



EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	Washlands Enhancement Project Phase 3 (Washlands Visitor Centre)	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
Meeting of:	Corporate Management Team 16/10/24	X
	Pre Cabinet 24/10/24	X
	Leader's / Leader of the Opposition's Advisory Group 31/10/24 & 06/11/24	X
	Cabinet 18/11/24	
	Scrutiny Regeneration, Development and Market Hall Committee 09/01/25	



<p>Is this an Executive Decision:</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>Is this a Key Decision:</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>Is this in the Forward Plan:</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>Does this report contain Confidential or Exempt Information:</p> <p>If the report Contains Confidential Information, please provide reason.</p> <p>If the report contains Exempt Information, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A LGA 1972:</p>	<p>NO</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p>

Essential Signatories:

ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN THE NAME OF A HEAD OF SERVICE



Monitoring Officer: **John Teasdale**

Date Signature

Chief Finance Officer: **Lloyd Haynes**

Date Signature

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

Date: 18th November 2024

REPORT TITLE: Washlands Enhancement Project Phase 3
(Washlands Visitor Centre)

PORTFOLIO: Regeneration

CHIEF OFFICER: Thomas Deery

CONTACT OFFICER: Thomas Deery **Ext. No. x1664**

WARD(S) AFFECTED: Burton & Eton

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. To provide a summative update on the development of the Washlands Visitor Centre proposal, including floorplans, concept design images, spatial analysis, cost appraisal and delivery programme.
- 1.2. To seek confirmation of funding for the delivery of the Washlands Visitor Centre, to commence in 2025 following the determination of a planning application.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Since 2019, the Council has been taking forward the development of the Washlands Enhancement Project and the Towns Fund programme, previously two separate schemes that are now entwined as part of an ambition to regenerate the High Street and riverside/Washlands area.
- 2.2. Following the approval of the Towns Fund Business Case in March 2022, a Washlands Visitor Centre concept has been further developed in partnership with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, with an aim of providing an environmental, ecological and educational centre adjacent the Washlands enhancement area.
- 2.3. The concept has been appraised and costed and a value engineering exercise has resulted in the overall construction costs reducing by more than £1m, which

has created additional capacity to fund external landscaping (hard and soft) works to create a fuller environment to the visitor centre.

- 2.4. The total cost budget estimate for this is £4.33m, which is within the original proposed budget from March 2022 and so it is proposed that this is confirmed as the project construction budget. This does not include the ongoing design consultancy and associated inputs, which are managed separately.
- 2.5. A lease with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust as intended operators is required and is in development and it is recommended that authority to agree this lease is delegated to the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance.
- 2.6. Following approval of these recommendations, a planning application for the proposal will be submitted in December 2024, with a procurement exercise for contractors commencing in January 2025.

3. Background

- 3.1. Since the approval of the Washlands Strategy and Landscape Vision in 2018/19, the Council has been taking forward the development of the Washlands Enhancement Project.
- 3.2. The enhancement of the 'central area' (Phase 1) was approved by Cabinet in April 2020 and has been undergoing delivery throughout 2024, utilising a mixture of Council capital funding and European Regional Development Fund grant funding.
- 3.3. The enhancement of the Garden of Remembrance area (Phase 2) was approved by Executive Decision in September 2024, with works being undertaken from 2024 until the spring of 2025. This is primarily financed from existing project underspends, including from the Phase 1 project.
- 3.4. The Washlands Visitor Centre proposal (Phase 3) represents the continuation of the Washlands Enhancement Project and a blending of this with the Town Investment Plan ambitions as part of the Towns Fund programme, initially proposed in 2020.

4. Contribution to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1. Improving the Washlands as a regional attraction is one of the Corporate Plan measures under the priority of 'Developing a New Green Deal for East Staffordshire'.

5. Changes to the Visitor Centre Positioning and Constraints

- 5.1. The Washlands Visitor Centre bridges Phase 3 of the Washlands Enhancement Project with the Towns Fund High Street Project, as it seeks to bring the enhanced riverside environment into the High Street by improving access to environmental education and activities.

- 5.2. Confirmed as a Towns Fund project in the March 2022 approval of project business cases, the Visitor Centre has since evolved through multiple iterations and was reviewed again following election of a new administration in May 2023, with an aim of:
- 5.2.1. Value engineering the concept to reduce build cost;
 - 5.2.2. Ensuring the design is in keeping with the Washlands and the wider High Street site;
 - 5.2.3. Positioning the development close to the riverside without compromising site infrastructure and flood defences.
- 5.3. The site itself has a number of easements and constraints, which informed the repositioning of the new facility away from the Water Tower (as an adjoining structure) and towards the Meadowside Leisure Centre, in previously voided space. These constraints are shown in figure 1:



Figure 1: Constraints plan showing buildable area.

- 5.4. The buildable area is located to the north of the water tower, south of Carling House, and west of Meadowside Leisure Centre/The Washlands.
- 5.5. The repositioning of the centre away from the Water Tower to this location addresses one of the key site constraints – underground infrastructure. Accommodating the existing pipework, cabling and easements in this way removes the need to realign existing key site infrastructure and the associated costs.

- 5.6. Having the Visitor Centre as a standalone facility also makes the management of it through a managed lease more straightforward.
- 5.7. It is considered this new location better meets the aims above (5.2.), particularly regarding the options to value engineer and the positioning against the riverside, with this location being opposite the ramped access to the Washlands.

6. Floorplan Design (Final Concepts)

- 6.1. The design of the building is still based on the preferred specification from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT), which is itself based on the Wolseley Centre in Stafford.
- 6.2. The design is based on a two-storey operation, with ground floor public accessibility and first floor controlled access for staff and schools.
- 6.3. Within the concept, there is provision for a reception and small café, a seasonal display area, changing places toilet facilities, a separate school entrance, offices, classrooms, and an external first floor terrace. These concepts are shown at figures 2 and 3 below.

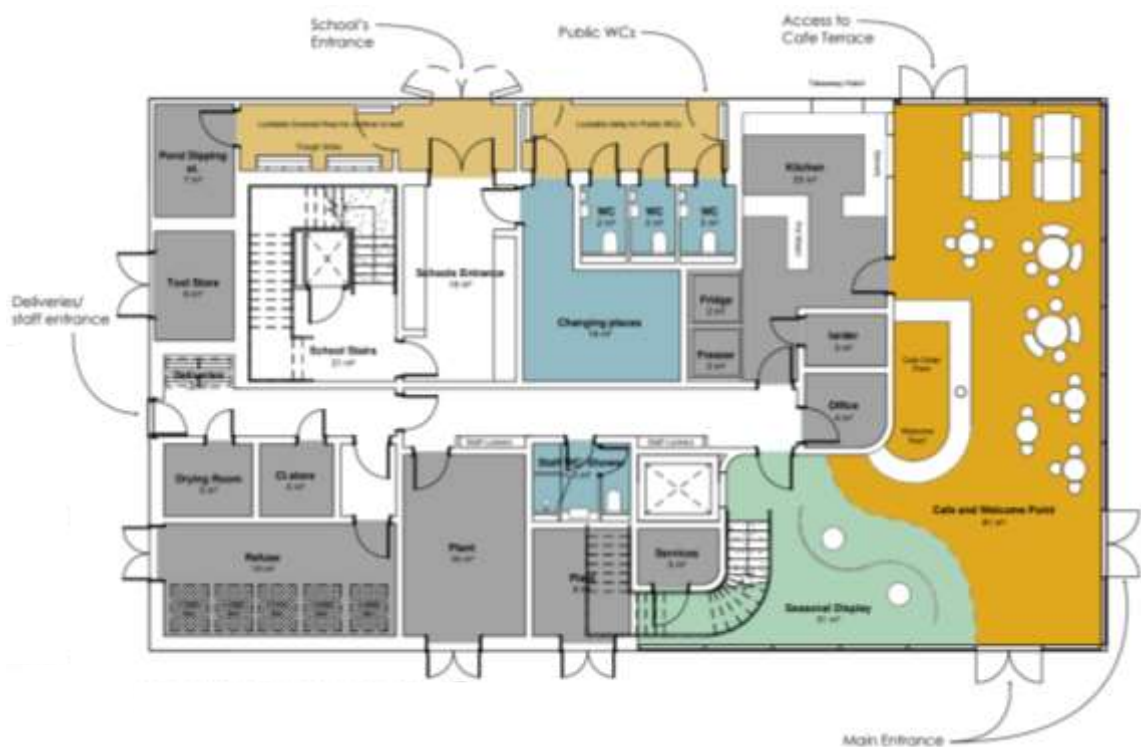


Figure 2: Ground floor plan.

- 7.2. This project has always operated on the basis that the Meadowside Drive car park area between the High Street site and the flood defence wall could be closed in order to facilitate the creation of a larger 'boardwalk' style frontage between the town centre and the Washlands.
- 7.3. With this in mind, an initial indicative landscaping plan has been produced showing areas of hard landscaping immediately around the visitor centre building, soft landscaping/grassland in the areas around that (particularly nearer the Washlands), with a new pathway directly connecting the Visitor Centre with the Washlands ramp, intended to provide a new levelled access point to the Washlands.
- 7.4. This is shown in figure 4 below, alongside the proposed coach parking and service access, which are designed around the retention of the mini-roundabout that accesses the rear of Meadowside Leisure Centre.
- 7.5. The landscaping plan is expected to be refined further as part of the planning application alongside the wider site landscaping to ensure that cohesion.

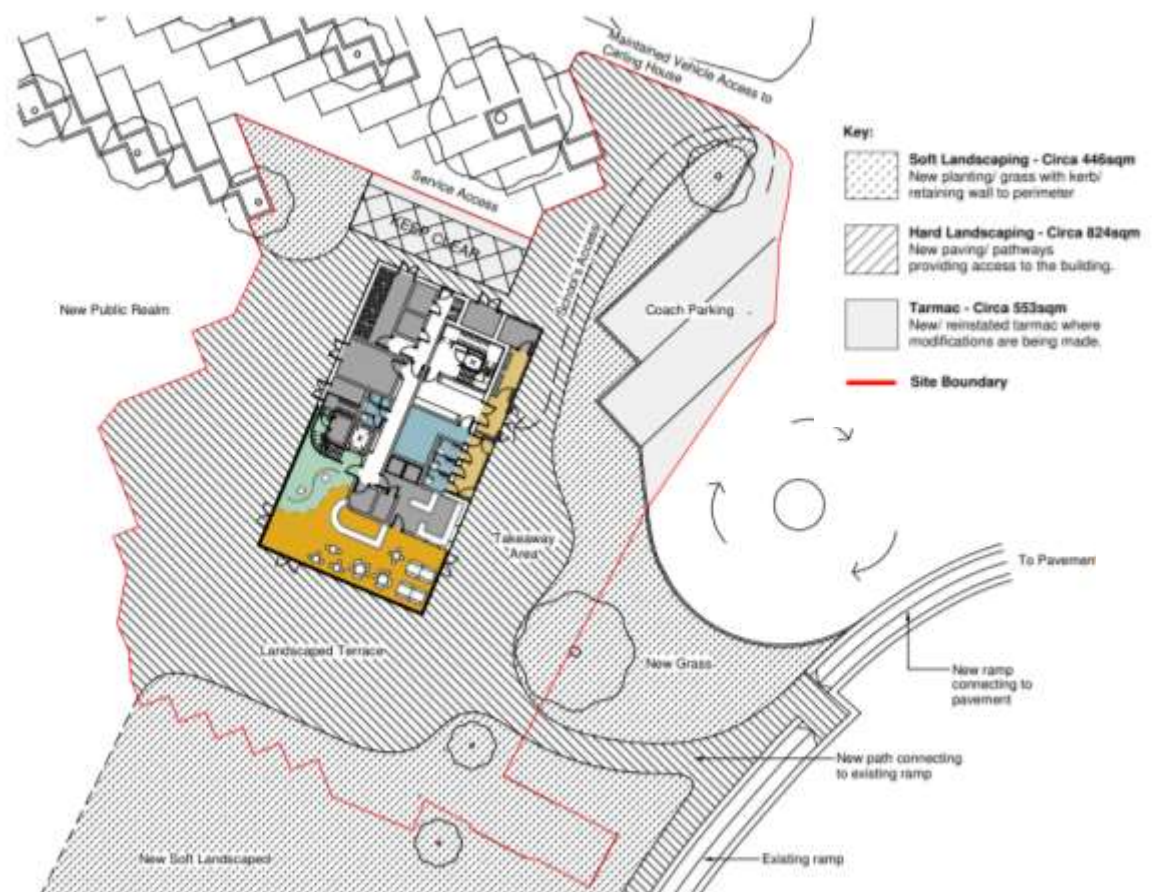


Figure 4: Indicative landscaping plan.

- 7.6. For the purposes of progressing the site masterplan, an initial conceptual elevation has been developed in order to demonstrate how the building *could* look.

- 7.7. As this is created in order to demonstrate concept and inform the various surveys (such as cost, structural and mechanical & engineering), it is expected to change through the planning process, like the landscaping plan. At this time, it has simply been informed by precedent imagery on the basis of utilising appropriate materials (e.g. wood and glass) to mirror the intended sustainable use of the building.
- 7.8. The conceptual elevation is shown in figures 5 and 6 below.



Figure 5: Conceptual elevation (landscape view)



Figure 6: Conceptual elevation (aerial view)

8. Next Steps

- 8.1. The Washlands Visitor Centre proposal forms part of the public engagement programme for the High Street project, which commenced in late September and runs through to November.

- 8.2. Although the planning application process for the High Street project will be uniformed, it will be made up of applications; one for the Visitor Centre and one for the wider regeneration.
- 8.3. This application is expected to be submitted in December 2024, following the conclusion of the engagement programme in order to take account of any feedback.
- 8.4. From January 2025, and during the planning determination period, the Council will commence with a procurement exercise in order to identify a preferred contractor, with a view to commence development later in 2025 (subject to planning). The proposed timeframe for this is expected to be confirmed in the 2025/26 Corporate Plan.
- 8.5. As the proposed scheme and financial implications are within the Towns Fund allocation (see section 11) and the output of this project remains unchanged, a Towns Fund Project Adjustment Request is not required at this time.

9. Ongoing Project Management Arrangements

- 9.1. The Phase 3 project will continue to be managed by the Washlands project lead, the Senior Enterprise Officer, with support from the wider Enterprise Team and dedicated project consultancy team alongside Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.
- 9.2. The project performance and financial implications will be monitored through the Council's monthly Business Assurance Group reporting arrangements alongside quarterly performance monitoring to the Council's Cabinet, Scrutiny Committees and the Town Deal Board.
- 9.3. 6-monthly reports are also provided to the Government reflecting project performance, financial spend, outputs/outcomes and risks.

10. Facility Operation

- 10.1. In keeping with the original proposal for this project, it is proposed that the Council proceeds with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust as the preferred partner for this project and operator of the facility.
- 10.2. Similarly, it is proposed that the operation of the facility is secured through a long-term lease, set at a peppercorn level, with the details of the lease obligations to be confirmed following the planning decision.
- 10.3. As such, it is proposed that the decision to proceed with the lease is confirmed separately, through a delegated authority to the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance.

11. Financial Considerations

This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit: [RW/ Daniel Binks]

- 11.1. The main financial issues arising from this Report are as follows:
- 11.2. The High Street Project business case, approved by Council in March 2022, allocated funding to the High Street project with a proposed construction budget for the Washlands Visitor Centre of £3,546,500 (base cost plus sustainability features) with a further £887,874 in fees and contingency, totalling £4,434,374.
- 11.3. Costs for any ancillary activities (such as planning and project management/project) were identified separately at a rate of £163,031. As such, the existing project budget is **£4,597,405**.
- 11.4. External works were accounted for separately and not attributed to this specific project. A budget of £1.52m was allocated to the wider project external courtyard and pedestrian areas.
- 11.5. A cost plan and appraisal has been completed for the proposed scheme with allowances for:
 - Physical construction works;
 - Main contractor's preliminaries;
 - Main contractor's overheads and profit;
 - Design development risks;
 - Construction risks;
 - Project and design fees, including fees in connection with site investigation works and survey fees;
 - Other development and project costs (i.e. non-costs in connection with the project).
- 11.6. No costs have been allocated for specific site risks, instead there are risk allowances for design, construction, change and other (ESBC side).
- 11.7. The construction cost estimate for the project comprises: substructure; superstructure; internal finishes; fittings furnishings and equipment; services; and external service works. This comes to a base cost of £2,365,402.
- 11.8. The external landscaping works have also been costed at a base construction cost of £492,157.
- 11.9. Within the existing project budget, the 'on-costs' of fees and risk resulted in a budget multiplier ratio of 1:0.3 (rounded). I.E. for every £1 of base construction budget we include an additional £0.30 to take account of the on-costs identified above. This is a simpler way of representing how percentage related costs, such as fees and risk, have been applied, which would otherwise follow this formula:

$$£1 + (((£1 + (£1 * 12\%)) * 11.6\%) * 3\%) + \text{fixed costs}[£30,000]$$

- 11.10. The proposed budget also takes account of preliminaries (at 12.6%), increases project management/project to 5% (from 3%), increases project fees to 15% (from 12%) and reduces contingency risks to 7% (from 11.6%). Finally, there is a 3.3% uplift to account for tender inflation.
- 11.11. Using the same 'simplified' formula approach set out in 11.9., there is a multiplier ratio of 1:0.515, which results in 'on-costs' for the Washlands Visitor Centre of £1,218,182 and for the external landscaping works of £253,461.
- 11.12. This results in a total Washlands Visitor Centre budget of **£3,583,584** and an external landscaping budget of **£745,618**. The combined project budget would be £4,329,202 and so it is proposed that this is rounded to **£4,330,000**.
- 11.13. This represents a saving on construction cost for the Washlands Visitor Centre of £1,181,098, reducing to £1,013,821 once the on-costs are included. As such, it is proposed that this saving is utilised for the external landscaping works as an added item, which then leaves a £267,405 underspend against the existing budget allocation.
- 11.14. It should be noted that the works are still subject to planning permission, which may result in a variation to the project that would have financial implications. In that event, a future decision would be required on if and how to respond to that circumstance. This may be considered when the Towns Fund financial profile is reviewed when the capital programme for 2025/26 is confirmed by Council.
- 11.15. Confirming a budget of £4.33m for the Washlands Visitor Centre is within the policy and budgetary framework (as per March 2022 Council decision) and represents approximately 38% of the remaining Towns Fund High Street Project funding, leaving £7.15m to be profiled across the remainder of the site as per 11.14.
- 11.16. Ongoing and ancillary project management work will be undertaken via existing and separate budgets/reserves.

Revenue	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27

Capital	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Washlands Visitor Centre	£3,583,584		
External Landscaping	£745,618		
Total Project Budget (rounded)	£4,330,000		

12. Risk Assessment and Management

- 12.1. The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:
- 12.2. **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits):
 - 12.2.1. The delivery of Phase 3 of the Washlands Enhancement Project and commencement of the Towns Fund works.
 - 12.2.2. The facilitation of new and exciting educational and leisure opportunities through a partnership with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.
- 12.3. **Negative** (Threats):
 - 12.3.1. Project costs may be impacted by the planning application decision
 - 12.3.2. The current Towns Fund spend deadlines do not leave much flexibility on the construction delivery programme.
- 12.4. The project has its own risk register that is managed by the project management team. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

13. **Legal Considerations**

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:
Glen McCusker – Locum Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer*

- 13.1. The main legal issues arising from this Report are as follows.
- 13.2. Legal Services have, and will throughout the Project provide all necessary legal advice.
- 13.3. The progression of this project is in keeping with the agreed Heads of Terms for the Towns Fund programme as well as the existing site covenants and restrictions.
- 13.4. The award of contract for construction works will be compliant with the Council's Procurement Policy and Contract Procedure Rules, the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, and the new Procurement Act, which will come into force on 24th February 2025.
- 13.5. A further Cabinet Decision may be required to award a Contract to the preferred Bidder.
- 13.6. The legal implications associated with commencing a lease will be considered when the lease terms are finalised and proposed for executive approval.

14. Equalities and Health

- 14.1. **Equality impacts:** The subject of this Report is not a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.
- 14.2. **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

15. Data Protection Implications – Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)

- 15.1. A DPIA must be completed where there are plans to:

- use systematic and extensive profiling with significant effects;
- process special category or criminal offence data on a large scale; or
- systematically monitor publicly accessible places on a large scale
- use new technologies;
- use profiling or special category data to decide on access to services;
- profile individuals on a large scale;
- process biometric data;
- process genetic data;
- match data or combine datasets from different sources;
- collect personal data from a source other than the individual without providing them with a privacy notice ('invisible processing');
- track individuals' location or behaviour;
- profile children or target marketing or online services at them; or
- process data that might endanger the individual's physical health or safety in the event of a security breach

- 15.2 Following consideration of the above, there are no Data Protection implications arising from this report which would require a DPIA]

16. Human Rights

- 16.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report.

17. Environmental Impacts

Consider impacts related to the Climate Change & Nature Strategy aims:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions (climate change mitigation)
- Preparing for future climate change (adaptation)
- Protecting and enhancing nature
- Using resources wisely and minimising waste and pollution

- 17.1. Does the proposal have any positive or negative environmental impacts? Yes

- 17.2. If so, are these impacts **significant**? Not at this time

(If No, the report author can complete paragraph 12.3. If Yes, the report should be forwarded to the Council's Climate Change and Adaptation Officers for enhanced consideration)

(note – a **significant** impact will likely result from any project, policy, procurement exercise or service change that has a direct or indirect effect on energy or fuel use, water use, land use, other physical resource use, waste generation, pollution, regeneration or construction - If unsure contact the Council's Climate Change and Adaptation Officers)

17.3. Please detail the positive/negative environmental impacts and any mitigation:

17.3.1. Positive impacts (Benefits/Opportunities)

A sustainable approach to development and operation will be undertaken

17.3.2. Negative impacts (Threats/Mitigation)

Any construction development has a negative impact on carbon emissions

17.4. Sustainability impacts will be fully explored and mitigated through the planning process.

18. **Recommendations**

18.1. That Cabinet:

18.1.1. Note the proposed design concepts for the Washlands Visitor Centre and its compliance with the Towns Fund programme.

18.1.2. Confirm an overall project budget of £4.33m comprised of £3.58m for the Washlands Visitor Centre and £0.75m for the external landscaping, both with the on-costs identified in section 11.

18.1.3. Note the principles of the lease identified at 10.2 and delegate authority to proceed with this to the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance.

19. **Background Papers**

19.1. Burton Town Investment Plan

19.2. Towns Fund report (Council, 21st March 2022)