors on foot and on bikes, but they are also attractions in themselves to be appreciated as part of the industrial heritage of the Bethesda area.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1 In response to the Members request for further information regarding the scheme, we can state that we have :

- Secured funding to implement the scheme within the current financial year.
- Assurance of revenue budget as a result of the support of the People of Gwynedd to protecting the Recreational Routes budget and commitment from the Community Council to contribute to the maintenance / lighting costs.

- Support for the scheme from the local community and their representatives and an appreciation of the benefits in terms of well-being, health and the economy which will derive from implementing the scheme.

Reasons for recommending the decision

I ask the Cabinet to support the scheme to be implemented as part of the Regulatory Department's capital programme in 2016/17 using the grant from the Transportation Fund and departmental funds which have been identified for this project.

Views of the statutory officers

The Chief Executive: Its good to see that the funding package for teh Project is now in place and that we can move forward

The Monitoring Officer: *No comments to add regarding propriety*

The Head of Finance Department: Having properly consulted with relevant Cabinet Member during 2015/16, I can confirm that £200,000 has been earmarked by the Regulatory Department for this purpose. I note that this has allowed the Council to benefit from a Welsh Government grant of £ 230,000 to complete the plan. We welcome this opportunity to improve asset Gwynedd and benefiting consumers Lon Las Ogwen. I also appreciate the proposals by Bethesda and Llandygai Community Councils to contribute towards the costs of maintaining the road and tunnel, which will ease some of the Councils revenue related commitment in the field.

Appendices