

Oundle Town Council Report	Meeting Date:	28 th September 2018	Agenda Item		
	From	Clerk			
		Councillor			
		Working Party			
	For Information	Yes	For Decision		
	Financial implications	None			
		In current year's budget			
		Adjust current year's budget			
		Consider for next year's budget			

North Bridge Update Meeting with Tom Pursglove MP

Cllr Peel opened the meeting and gave a brief update on where we are with North Bridge. The Planning Application to install traffic management bollards on the bridge has been withdrawn due to concerns that both English Heritage and Oundle Town Council voiced to ENC. The result is that the intended location of the bollards has been changed which means that, as they are not on the listed parts of the bridge, they do not need planning consent and can be installed at any time.

Cllr Robinson thanked Tom Pursglove for giving our situation needed attention and support. Cllr Robinson stressed how crucial business is to the small market town of Oundle and how good traffic flow is necessary to keep those businesses thriving. North Bridge is the main access to Oundle and whilst acknowledging that the bridge is in desperate need of repair, the councillor stressed that alternatives to what is proposed must be found. The intended weight restriction and traffic barriers would be almost like a no entry sign to incoming traffic. Cllr Robinson emphasised there had been very little engagement from NCC. When the Cllr finally met with an engineer to find alternatives he was subsequently informed that NCC were not considering any alternatives.

The Cllr briefly went through the repair history of the bridge from 1983 through to 4 years ago when NCC started a survey and said the bridge was unsound and should have a 3 tonne limit placed on it. NCC failed to inform anyone in Oundle regarding this situation. They carried on with a further 2 years survey and again did not share the results of this with the council. Finally, 6 months ago, they informed the council the bridge was in a terrible state of repair and they needed to impose a 3 tonne limit.

NCC are reluctant to share the survey findings, however last week the first elements of the report from this survey were shared and show that they can find no association with weight and damage on the bridge. On this basis Cllr Robinson had suggested a 7.5 tonne weight restriction which would be more manageable and keep traffic flowing through Oundle more easily. He emphasised a conversation is needed to discuss these alternatives to resolve this issue.

Tom Pursglove gave an update on where he has been raising this issue. He has formally presented a petition to Parliament, representations with the County Council and Department of Transport and has had meetings with the Roads Minister. He highlighted there is a budget for this kind of work and is waiting for an update from the Transport Minister and NCC regarding their discussions. TP to request NCC attend one of these meetings and will put forward the 7.5 tonne idea unless they can give compelling evidence that a 3-tonne restriction is needed.

If NCC cannot do the work soon then they need to engage with OTC & residents about finding alternatives. NCC will be informed that work must not commence without proper consultations and TP will do this and keep the pressure up at national level with Transport Ministers.

Question raised: What can the people of Oundle do to keep this issue in the forefront of everyone's minds?

Everyone to keep this at the top of their agendas. It was stressed how vital it is for updates to be in the Nene Valley News, on the radio, at parish and Trade Association meetings and keeping the pressure up on the decision makers NCC, Heather Smith etc. Cllr Robinson confirmed HS has been very supportive and positive, advising the council on correspondence - what and who to write to.

TP has stressed to commissioners the importance of this and, whilst appreciating the financial constraints, knows this is a capital project, which doesn't affect revenue, and should be prioritised in the scheme of works. Less significant work in the county should not be carried out before the bridge.

Concerns about the diversion system were expressed as there seems no urgency from NCC to decide on this. If indeed the bollards/barriers are fitted this will need to be in place.

TP assured the council that he would speak to Matt Golby, follow up in writing and publish content, requesting assurances that no work will proceed before the correct consultations have taken place. All businesses and residents encouraged to do the same.

Question raised: Realistically, is there a possibility that this will be 'put to sleep' for so long that it becomes an accepted restriction?

TP stressed that is why we need to keep the pressure up, the onus is on all of us to make sure the bridge repairs do go ahead. Parts of the bridge are listed so that helps, being a Heritage site adds weight to the need for repair. The 750,000-1 million budget seems large but is actually relatively small in the grand scheme of highways budgets. Also, the knock-on effect of delays to bridge repairs is that other major decisions cannot be made (decisions regarding buses and bus routes etc), thus reinforcing the need to push this forward.

Question raised: Will the plans for the new unitary structure prolong this situation further.

TP explained the progression of the unitary structure and how the hand over will work.

There should be no impact on the progression of works on North Bridge as a result of these planned changes.

Philip Amps asked Richard Tremellen to explain how the bridge restriction would affect Oundle School as they have major building works being carried out at the moment and also have a high volume of buses and lorries visiting the school regularly.

RT stated that from Jan 2019 some escorted lorries carrying loads of 22 mtrs are scheduled, these simply will not be able to get in to Oundle with the planned restrictions. The suggested alternative route of coming in on the Barnwell Road from the A605 equally creates potential problems, HGV's turning at the junction and the narrow South Bridge with traffic lights. Cllr Peel states that traffic lights are being considered at that junction on the A605 to help with this issue. It was acknowledged that, while this will help, it will still disrupt the traffic flow on the A605 quite substantially. Again, it was emphasised the large number of coaches and food delivery lorries etc which come in and out of Oundle purely for Oundle School, the disruption would be massive to this one organisation. Similar disruptions for Tesco's, Co-op, Waitrose and many other businesses in Oundle. These need emphasising to add weight to our case.

Questions raised:

1. If the Weight Restriction was 7.5 tonnes would coaches be able to use bridge? No, coaches are more than 7.5 tonnes.
2. Is the weight restriction being imposed because they are not able to carry out repairs immediately or to allow for repairs to be carried out?

The restriction is to allow them to get on with the repairs but due to the financial situation, it looks unlikely they will be done in a timely manner. We have been told it may be 2 to 5 years if they cannot raise the funds and the budget needed is now 1.5 million. So, the restrictions would remain for as long as the bridge is deemed unsafe. Even if they are able to commence works soon, they anticipate the restrictions would be in place for at least 12 months given all the planning issues and consultations required with English Heritage.

It was agreed that any additional statistics regarding the number of buses and lorries coming in and out of Oundle on a daily basis, including those for Oundle school, should be shared and the impact the weight restrictions would have, be re-enforced.

Cllr Peel mentioned that, as part of the Neighbourhood Plan, there have been early discussions for a roundabout to be built where the A605 meets Herne Road.

Question raised: If these restrictions do come in to force, what will the HGV lorries' route be as no-one wants them coming through the centre of town.

Cllr Peel stated that the council have put forward proposals suggesting a one-way system using Blackpot Lane and Milton Road. This would cause some disruption for parking along these roads but would keep the larger lorries out of Oundle Town Centre.

Cllr Peel clarified the proposed one-way system would include East Road, South Road, Milton Road, Blackpot Lane and parking would be allowed on one side of these roads only, apart from top end of East Road where it joins St Osyth's and the whole of Blackpot Lane where parking would possibly not be permitted at all. Further trial runs will be carried out. Buses have been able to get through Blackpot Lane with cars parked but, as yet, we have not been able to see if some of the larger lorries can get through with cars parked on one side without causing damage to the cars or the wall on the other side.

Question raised: Parking already an issue, this will impact it further, what is being done about this. East Road long stay is always full, so other workers struggle to find parking for the day.

Cllr Peel highlighted that Fairline currently use this car park, for various reasons, but have been asked to use their own car park to alleviate some of the problem.

Philip Amps thanked Tom Pursglove for attending the meeting, his working with us and his support in finding a solution. Encouraged everyone to make more noise to increase pressure and ensure this work gets done as quickly as possible.

Question raised:

Could we get a PFI (Private Finance Initiative) involved to hasten the money situation?

TP explained there may be some reluctance but, if it is a viable option, it should be considered.

TP thanked everyone involved for their efforts. He again emphasised continuing with the excellent local campaign work done so far and keeping the pressure up on this issue. TP suggested he would arrange a meeting with NCC officers and a Cabinet Member, so discussions can take place, with all parties involved, with the aim of finding a workable solution.

Thanks given to all and meeting concluded by Philip Amps.

