

Pre-application consultation meeting on bridge reconstruction, 21st July 2010

Representatives of Whitchurch on Thames Parish Council, along with Pangbourne, Goring Heath, Goring and Woodcote Parish Councils, Pearl Slatter SODC, David Sexon OCC and The Dolphin Centre recently attended a pre-application consultation meeting with the Whitchurch Bridge Company (WBC) and their advisors, David Simpson, Head of Planning at Temple Group and Martin Brain, Principal Engineer - Bridges, Oxfordshire County Council.

Following the most recent safety inspection of the bridge, WBC have recently announced that they are bringing forward the planned reconstruction of the bridge to October 2011. Accordingly they are intending to submit the suite of planning applications required (including planning permission, listed building consent, conservation area consent, consent for the temporary footbridge, consent to build a temporary construction compound on the water meadow, and so on) simultaneously to both South Oxfordshire District Council and West Berkshire District Council by the end of December 2010.

Martin Brain talked through the specific safety issues with the bridge and why the reconstruction is deemed necessary in some detail, in a nutshell the piers which support the bridge are cracking (indeed they are to be subject to temporary repairs in August 2010, deemed necessary as the rate of cracking has sped up significantly in the past year), the current old paint work (up to 16 layers in places!) needs to be blasted off in order for the bridge to be painted properly and the road surface needs to be waterproofed. He then went on to talk about the "new" bridge, design constraints relating to this and how it is planned that it will be constructed, the basic message being that it will look pretty much identical to the existing one.

Following this section there was a broader question and answer session which highlighted a number of points of interest:

- The work has to be done during the winter months, as the Environment Agency will not allow the river to be closed during the summer months. Whilst not ideal from a construction perspective (bad weather more likely to cause delays etc) this means therefore that major work is likely to start late October / beginning of November and run until approximately April.
- Temporary crossing for foot passengers is anticipated to be constructed upstream of the existing bridge, likely to go from the bridge and then across the toll house garden on the Whitchurch side and across the garden of the Boathouse Surgery on the Pangbourne side (subject to landowners consent). The footbridge will be on the same level as the current bridge and supported by temporary pontoons in the river
- Apparently a major contractor of the type that would be employed to undertake the work has been to the site and confirmed that logistically it is possible to get everything needed for the project onto the site via Pangbourne (i.e. it will all fit under the railway bridge).
- The majority of the work itself will take place in a temporary construction compound on the Pangbourne meadow, accessed by a temporary road across the meadow.

- The Dolphin Centre will need to have relocated river access as they have people canoeing all year round. This will need to be upstream of the current bridge (as the works themselves will be downstream).
- The Thames Path will need to be diverted.
- Currently services (gas, electricity, phone lines etc) are brought into Whitchurch via the bridge. Suppliers of these services have not as yet confirmed how they will divert these, with the gas supply clearly the biggest issue.
- Road diversions for traffic are the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council's Highways department and a full traffic assessment / impact study will need to be submitted as part of the planning application.
- It is the intention that there will be a full public consultation on this project involving WBC, their advisors and all local communities prior to submission of the planning application. Meetings will be held in both Pangbourne and Whitchurch to which the parishioners of both villages will be invited. The FAQs section of the WBC website will be a useful source of information

Whitchurch on Thames Parish Council, 24th July 2010