

John Howell OBE MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dan Rogerson MP
Minister DEFRA

11 November 2014

Dear Dan

Whitchurch Toll Bridge

Whitchurch Toll Bridge in my constituency is one of the few remaining privately owned bridges in the country. It was built as a result of the Whitchurch Bridge Act 1792 and crosses the River Thames from Whitchurch on Thames to Pangbourne. The present bridge was built in 1902 and around 2005 it became clear that it was coming near to the end of its useful life. There followed many years of negotiations between engineers and planners to ensure that it met 21st century safety and structural standards whilst retaining the heritage aspects demanded for a Grade II listed structure. The compromise resulted in something that would retain the key visual characteristics whilst meeting engineering requirements; something that inevitably cost more than a more simple modern structure. The reconstruction work required river closure and in order to meet the needs of river users the Environment Agency would only permit this during winter months. None the less the project was duly planned and work commenced.

However as a result of the severe weather experience last winter the Environment Agency issued a 'Strong Stream Warning' and forced all work to be suspended for several months. Once the river closure was lifted there was a limited window of time given by the EA to complete the work and thus the cost of the project escalated. As a result the company is now seeking to increase the toll substantially to recoup the cost even over a relatively long time period.

My purpose in raising this with you and giving you this background is that when the Government announced financial relief for those affected by flooding the scope of this did not permit application from the Whitchurch Bridge Company. However the knock on effect on not only the company, but also my constituents, in relation to the increased cost is substantial and something that will affect many people for many years. I am therefore asking if some grant funding could be awarded to the company to mitigate the effect of the unplanned increase in costs. In considering this request I would be grateful if you would bear in mind that the increases are largely due to government requirement and agencies; most notably planning regulations, English Heritage, and the Environment Agency. Without limitations placed on the project by these a more cost effective solution may have been found.



On behalf of my constituents I would be most grateful if you could look to see if there is any contingency funding that could be made available to help in this situation.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Howell', written in a cursive style.

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