

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE ON 31 MARCH 2022

SUBJECT: Littlehampton Town Centre - Fibre Ducting Works

REPORT AUTHOR: Karl Roberts – Director of Place
DATE: 17 March 2022
EXTN: 01903 737760
AREA: Place Directorate

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report seeks approval of the Committee to increase the budget of the Littlehampton Town Centre Improvement Works by £240,000 to include the installation of fibre ducting within the project. This will provide the future capability of Ultrafast Full Fibre internet connectivity to business and residences in the Town Centre.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

This report seeks approval of the Committee to:

1. Increase the budget for the Littlehampton Town Centre Improvement Works by up to £240,000 for the installation of fibre ducting to Littlehampton Town Centre funded from the corporate underspend for 2021/22;
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, to investigate and enter into the most advantageous model for the utilisation of the ducting; and
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Place to seek agreement from West Sussex County Council for any additional permissions required for the laying of fibre ducting.

1. BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 Fibre ducting is a type of tubing that protects telecom network infrastructure and is sunk in the ground. In this case it would be designed to house fibre optic cabling that can provide ultrafast full fibre internet connections.
- 1.2 The ducting would provide the backbone for carrying fibre cables through the town centre along with branched breakout points. Fibre is then 'blown' down the ducting at a later date to allow the connection of individual properties to ultrafast full fibre internet without re-lifting surface coverings.

- 1.3 CityFibre are identified as one of the future suppliers of this fibre network. As CityFibre have not begun work in the Littlehampton area yet, we asked them to accelerate their design for the Littlehampton Town Centre at the end of 2021 to try and ensure work could be undertaken at the same time as the Littlehampton Town Centre Improvement Works (LTCl), which on completion will have a section 58 applied to it.
- 1.4 To date Arun's contractor, Edburton, have been working with CityFibre to install the required ducting based on the CityFibre design.
- 1.5 Due to time pressures it was not possible to fully cost the ducting design prior to the commencement of the project. So ducting work began in good faith.
- 1.6 Edburton have now supplied a quote to the value of £234,699 for installing the ducting network in phases 2 & 3 of the LTCl and this has been reviewed and accepted by the Council's independent quantity surveyor on the LTCl Project.
- 1.7 CityFibre asked their contractors to provide an estimate, and this has come back at considerably less, but through negotiations CityFibre have verbally agreed to increase the offer for the use of the ducting, although this still falls significantly short of the quote by Edburton and both parties have unable to agree a mutually acceptable price.
- 1.8 The variation in costs is mainly related to the different delivery approaches of Edburton and CityFibre.
- 1.9 CityFibre would generally use a small team (3-4 people) who work from the back of a vehicle and focus on dig, sink and repair of long stretches of ducting runs; this then saves on costs for a site compound and prelims.
- 1.10 Due to current progress of works in the town centre and approach to groundworks it is not possible to adopt CityFibre's small-team method.
- 1.11 Alternative options for provisioning ultrafast full fibre internet to businesses and residences via the existing Physical Infrastructure Access (PIA) in the town centre have been explored with CityFibre, but they could not guarantee full coverage for the businesses.
- 1.12 This is due to parts of the telecoms network infrastructure being "dug in" (i.e. not using ducting) and inaccessible leaving limited opportunities for any provider to provision full fibre connections via the existing PIA.
- 1.13 Therefore, it is considered that the only option for future proofing ultrafast full fibre connectivity and ensure town centre businesses are not digitally excluded is for the Council to take ownership of the ducting.
- 1.14 Officers have been exploring options to reduce the overall net cost to the Council through applying a commercial philosophy to the future use of the ducting, but it may take many years (with no guarantee of success) to achieve an overall reduction in the net cost. However, the alternatives of City Fibre laying the ducting themselves in 5 years' time (since the new surfacing cannot be taken up for that period) or having the town centre not served by the fibre network are not attractive given the underlying philosophy of undertaking the public realm work is to support the town centre.

1.15 The current intention is that CityFibre will be laying their ducting for phase 1 (terminus road) ahead of the proposed public realm works which are due to start in late 2022 or possibly 2023.

2. PROPOSAL(S):

- a. To increase the budget for the Littlehampton Town Centre Improvement Works by £240,000 for the installation of fibre ducting in the Littlehampton Town Centre funded from the corporate underspend for 2021/22.
- b. Delegate authority to the Director of Place in consultation with the Section 151 Officer to investigate and enter into the most advantageous model for the utilisation of the ducting.
- c. Delegate authority to the Director of Place to seek agreement from West Sussex County Council for any additional permissions required for the laying of fibre ducting.

3. OPTIONS:

- i. Agree to increase the budget of the Littlehampton Town Centre Improvement Works to deliver fibre ducting at a cost of circa £240,000, some of which will be repaid from future rental agreements with fibre providers. This will ensure the Littlehampton Town Centre will be ready to take advantage of ultrafast full fibre connectivity as the opportunities arise.
- ii. Not underwrite the costs and cease all further ducting works. CityFibre will pay for costs up to 4 February 2022, whilst the Council would be liable for the costs of works undertaken since that date (approx. 7 weeks). This would limit the roll-out of ultrafast full fibre internet within Littlehampton Town Centre.
- iii. Grant delegated authority to the Director of Place in consultation with the Section 151 Officer to investigate and enter into the most advantageous model for the utilisation of the ducting. This would allow for agile decision-making during negotiations and reduce the risk of missed opportunities with network providers ready to install ultrafast full fibre connectivity.
- ii. Not grant delegated authority to the Director of Place in consultation with the Section 151 Officer to investigate and enter into the most advantageous model for the utilisation of the ducting. This would extend the decision-making process with the risk of losing opportunities with network providers as they find alternative delivery methods.

4. CONSULTATION:

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council	✓	
Relevant District Ward Councillors	✓	
Other groups/persons (please specify)		

5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)

	YES	NO
Financial	✓	
Legal	✓	

Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		✓
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		✓
Sustainability	✓	
Asset Management/Property/Land	✓	
Technology	✓	
Other (please explain)		

6. IMPLICATIONS:

- Financial – The Council will commit to increase the budget for this addition to the project.
- Legal – Letting agreements for utility providers will need to be put in place
- Sustainability – Sustainability is a factor when sourcing materials for the scheme and consideration of maintenance of the completed project as well as the desire for 'Dig Once' on major schemes.
- Asset Management/Property/Land – ADC will retain responsibility for the ducting and therefore its maintenance.
- Technology – provision of the ducting will enable technological advances for the businesses in the town centre.

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:

To ensure the future digital inclusion of businesses and residences within Phase 2 & 3 of the Littlehampton Town Centre Improvement Works, through the provision of accessible fibre ducting.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None