

## Comments by the Whitchurch Traffic & Pavements Advisory Group (TAPAG) for Whitchurch Parish Council on Planning Application P11/E0743, Reconstruction of Whitchurch Toll Bridge

Our comments are concerned with two aspects of the plans:

- Safety of pedestrians on the bridge and its approaches
- Traffic arrangements during construction.

### Safety of pedestrians on the bridge and its approaches

**We are concerned that the plans contain no measures whatsoever to improve the safety of pedestrians and we believe that conditions should be imposed to provide for these.** The bridge was built in 1902 for horse-drawn traffic, for which the narrow width was perhaps sufficient. Since then, however, the increase in vehicle size, speed and numbers means that the conditions for pedestrians have for a long time been uncomfortable and hazardous. But the proposed replacement bridge, which is expected to serve for the next 120 years, maintains these same conditions for pedestrians in every respect. If the proposals are approved, the present unsatisfactory conditions will be perpetuated. That would be unfair to the many pedestrians who use the bridge and an extraordinary wasted opportunity, given that the new bridge is being completely redesigned to enable it to withstand 44 tonne lorries.

Pedestrians crossing the bridge include family groups with small children, some on their way to and from school, and elderly residents seated in buggies. The Thames Path national trail crosses the bridge.

The bridge consists of **three parts**, all owned by the Bridge Company. The three together offer the only possible route for the many people who walk between Whitchurch and Pangbourne.

#### 1. The Pangbourne approach embankment

We consider that the **narrow curved pavement** on the Berkshire approach, running alongside two-way traffic on a curved roadway of woefully substandard width, is very hazardous, particularly for parents escorting children and for the elderly. There have been many strikes from wing mirrors on this blind bend. The photo shows the difficulty for pedestrians. The conditions for pushchairs or for disability scooter users are dire,



especially when two meet each other. Large vehicles such as buses cannot pass other traffic without one of them having to mount the pavement.

There is plenty of hard evidence of vehicles crossing the pavement and colliding with the iron railing on this embankment because after these collisions the vertical bars have remained bent – the photo here shows just one example. There are about a dozen separate pieces of evidence like this on the footpath side.



To widen the embankment throughout would be one solution. But we recommend that pedestrians should to be taken off the embankment altogether and routed down to the paved public right-of way near the Adventure Dolphin Centre. That would widen the roadway on the embankment, to the considerable benefit of drivers.

We also wish to draw attention to the unsatisfactory and hazardous route that the **Thames Path** currently has to take in this area, which the bridge company's plans do nothing to improve. The above proposal provides the remedy. We understand that the West Berkshire Council Rights of Way Officer strongly supports the proposal.

It is also time for the **faulty drainage** to be rectified. The photo shows the flooding



that forces walkers to run the gauntlet to avoid being splashed with dirty water after heavy rainfall. The road and drainage here are owned by the Bridge Company and are beyond the boundary adopted by West Berkshire Highways. We believe that this is not just an issue of maintenance but of design and that the drainage here originally flowed into the Thames. Recent maintenance of the drain failed to stop the flooding. The Bridge

Company should rectify the system now, so that pedestrians do not have to contend with this for the next 120 years.

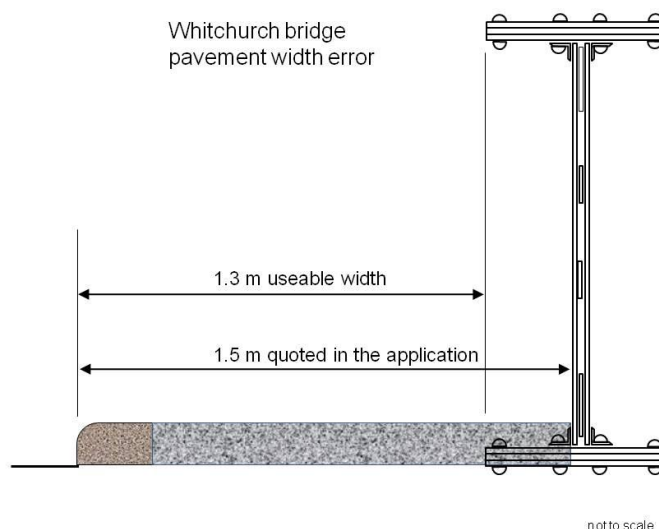
## 2. On the bridge itself

At present walkers between the two villages have to make an unnecessary number of **road crossings**. The B471 carries 6000 vehicles per day and attempting to cross it is hazardous for all, particularly the elderly, children and the disabled. We consider that **the pavement on the bridge should be relocated** on the downstream or meadow side, instead of the present upstream or lock side. This would substantially reduce the number of crossings of the B471 that need to be made by those walking in either direction between Pangbourne and Whitchurch.

The 5.25m width of the **roadway** on the bridge is substandard for a two-way road. This situation is exacerbated by the top flange of the lattice girder on the downstream

or meadow side, which causes vehicles to keep away from the kerb and reduces the effective roadway width.

The **pedestrian pavement**, on the upstream side of the bridge, is in our view inadequate. The useable width is 1.3m, not 1.5m as claimed in the application. See diagram, right. **The presence of the top flange has been ignored.** We believe this error has led to a wrong evaluation of the adequacy of the pavement. The presence of the flange, a hard and sharp barrier at head level for children and mid level for adults, contributes to the discomfort felt by pedestrians crossing the bridge, when combined with the nearness of northbound vehicles.



In assessing the safe width for this pavement there is another factor. The narrow pavement on the bridge serves as a popular **viewing platform** for visitors, and many walkers currently find themselves stepping into the road to get round people enjoying the Thames scenery.

### 3. The Whitchurch approach

At present the arrangements for pedestrians on the Oxfordshire side are inadequate and unclear. A better flat top raised pavement and improved crossings are needed, including one to provide a safer and more attractive route for residents of Mill Drive area, visitors to the Church and Thames Path walkers. Until the construction of the toll booth there was a pedestrian pavement and right-of-way all along the side of the road adjacent to the toll cottage (see photo). This was removed by the Bridge Company in the 1990s to the detriment of walkers and without any satisfactory new route being provided. The later installation of rising arm barriers has added a further hazard.



The transfer of the pavement on the bridge itself to the downstream side, discussed above, would avoid the need for one of the crossings here but a proper crossing opposite the Mill Drive would still be necessary.

**To summarise** our comments on the vital matter of pedestrian safety: we wish to draw attention to the inadequacy of the present provision for pedestrians; we note that the bridge company acknowledges many of the inadequacies but is failing to offer any improvement; and we recommend that a condition is imposed for a 1.8m wide pavement to be provided from the toll booth to the Dolphin Centre car park.

### **Traffic arrangements during construction**

Concern has been expressed by Whitchurch residents and others about the lack of detailed plans for alternative routes during the bridge closure period. The need was exemplified by the severe blockage in Goring and Streatley in early May this year when the B471 was closed for a day. Considerable planning work is needed by the authorities in both counties, in conjunction with the police, to ensure that bridge users will be able to find satisfactory alternatives.

*Whitchurch Traffic & Pavements Advisory Group, Sub-committee of Whitchurch  
Parish Council, 20th June 2011*