PROPOSED DECISION

(i) To make the necessary funds available as set out in the report to enable the works for option 2 to be procured and undertaken, and

(ii) A further review of the investment options for Easton Street Multi-Storey Car Park be undertaken within 2 years.

Reason for Decision

Easton Street Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP) requires urgent maintenance to protect its structural integrity which will need to be commissioned over the summer to prevent closure this winter. Further substantial investment is required to keep the car park operational in the long term. The report explores the options open to the Council for this car park serving the eastern side of High Wycombe.

Corporate Implications

1. Under Section 122(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 a local authority has a general duty to ensure the provision of suitable and adequate off-street parking facilities and to secure the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of traffic.

2. £144,000 for the upper deck resurfacing and edge protection investigation will be funded from the Repairs and Renewals Fund. This was included for 2012-13 in the Medium Term Financial Plan approved by Cabinet on 5th March 2012.

3. The investment as proposed is the minimum required to enable Easton Street MSCP to continue to operate beyond October 2012. If this investment is not agreed then a more detailed options appraisal will need to be carried out including an equality impact assessment to inform Members of future options for this car park.

Executive Summary

4. Easton Street MSCP serves the eastern side of High Wycombe and if it is to be retained for use, a decision is required in order that a programme of works can be commissioned over the summer. The report examines the role the car park performs and explores the options open to the Council when considering its future use.

Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications

5. The provision and maintenance of car parks across the District, including Easton Street MSCP supports the Council’s priorities for sustainably regenerating the area (place) and delivering value for money (pounds).
Background and Issues

6. Easton St MSCP was built in 1972 and comprises 494 car parking spaces spread over 12 half decks. The car park is essentially two separate structures linked by the access ramps. MSCPs are considered one of the most vulnerable types of structure due to their constant exposure to weather and the damage caused by vehicles depositing oil and salt on the deck surfaces. Following the catastrophic collapse of two car parks elsewhere in the country, it was recommended car park owners carry out increased monitoring and maintenance of their car parks.

7. In 1994/5 a comprehensive inspection programme was undertaken at Easton Street. This found that the car park structure had high chlorine levels in all areas. Chlorine is brought into the car park from road salting operations and if unchecked will cause severe corrosion of reinforcement in the concrete structure; and possibly leading to a sudden collapse. In 1997/8 a substantial repair programme was undertaken with a budget of £1.3 million. This included repairs to the concrete, resurfacing of all the deck surfaces and the installation of an ICCP (Impressed Current Cathodic Protection) system. The ICCP comprises a series of units which pass a current through the reinforcement and a special paint system on the car park ceiling which together ensure that the reinforcement steel is not corroded. The ICCP system requires constant monitoring to maintain its effectiveness.

8. In December 2002, following further concerns about the maintenance of MSCPs, the Institution of Civil Engineers published ‘Recommendations for the inspection, maintenance and management of car park structures.’ The key action from the Recommendations is the creation of Life Care Plans and the appointment of a competent Engineer to monitor and inspect the car park on a regular basis. In 2004 the Council agreed to follow the Recommendations and appointed Taylor Woodrow, now Vinci, to develop Life Care Plans for all the Council’s MSCPs and to undertake monitoring of the ICCP systems installed in Easton Street and the Swan MSCPs.

9. Over the last 4 years Vinci have produced a number of reports on the structural condition of the car park. The conclusions from these reports were summarised in a Whole Life costing report which was issued in early 2009. The report assumed the car park would remain in Council ownership for a minimum of 20 years. This report has formed the basis of the R&R (Repairs and Renewals) budget for this car park.

10. The report highlighted that a significant investment is required in the next 4 years to maintain the car park in an adequate condition. The principal works are the recoating of the deck surfaces which have a guaranteed life of 10 years and are now 4 years overdue for replacement and refurbishment and extension of the ICCP system as monitoring has found increased levels of corrosion in the upper decks. The most urgent work identified in the last inspection is the resurfacing of the top exposed decks where significant failure of the surface has caused leakage through the structure leading to corrosion of the reinforcement and damage to the concrete surround.

11. Unless a programme of works is agreed, the upper decks of the car park will need to be closed within the next 8 months.
Policy Context

12. The Draft Delivery and Site Allocations (DSA) Development Plan Document - includes a vision for the town centre that is uniquely appealing, attractive and thriving; well connected and accessible. Any redevelopment would be expected to contribute towards delivering the vision.

13. The Easton Street area is recognised as a key employment location. The car park is adjacent to the High Wycombe Conservation Area, and the frontage buildings either side of the access to the car park are listed. Policy HWTC9 sets out criteria to guide any redevelopment that might come forward in this area.

14. As part of the Urban Strategy for High Wycombe Local Transport Plan 3 recognises that Car parking stock in the town will be managed to make best use of this supply.

15. The new National planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - refers to planning policies and says that these should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period.

16. Parking Review - the council has commissioned a review of its off-street parking operation following the transfer of the on-street operation back to Bucks County council in September 2011.

17. The review, undertaken by Parking Techniques, has included an examination of the supply and demand for off-street parking across the district, an assessment of the car park assets and an evaluation of how best to manage the car park operation in the future.

18. The review is reaching a conclusion and will be reported to Members over the summer. However, from the work undertaken by Parking Techniques, whilst overall there may be opportunities to reduce town centre parking capacity so that it better reflects levels of demand, reallocating demand to other parking stock by partially closing or closing an MSCP would likely involve a significant level of parking displacement and user resistance. The capacity provided by the Council’s town centre MSCPs should be retained.

Parking Demand and Supply

19. Monitoring of car park occupancy has been undertaken by the Council’s Car Park Inspectors. It is based on “snap shot” counts on one particular working day each month by parking attendants. This monitoring indicates that:

- The town centre parking stock typically operates well below capacity as indicted by recent occupancy surveys:– April 2011(59%), Dec 2011(68.6%), March 2012 (55.4%).

- Nonetheless across the town centre and at certain times and in certain car parks, demand operates closer to or at capacity. Parking demand varies throughout the day, during the week; central car parks tend to be busier at weekends but overall demand has dipped over recent months. Throughout the year, the Council’s approach has been to ensure that in the “shoulder” of the Christmas peak, (ie not the peak of the peak) parking demand should not exceed 90% of supply.
• The eastern side of the town is served by Duke Street and Railway Place surface car parks, and by Easton Street and the new Chiltern Railway MSCPs.
• Duke Street is close to being fully occupied during the working week principally by rail commuters.
• Railway Place operates close to or at maximum capacity during the working week. It has a mixed use of 50% short stay customers and 50% long stay/over four hours.
• Easton Street MSCP is operating at between 80% - 90% capacity at peak periods (10.00 to 14.00), Monday to Thursday. It has a mixed use of 70% short stay and 30% long stay (over four hours).
• The Chiltern Railway MSCP has recently opened and is operating at 70% capacity and the operator expects patronage to increase over time.

Future Parking Demand
20. Looking ahead and taking account of anticipated population growth of 7% up to 2026 (see footnote) (which is assumed to translate into a pro rata increase in parking demand) and anticipated closure of car parks such as Bellfield, overall parking capacity for the town centre would remain sufficient to cope with typical peak parking demands.

21. When considering demand for parking to the eastern side of the town, while this is high currently, there are potential changes in the shorter term that could impact on the use of Easton Street MSCP and Railway Place in particular. Red Kite Community Housing is looking to move offices from Queen Victoria Road (QVR) which could see a move away from this area of the town. Bucks CC is also looking at its options as to whether it should retain its Easton Street area office. This Council is also seeking more flexible working arrangements for staff which could reduce its use of both the QVR office car park and Easton Street MSCP.

22. These factors may have a bearing on parking demand in the shorter term and may create a window within which parking levels could be reduced with limited direct impact, so that any displacement of parking could be more acceptable.

Easton Street Car Park Options
23. Easton St MSCP generates a net revenue contribution before taking account of corporate overheads and depreciation of the order of £155,000 per annum, based on 2011/12 figures. It is too early to be clear at this point how the price changes in late December (the long stay charge was reduced from £7.50 to £5.00) will impact on income going forward. Preliminary indications suggest they may have resulted in a small increase in income per month.

24. If the car park is to remain fully open the critical repairs and renewals works identified for 2012/13 and 2013/14 are deck resurfacing for the upper deck levels 11 and 12 at an estimated cost of £120,000 and edge protection investigation costing £24,000, total cost £144,000. In effect, these upper floors and edge walls provide the main weather protection for the whole structure and these works are essential if the car park is to remain open beyond October 2012 when the more inclement weather starts.
25. Cathodic protection paint replacement works for decks 5 to 8 costing £200,000 are programmed for 2012/13 but could be delayed until 2014/15. The remainder of the deck resurfacing is programmed for 2013/14 and 2014/15 with a cost of £240,000 for each of those years but could be delayed until 2014/15 and 2015/16.

26. The ICCP to decks 9 to 12, currently programmed for 2015/16 at an estimated cost of £400,000 can be delayed until 2016/17.

27. Average annual maintenance costs equate to £90,000, base on the R & R rolling programme for the 10 years from 2012/13.

28. The top floor of the car park is used for CCTV and communications infrastructure. If the car park was to be closed there would be additional costs incurred to re-site these facilities.

Options Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Capital Cost</th>
<th>Average Annual Maintenance Cost – 10 year cycle</th>
<th>Earliest Start Date</th>
<th>Latest Start Date</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do Nothing</td>
<td>No cost</td>
<td>No cost</td>
<td>October 2012</td>
<td>October 2012</td>
<td>No investment in the car park will lead to its closure in October. Demolition would cost £500,000. There would be an impact on car park income that is hard to quantify and which has a wide range of uncertainty and adverse public reaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Minimum Investment resurfacing decks 11/12</td>
<td>£144,000</td>
<td>£90,000 pa</td>
<td>2012/13 – 2013/14</td>
<td>2012/13-2013/14</td>
<td>This option enables essential work to be undertaken and so retaining car park capacity (except when works are carried out), giving a window to review the demand for parking capacity in 2yrs time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option</td>
<td>Capital Cost</td>
<td>Average Annual Maintenance Cost – 10 year cycle</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Deck Resurfacing and repairs to cathodic protection to decks 5-8</td>
<td>£680,000</td>
<td>£90,000 pa</td>
<td>2012/13 – 2013/14</td>
<td>2014/15-2015/16</td>
<td>This option assumes that a decision is taken to retain the car park for a minimum of 10 years. During this period further work is required to determine the future use of the site.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Cathodic Protection to decks 9-12</td>
<td>£400,000</td>
<td>£90,000</td>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>2016/2017</td>
<td>This option can be reviewed in 2015/16 – 2016/17. The proposed work would extend the life of the car park for a further 20 years but would also require resurfacing of all decks within 10 years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Consultation**

29. Discussions have taken place with Bucks County Council regarding their future office space requirements. At this stage it is unclear of their preferred option.

30. A survey of customers using the Duke St and Railway Place car parks was undertaken to establish their reasons for parking at that location.

**Conclusions**

31. There is currently a strong demand for parking in the eastern side of High Wycombe. However, this could change over time with the potential office moves as mentioned above. It is recommended that option 2 be pursued to enable essential works to be carried out to Easton St MSCP and so continuing its use for the time being. A further review can then be undertaken within 2 years when the full impact of changes in demand for parking can be assessed.

**Next Steps**

32. To procure the essential works as set out in option 2

**Background Papers**

Working papers held by the Corporate Director.