



Communities Scrutiny Group

Thursday, 5 October 2023

Review of Canal and River Trust Partnership Funding - Grantham Canal Service Level Agreement

Report of the Director - Neighbourhoods

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report is to inform Councillors as to how the Council is working with the Canal and River Trust (CRT) with particular focus on the Access Agreement between RBC and the CRT for the Grantham Canal. The agreement runs from 1 April 2003 for 21 years, expiring on 31 March 2024.
- 1.2. A representative from the CRT will provide a presentation to the Group summarising the current agreements with the Council and setting out their future strategic ambitions beyond the expiry of the existing agreement in 2024.
- 1.3. Communities Scrutiny Group is requested to comment on the CRT partnership's delivery (Service Level Agreement - SLA) and make comment on future service levels post 2024 so this can be fed into the 2024/25 budget setting workshops.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Communities Scrutiny Group:

- (a) receive a summary presentation of the work that has been undertaken by the Council in partnership with the Canal and River Trust
- (b) make comment on the strategic ambitions of the CRT for any future Service Level Agreement and the associated funding required for this work.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The CRT has achieved the outcomes set out within the Agreement and continued access to the route remains open to all users.
- 3.2. The current SLA ends in March 2024 and the Council needs to consider whether to stop, reduce, maintain at existing levels, or increase the commitments under the SLA with the CRT for future years and the length of any such commitments.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. The CRT was formed in 2012 in the largest ever transfer of public assets to the voluntary sector. The purpose of the Trust is to protect, manage and improve the nation's canals and river navigations for the millions who enjoy them.
- 4.2. The CRT own the Grantham Canal and tow path and whilst it has a statutory duty to maintain it as a "remainder waterway", through partnership working with the Council the parties have sought to improve it further for the purposes of achieving a shared objective: to provide an 18km off-road, multi-user route through the Borough for pedestrians, cyclists and users of manual and motorised wheelchairs/scooters.
- 4.3. The Council has been working with the CRT (formerly British Waterways) on Grantham Canal via various projects since 1992; upgrading and improving accessibility to all users of the tow path, a route which runs from Gamston to the edge of the Borough boundary with Melton, near Hickling.
- 4.4. The capital schemes over this period have included: widening the tow path to two metres, resurfacing, bank protection, installing footbridges, ramp improvements, bins, signage and motorbike barriers.
- 4.5. In 2003, an SLA between the parties secured provision of the future maintenance of the route, with the CRT undertaking all works and the Council providing a financial contribution at an agreed rate. The agreement also provided a licence to the Council to grant open access to the route for all users.
- 4.6. The partnership has enabled the significant improvement of the route to be created, maintained and open to all users since 2003. It provides Rushcliffe residents with a non-road alternative means of accessing the Borough and provides a route for recreational use.
- 4.7. In 2022, the CRT delivered a project using £27,416 grant funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to undertake a series of reed clearance works by removing excessive reed growth in a 13ft (four metre) wide channel across the middle of the canal at sites in Kinoulton, Hickling, Cotgrave, Gamston and Lady Bay. The channel provided clear water, for fish, dragonflies and other aquatic plants as well as improving water flow.

Summary of the Partnership Agreement

- 4.8. Under the terms of the Partnership Agreement, the CRT will:
 - Give Rushcliffe Borough Council licence to use the multi-user path for recreational purposes for all pedestrians, cyclists, and wheelchair/motorised mobility scooter users
 - Maintain the surfaced multi-user path and verge, pedestrian and cycle routes and timber pedestrian footbridge

- Maintain the street furniture, including bins and motorcycle barriers.

Achievements and Outcomes of the Partnership

- 4.9. A representative from the CRT will provide a presentation detailing the work they have undertaken in maintaining the accessible route along Grantham Canal, but the agreement is largely focussed on towpath management and hedge management (Background paper for inspection).
- 4.10. A representative from the CRT will provide detail in the presentation of a range of options; these being the option not to renew the agreement and the implications of this, renewal at the current service level of hedge and towpath management (status quo) or an enhanced service level agreement to include a programme of working such as reed management, operational management support, wellbeing activities and a programme of education and events targeting local school pupils.

5. Risk and Uncertainties

- 5.1. The current agreement ends in March 2024 and the Council is reviewing the current agreement and seeking comments regarding any potential new agreement beyond 2024.
- 5.2. Whilst there is budget in place for the agreement, due to the current climate of increasing costs and inflation there is a risk going forward the cost of this service could increase, which could cause pressure on budgets or negatively impact quality of service provided. As part of any review, a prioritisation of objectives and outcomes should be undertaken prior to extension or acceptance.
- 5.3. The CRT have also provided an estimate for culvert repairs and lock improvement, but these have been costed separately as distinct projects should the Council wish to pursue these options.

6. Implications

6.1. Financial Implications

- 6.1.1. The payment to British Waterways in 2003 was for £16,704 and the existing agreement allows for an annual uplift in accordance with civil engineering indices. In 2022/23 the payment to CRT was £45,169.82 and is currently contained within the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS).
- 6.1.2. Should the Council resolve to enter a future agreement it should follow the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) and not civil engineering indices to be in line with council policy, in addition the length of any new agreement should not exceed 5 years in line with the MTFS and should include the option of a break clause for either party.

6.1.3. The Council's is currently preparing the draft MTFS for 2024/25 to 2028/29. Any enhancements to the CRT partnership and SLA would result in a budget pressure and should therefore be considered in the context of budget setting and the wider economic environment.

6.2. **Legal Implications**

6.2.1. The Agreement with CRT was established and reviewed with the Council's Legal Services team and expires in March 2024.

6.3. **Equalities Implications**

6.3.1. Restriction free access to recreation green and blue spaces is promoted to all residents and can help to address issues relating to equality, diversity, mental and physical health, and wellbeing. Recent research from the King's College London, Norman Projects and J & L Gibbons found that being by water left people feeling happier and healthier, and that this connection was stronger than time spent in an environment that is characterised by only green space.

6.3.2. Andrea Mechelli, Professor of early intervention in mental health at King's College, stated that Canals and rivers contain not only water but also an abundance of trees and plants, which means their capacity to improve mental wellbeing is likely to be due to the multiple benefits associated with both green and blue spaces. "Canals and rivers also provide homes to a range of wildlife, and we know from other research that there is a positive association between encountering wildlife and mental wellbeing. "Taken collectively, these findings provide an evidence base for what we intuitively thought about water and wellbeing and support the proposal that visits to canals and rivers could become part of social prescribing schemes, playing a role in supporting mental health."

6.4. **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act Implications**

6.4.1. The partnership has worked to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and in particular the restriction of motorised vehicles on the tow path.

6.5. **Biodiversity Net Gain Implications**

6.5.1. The Grantham Canal is a listed green and blue infrastructure site, identified in the Greater Nottingham Blue and Green Infrastructure Strategy January 2022, which has biodiversity value and will be a key site for offsite biodiversity net gain enhancement when the duty comes into effect. It has also been identified in the Rushcliffe Core Strategy for land East of Gamston/North of Tollerton strategic development site for an enhanced green corridor for biodiversity enhancements.

7. Corporate Priorities

The Environment	The access agreement and budget to support delivery, are all designed to provide wellbeing services, through walking and cycling opportunities, access to green and blue space and safeguard the natural environment through improved sustainable management and to support our carbon reduction objectives
Quality of Life	Access to green and blue spaces contributes to improvements in public health for example through; walking and cycling opportunities, improved nature conservation and biodiversity, and by sequestration of carbon; all of which have a profound influence on quality of life.
Efficient Services	On-going management of access agreements ensures that they can be updated and adapted to reflect our corporate priorities and ensure prudent financial management
Sustainable Growth	The Grantham Canal is a green lung which snakes it way throughout the Borough and should be protected as the Borough develops to ensure sustainable growth. The canal is adjacent to the new proposed development at Tollerton and development in Cotgrave.

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that Communities Scrutiny Group:

- (a) receive a summary presentation of the work that has been undertaken by the Council in partnership with the Canal and River Trust
- (b) make comment on the strategic ambitions of the CRT for any future Service Level Agreement and the associated funding required for this work.

For more information contact:	Dave Banks Director of Neighbourhoods Tel: 0115 9148438 dbanks@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers Available for Inspection:	Agreement between Rushcliffe Borough Council and Canal and River Trust 2003
List of appendices (if any):	Scrutiny Matrix British Waterways Board Service Level Agreement