

**Proposal:** New sewerage connection at Swanley Park

**Applicant(s):** Swanley Town Council

**Ward(s):** Swanley White Oak

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the **£25,000** applied for, as set out in the report, for the scheme “New sewerage connection at Swanley Park” be approved on the following grounds:

Principal criteria met:

- Strong social, economic and environmental benefits to the community;
- The scheme is identified in an adopted strategy or plan;
- Significant public benefit;
- Clear evidence to show that the scheme will be delivered;
- Strong local support;
- The scheme contributes towards the Council’s commitment to tackling climate change.

## Introduction

- 1 CIL funding is sought for the installation of a new sewerage connection at Swanley Park.
- 2 The application was received before the application deadline closed on 15 September 2023. This proposal has not been previously considered by the CIL Spending Board.

## Description of Proposal

- 3 The proposal is to connect the public toilets in Swanley Park to the main sewerage network 350m away along College Road.
- 4 This new infrastructure will allow for the public toilets at Swanley Park to be connected onto the main sewerage network. This will replace the existing septic tank, which requires emptying 2-4 times a week via vehicular tanker, and will significantly improve the capacity of the current infrastructure for the benefit of the local community and visitors.

## **Funding**

- 5 The applicant, Swanley Town Council, estimates that the total cost of the project is £58,147.50.
- 6 The following additional funding sources and grants have been identified to support the application to the Board:
  - £25,000 – West Kent Rural Grant
  - £8,147.50 – Swanley Town Council
- 7 Therefore, to meet the funding gap for the full cost of the project, the applicant has applied to the Board for £25,000 of CIL funding. This equates to 43% of the total project cost.

## **Representations and Support**

- 8 The application submitted indicates that the applicant has consulted with the relevant bodies in order to gain consent to undertake the project, including Kent County Council and Hextable Parish Council. Once completed, Thames Water will adopt and maintain the connection as part of the wider sewerage network.
- 9 The application is supported by the following local representatives and organisations:
  - Cllr Ferrari (Swanley White Oak)
  - Swanley Town Council
  - Swanley Park Café
  - Swanley New Barn Railway
  - Every Step Counts

## **Officer's Appraisal of Bid**

- 10 Assessment criteria met:
  - Strong social, economic and environmental benefits to the community;
  - The scheme is identified in an adopted strategy or plan;
  - Significant public benefit;
  - Clear evidence to show that the scheme will be delivered;
  - Strong local support;
  - The scheme contributes towards the Council's commitment to tackling climate change.
- 11 Assessment criteria not met:
  - Weak link between new development and the scheme;
  - Lack of partnership working;
  - Funding not maximised from other sources.

## Appraisal of strongly performing criteria

### *Strong social, economic and environmental benefits to the community*

- 12 When considering an application for CIL funding it must be demonstrated that the project would deliver clear social, economic and environmental benefits. This is crucial to the sustainability of the scheme and a key consideration in determining whether the project should be awarded CIL funding overall.
- 13 The project would significantly upgrade the existing sewerage infrastructure, increasing capacity for future users of the park and reducing unplanned closures. This would improve the visitor experience and help to attract more visitors in the future.
- 14 The applicant has set out that the new upgraded infrastructure will reduce backups and closures of both the public toilets and the café, as often regular community group events cannot go ahead owing to the capped capacity of the public toilets. This is exacerbated during the summer months when blockages lead to the closure of the toilets leaving many visitors reluctant to return. The health and social benefits of publicly available parks and open spaces are well documented and can have a positive impact on people's lives. Further to this, it is noted that Swanley has some of the most deprived wards in the District where there are health inequalities. It is considered that through providing upgraded facilities the project will positively contribute towards the health and wellbeing of Swanley residents and the wider community.
- 15 Turning to the economic benefits, it is understood that the current annual cost to remove sewage via vehicular tanker is £30,000. Once the infrastructure is upgraded this cost will reduce to £0, as Thames Water will adopt and maintain the connection as part of the wider sewerage network. This is a significant reduction in costs, and the applicant states that this money will be invested back into the park to improve the overall facilities, which in turn will improve the visitor experience and help attract more visitors.
- 16 The current infrastructure (septic tank) requires regular maintenance and the applicant states that during the financial year 2022-23, a total of 137 tanker loads were removed. There are a number of environmental concerns related to this. Firstly, the process of removing the waste risks spillage and therefore pollution and contamination, impacting on the visitor experience. Secondly, the vehicular movements linked to removing the waste on a regular basis equate to a significant amount of mileage and therefore carbon emissions. Upgrading the infrastructure would resolve both of these concerns, improving the immediate environment for a more pleasant visitor experience and reducing carbon emissions, helping to tackle the challenge of climate change.

*The scheme is identified in an adopted strategy or plan*

- 17 The project is not identified in either the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan or Infrastructure Funding Statement. However it is noted that CIL may be spent on projects outside of these plans.
- 18 Swanley Town Council's Strategic Plan 2020-30 identifies a number of actions to both improve the visitor experience at Swanley Park and to work towards becoming carbon neutral, including through installing greener sewage processes. It is considered that the application therefore meets this requirement.

*Significant public benefit*

- 19 As set out in paragraphs 13-16 above, the project would improve the visitor experience and help to attract more visitors to the park in the future. It is clear that the current sewerage infrastructure has limitations that negatively impact regular users and visitors to the park and also the businesses that operate there, including the café and railway. It is noted that they regularly respond to customer complaints about the state of the current sewerage infrastructure. Swanley Park is one of the District's most well known and loved parks that attracts visitors in their thousands, particularly during the summer months. It is therefore considered that the public benefit of this project is significant.

*Clear evidence to show that the scheme will be delivered*

- 20 The applicant notes that they own part of the land, with the other part being owned by Kent County Council, from whom permission has been sought and granted. Consultation has taken place with Hextable Parish Council, who is supportive. Swanley Town Council is the leaseholder of the land that the draining will run through. The applicant is therefore in a good position to see the project delivered and has the legal right to do so.
- 21 The applicant has committed to keeping the District Council updated with progress and has set out clear timescales for the delivery of the project. Planning permission is not required and the relevant consents have already been obtained. The project is estimated to take 6 weeks and is planned for early 2024. It is therefore considered that sufficient evidence has been submitted to show that the scheme will be delivered.

*Strong local support*

- 22 The applicant consulted with key stakeholders, and the application is supported by local member Cllr Ferrari, as well as local businesses Swanley Park Café, Swanley New Barn Railway and the local walking group Every Step Counts. It is clear from these letters of support that the project will bring positive benefits for all and will improve the visitor experience through providing a more pleasant environment.

*The scheme contributes towards the Council's commitment to tackling climate change*

- 23 As set out in paragraph 14 above, the project would result in the reduction of 137 tanker movements each year, which will directly reduce carbon emissions and have a significant positive impact on air quality in the locality. The District Council is committed to tackling the challenge of climate change, particularly in relation to the emissions of the District, and it is considered that this is an important consideration in determining whether the project should be awarded CIL funding.

#### Other considerations

##### *CIL exemptions*

- 24 The applicant has confirmed that they have not previously benefitted from a CIL exemption for the project. In accordance with the CIL Charging Schedule, CIL is chargeable on the following developments: residential, supermarkets and superstores and retail warehousing. The proposed works would not fall within these remits and as such would not be subject to a CIL charge.
- 25 It is therefore considered that there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the applicant has not previously, and would not, benefit from a CIL exemption for the project.

#### Appraisal of weakly performing criteria

##### *Weak link between new development and the scheme*

- 26 The applicant has not made reference to how the project will support new development in Swanley or the wider area, or how new development has created a need for the project.

##### *Lack of partnership working*

- 27 The applicant has engaged with the relevant bodies in order to gain consent and support to undertake the project, including Kent County Council and Hextable Parish Council. However it is not considered that there is evidence of partnership working to deliver the project. However, due to the nature of the project it is acknowledged that opportunities for partnership working may be limited.

##### *Funding not maximised from other sources*

- 28 The applicant, Swanley Town Council, is contributing £8,147.50 from their CIL pot towards the project. A grant of £25,000 from the West Kent Rural Grant fund has been applied for and is pending approval. It is not clear from the application paperwork whether other grants have been applied for.
- 29 In these circumstances members of the Board may wish to consider adding a condition to ensure that funding to cover the full cost of the project is secured before any CIL funding is released.

## Conclusion

- 30 Swanley Town Council (the applicant) has submitted an application for CIL funding to upgrade the sewerage infrastructure at Swanley Park.
- 31 The need for the project has been clearly demonstrated as the current sewerage infrastructure is negatively impacting the visitor experience and generating a number of environmental concerns. The project will bring significant social, economic and environmental benefits to the local area with wide public benefit, for all those who visit Swanley Park. The project has been identified in Swanley Town Council's Strategic Plan 2020-30 and benefits from local support. It is noted that the applicant is asking for 43% of the total project cost, and has not benefited from CIL funding previously.
- 32 After reviewing the application and supporting evidence, it is recommended by Officers that £25,000 of CIL funding be awarded to support the delivery of the project, subject to a condition that ensures that funding for the full cost of the project is secured before the CIL funding is released. It is considered that the scheme provides significant public benefit and represents good value for money, therefore demonstrating appropriate use of CIL funds.

### Appendices

Applicant's original bid pro-forma and supporting information

### Background Papers

None

**Contact Officer(s):** Emma Henshall Ext. 7358; Carlyn Kan Ext. 7246

**Richard Morris**

**Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer for Planning & Regulatory Services**