

CABINET

7 FEBRUARY 2023

ROCHESTER PIER SALVAGE

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Adrian Gulvin, Portfolio Holder for Resources
Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive
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Summary

In 2019 Rochester Pier closed owing to structural safety concerns relating to the central floatation platform linking the two brows from the upper section of pier to the pontoon. This report seeks approval to remove the collapsed sections of the pier and timber dolphins from the riverbed.

Within the relevant lease, the pier is described as Esplanade Pier, for the purposes of this report, Rochester Pier is the term used.

1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1. Cabinet is asked to agree to the removal of collapsed sections of the pier to aid future restoration and removal of two timber dolphins to prevent navigation hazard. Adding the required funding to carry out these works however, is a matter for full Council.
- 1.2. The recommendations in this report support the priorities outlined in Medway's Council Plan 2022 – 2023, specifically putting 'Medway on the map'. By building on what makes Medway unique - the river, our heritage and sporting legacy - Medway on the Map promotes our area as a great place to live, work, learn and visit'.

2. Background

- 2.1. Rochester Pier, originally constructed in 1881 and known as Esplanade Pier, was built to provide river trips and passenger services. In 1998 the pier was extensively improved with a new 19m long pontoon to accommodate the Kingswear Castle paddle steamer, a roof on the T section and pedestrian access via a link span of two brows with central floatation platform.
- 2.2. A Marine Survey in April 2019 identified eleven immediate priority repairs, including the removal of two redundant timber dolphins owing to risk of collapse into the river, causing navigational hazard and with the floatation platform showing signs of metal buckling.

- 2.3. In September 2019, support beams of the central platform began to crack, marine engineers advised pier closure and quoted £56k for essential repairs.
- 2.4. With insufficient funding available, the river tour company ceased use of the pontoon and the pier was closed.
- 2.5. Rochester Bridge Trust were approached for advice and potential funding contribution but were unable to provide charity funding to a Local Authority. However, they agreed to fund a feasibility report for the creation of a volunteer led Trust to obtain, manage and maintain Rochester Pier and to expand funding opportunities,
- 2.6. In May 2022 the flotation platform failed, causing the two brows to collapse into the riverbed, causing damage to the pontoon and potential structural stress to the T section.
- 2.7. In October 2022, three quotes were obtained for the removal of the collapsed sections of the pier and removal of the wooden dolphins. These were undertaken to enable officers to provide an estimate of the funding needed.

3. Options

3.1. Option 1 - part removal

- 3.1.1. Timber dolphins are considered more dangerous to navigation than collapsed brows. The removal and disposal of the dolphins is estimated to cost £27k.
- 3.1.2. Commissioning a marine structural assessment of the upper T section of the pier will be required and is estimated to cost £3,400.
- 3.1.3. If the assessment is undertaken and confirms the T section is safe for public use, the pier could be re-opened but with a recommendation to lock the mains gates between dawn and dusk.

3.2. Option 2 - full removal of collapsed sections of the pier and timber dolphins

- 3.2.1. Carrying out all salvage works would consist of two brows, the central flotation platform, two wooden dolphins and associated debris being removed from the riverbed.
- 3.2.2. The required works would eliminate the undesirable view of pier wreckage from Rochester Castle, Rochester Bridge and Esplanade and the clearance of the collapsed sections of the pier and dolphins would provide an easier starting point for future restoration works.
- 3.2.3. A tender for the salvage works would be required through the procurement process.
- 3.2.4. This is the recommended option.

3.3. Option 3 - do nothing

- 3.3.1. Taking no action would mean the collapsed sections would continue to deteriorate and there would therefore be an increased risk of debris breaking away through storm action, which may present danger to navigation and damage to Rochester Bridge.
- 3.3.2. Polystyrene from the remains of the floatation platform continues to disintegrate causing pollution to marine life and contributes to litter washed up on estuary shores and salt marshes.
- 3.3.3. The wooden dolphins may collapse and produce significant floating debris which would be likely to be just below the river surface causing danger to navigation between Peters Village at Wouldham & The Strand at Gillingham. Collapse of the timber dolphins is also likely to cause damage to pleasure craft moored at Rochester Cruising Club finger pontoons located 30m from end of T section.
- 3.3.4. Debris from collapsed sections of the pier and timber dolphins is a significant risk to navigation and may result in compensation claims against Medway Council for damage to the leisure craft, commercial shipping at Medway City Estate and river infrastructure including Rochester Bridge and private moorings.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1. Rochester Pier enjoys a prime location on the river, beside Rochester Castle and Rochester Bridge with easy access to the High Street for visiting boat passengers, estimated at 4,000 in 2018. As set out in Medway's Capital Strategy, in line with its vision to become a waterfront city, the Council is keen to improve the connectivity to the river across Medway, and with investment, our piers have the potential to support this and to generate income for the Council.
- 4.2. With investment in the region of £600,000, the collapsed sections of Rochester Pier could be removed, as well as restoring the public access to the river and potentially reintroducing river tour operators to enhance the experience of visitors to the area. Income from mooring fees and landing fees from tour operators would contribute to the ongoing maintenance requirements.
- 4.3. It is the intention of Medway Council to fully restore the pier when funding becomes available and create a volunteer led Pier Trust to manage and maintain the structure. However, for restoration work to begin, the collapsed sections of pier, comprising; two brows and floatation platform need to be removed from the river.
- 4.4. Removal of the collapsed pier sections and timber dolphins from the river will negate risk of debris becoming a danger to navigation and thereby mitigate risks of compensation claims of damage to vessels and private river infrastructure.

- 4.5. These works are a practical solution to the issue of wreckage on the riverbed and creating a more desirable view of the river from notable landmarks with high visitor rates.
- 4.6. Clearance of the collapsed sections of the pier and dolphins provide a significantly improved starting point for future restoration works and sustaining navigational safety, thereby increasing the opportunities for a volunteer led Trust to take on the management and maintenance of Rochester Pier.
- 4.7. It is therefore recommended that Cabinet agree to Option 2.

5. Risk management

- 5.1. Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community. Using the following table this section should therefore consider any significant risks arising from your report.

| Risk | Description | Action to avoid or mitigate risk | Risk rating |
|----------------------|---|---|-------------|
| Capital funding | There is insufficient capital funding to deliver the project. | Establishment of a liaison group chaired by the Deputy Leader to assess and approve proposals within agreed Capital funding | C2 |
| Inflation costs | Cost of materials may increase and exceed original budget | Agree set price in advance of scheduled works | D2 |
| Weather & tides | Poor weather combined with tide times may restrict working window leading to project extension. | Agree with chosen contractor best time of year and appropriate tides in advance of works | D3 |
| Operational unknowns | Removal of brows may require additional safety equipment leading to project overrun | Build operational unknowns into procurement brief. | C2 |

| Likelihood | Impact: |
|--|--|
| A Very high B High C Significant D Low E Very low F Almost impossible | 1 Catastrophic (Showstopper) 2 Critical 3 Marginal 4 Negligible |

6. Consultation

6.1. There has been no formal consultation undertaken.

7. Climate change implications

7.1. Rising sea levels combined with increasingly unpredictable weather will add risk of debris dispersal during storm surges and exceptionally high tides.

7.2. Access to and from the site will be via the river. Removal of debris, dolphins and brows using an 800t barge at 75% capacity, would reduce CO2 by 95% when compared to using Heavy Good Vehicles to remove the same volume. Use of vessels to complete the works has zero impact of the highway network and significantly less impact on air quality.

8. Financial implications

8.1. The total capital funding requested to deliver option 2 is £137,172, which includes the removal of two brows, the central flotation platform, two timber dolphins and associated debris from the riverbed and also includes river works licences, consents and fees.

8.2. The cost will be funded by borrowing over a 15 year period which is estimated to add a pressure to the revenue budget of £21,995 each year.

8.3. Damage to pleasure or commercial craft from collapsed timber dolphins leaves the Council at risk from compensation claims or potentially, protracted legal action.

9. Legal implications

9.1. Legal action may be taken against the Council in the event of damage to vessels moored or under sail and to fixed river infrastructure within the lower river Medway area, which arises from the condition of the pier.

9.2. Medway Council own the entire structure of Rochester Pier with the area of riverbed beneath all sections of the pier being leased from Peel Ports.

9.3. Rochester Pier Lease, which was signed in 1999 describes Medway Council's responsibility of keeping the pier in a safe working order, failure to do so will result in Peel Ports making the repairs or removing the entire structure completely and charging Medway Council for the works.

9.4. In 2016 a Deed of Variation to the lease negotiated with Peel Ports, replacing the £10k a year rent to a lump sum of £430,000 to waive all riverbed rent charges for 80 years.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1. The Cabinet is asked to approve the removal of the collapsed section of Rochester Pier and timber dolphins, as set out at option 2, in order to remove the potential hazard to navigation and provide a cleared location for future restoration of the pier.
- 10.2. The Cabinet is asked to recommend Full Council to approve the addition of £137,172 to the Capital Programme to be funded by borrowing.

11. Suggested reason for decisions

- 11.1. Removal of the collapsed pier sections and timber dolphins from the river will negate risk of debris becoming a danger to navigation and thereby mitigate risks of compensation claims of damage to vessels and private river infrastructure.
- 11.2. Clearance of the collapsed sections of the pier and dolphins will also provide a significantly improved starting point for future restoration works and sustaining navigational safety, thereby increasing the opportunities for a volunteer led Trust to take on the management and maintenance of Rochester Pier.

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Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Image Rochester Pier description of sections
- Appendix 2 - Rochester Pier – timber dolphins
- Appendix 3 - Rochester Pier Survey Report 2019

Background papers

None

Glossary of terms

Brow – suspended, box metal walkway with metal deck and latticed beams

Flotation platform – floating concrete platform attached between four piles, platform rises and falls with each tide and acts as link between the two brows.

Pontoon – floating concrete platform 91m length by 5m width, polystyrene flotation blocks with rubber skirting.

T Section – Fixed concrete platform supported by cast iron piles and cross bracing beams and with pedestrian guard rail, 30m length, 7m width opening to wider section 10m length, 16m width.

Canopy – Roofed area on T section 19m length, 7m width.

Timber dolphin – Heavy duty timber mooring tower, located at the end of the T section.