

DC/21/2043/LB - Hemyard Bridge, The Abbey, Ixworth

Green Ixworth has two primary aims: to protect and enhance the natural and the built environment thus enabling public participation and enjoyment of our environment. We therefore heartily welcome this project to repair and restore a beautiful example of what, according to local historians, probably started as a 16th Century bridge and preserving the valuable heritage and amenity of our built environment in Ixworth. We also welcome the care and attention generally paid by the contractor to the proposed repairs.

River Bed - It is inevitable that during repair work mortar, render and probably masonry will be dropped. We would expect therefore, that detritus would be removed prior to the dismantling of the coffer dams. However the coffer dams themselves along with the scaffolding will cause damage to the river bed.

We would therefore expect the contractors to bring the river bed to a pristine condition by flushing away accumulated silt and the replacement of gravels beneath and for a few metres, upstream and downstream of the bridge. On the river banks upstream and particularly downstream, protection against scour should be provided using graded material. The anti scour area should then be gravelled to maintain continuity with the bed, this will prevent bank erosion and thus soil particles being removed and deposited further downstream. This should be completed to at least likely Climate Heated by 2.5 degrees C maximum flood level. In time the area above lowest water level will become vegetated and thus have a natural look.

Vegetation - We would also ask that everything necessary be done to protect the trees and shrubs close to the ends of the bridge. The fallen willow upstream may actually present a danger to the bridge in the near future so might need to be significantly shortened in order for work to proceed safely.

Equestrian Barrier – A more contentious issue. The barrier cannot be restored as it is new, an unnecessary attachment capable of consequential damage to the bridge structure. There are no indications within the drawings to show reasons for its addition. The existing temporary structure is only 1.2m high and that to ensure sufficient rigidity in the timber platform. The only complaints about the existing temporary structure have been its presence not its height. The only similar local Bridleway bridge of which we are aware is the Moulton Packhorse Bridge, which manages with its original stone structure and no barriers.

The Department of Transport's 2020 "Design Guide for Bridges and Roads" does contain information about appropriate barriers but primarily for **new build** and that for significant crossing points, i.e. motorways, major roads, navigable rivers and railway where there may be moving vehicles etc. below the bridge. It is implemented by a **Code of Practice** not restrictive formal regulation. Codes, especially for Health and Safety issues, are designed to be flexible to take account of real life situations.

The British Horse Society has published its own Guidance for bridges

- 1. In providing specifications for equestrian ways and facilities, the British Horse Society considers all equestrian users, which may result in a high specification which might not be appropriate in all circumstances. The recommendations should be read with this in mind. If the specification seems inappropriate in a situation, the Society strongly advises consultation with its local representative to establish what*

may be acceptable at a particular site.....

- 2. Parapets or infill are not always required, or may be acceptable at a lower height, or desired at a greater height in some circumstances. This is relative to the local conditions, particularly the height of the span, width and proximity of a horse's line of travel to the parapet, and what is being bridged. A railway or fast road will need a more substantial and higher parapet than a stream or minor road.....*
- 3. Parapets on bridges are usually intended to prevent a pedestrian or vehicle from leaving the bridge while on the deck. Parapets to provide equivalent protection to a rider would be over 2m high and are rarely practical or desirable therefore the height of any parapet on an equestrian route is likely to be a compromise and there is no single solution for all situations.....*
- 4. Where it is not practicable to meet the recommended standard on any bridge, mounting blocks at each end of a bridge would be welcomed by equestrians who choose to dismount and lead across the bridge (see BHS Advice on Mounting Blocks).....*

Design – The detailed drawings of the timber or steel barrier, if implemented, would be extremely damaging to the bridge structure. Timber would need special treatment to minimise damage to horses from splintering.(BHS The posts are a minimum of 100mm sq and when buried in the bridge deck the concrete packing would be 800mm below deck level and 300mm sq. In many places the roadway deck is not that deep. The post hole depth is greater than the road surface plus arch brickwork by up to 400mm. In strong winds or pushed by a horse, the side forces exerted by the rails on the posts could be heavy and the potential damage to the roadway and brick parapets significant. The post fixings, concrete, would be harder than the bridge materials and therefore cause damage to the bridge rather than the barrier. Further the bridge is approx. 4m wide between parapets and the barrier would reduce that width by at least 750mm.(20%)

Health and Safety - All measures to protect health and safety should require a Risk Assessment, rather than just take a standard supposedly “safe” approach, for without one, the “mitigation” measures themselves can create hazards for other users. Because of its height, at 1.8m, it will be the most visible part of the bridge and would itself create major safety hazards to other users because:

- The parapet is of triangular section preventing use as a walkway. With the barrier as a rail it would become possible.
- It makes an excellent climbing frame with a river and hard parapet one side and the hard surface of the bridleway on the other to fall in to or on.

Children being children and often supposed adults being children, protecting the barrier from such misuse would not be a realistic proposition.

Children - How will children be able able to play Pooh Sticks without direct access to the parapets. Looking over a bridge and being directly above water, is one way children can safely explore and learn of the life in and around rivers. The barriers would isolate them from their surroundings and deny them that learning opportunity and ability to appreciate their heritage.

Wildlife - The river is populated by swans and geese, heavy birds with a long and low

angle of take off needing a long straight section of river. The bridge will nearly double in height above water level, thus approx doubling the length of take off distance to safely achieve flight over the bridge. The total height above water level would be between approx 3.5m and 4.5m. Putting this further obstacle in the way of flight paths could be extremely damaging to the birds.

Users - Whilst the present temporary structure has been in place, the few and infrequent riders often ignored the notices to dismount and some destroyed the notices several times. This would indicate the riders and their horses are not of a nervous disposition, the main rationale for having barriers at all. In addition there are few horse riders in the area, the main users being walkers, with or without dogs and anglers who value the bridge and the route most highly. Whilst the BHS understandably only considers the interests of Equine users the Committee also has to consider all the other 99% users.

Conclusion - Given the low utilisation of the bridge by riders and their horses, we can see no requirement for the Equine Barrier at all, mounting blocks would satisfy riders needs by dismounting if needed. The barrier would significantly reduce amenity value. We would not wish to see the Bridle Way extinguished to see it revert to just a statutory footpath, unless there were no alternative and such action could seriously delay the work.

The reason for the long campaign to restore the bridge was the desire of Ixworth people to see their ancient heritage retained for future generations and that all those parts of the village, of an age, were its unique selling point. Apart from the Abbey and bridge which are Grade I there are over 70 Grade II and Grade II* buildings in the village. If the Equestrian Barrier were to be added to this ancient structure it would be considered pure vandalism. Our current view is that the Equestrian Barrier completely destroys the beneficial aspect of the restored bridge, with no historical precedent to justify it. (See drawings DR-0001 and 0103 and the modified photograph below)

Before



After



[This artists impression is all drawn to scale. The taller of the people is 1.8m.(6ft) The road deck height of the bridge is approx the horizontal line above the arches, a little higher on the right, lower on the left.]

It would be a great shame if the Hempyard Bridge failed to retain its essential simplicity and aged traditional appearance after such effort by the Parish Council and expense to the County Council and we, the tax payer. Thus we object most strongly to the Equine Barrier being included in the project.