

POTTER HEIGHAM COMMUNITY MEETING

Minutes of the Potter Heigham Community Meeting held on **Tuesday 21st March 2023** at **7:00pm** in the Potter Heigham Village Hall.

Present Sheridan Turner, Parish Council Chairman
Donald Pickering, Parish Council Vice-Chairman
Cally Smith, Broads Authority Head of Planning
Chris Alston, Norfolk County Council Highway Area Manager North
Dr. James Albone, Historic England

In Attendance Amy Gallant, Parish Council Clerk
County Councillor, Richard Price
District Councillor, Harry Blathwayt
Parish Council Members
Local Business Representatives
Local Organisation Representatives
Members of the public

Welcome and Introductions

The goal of the meeting was to share as much information as was known today about the status and process of repairs to the Potter Heigham Bridge.

It was noted that the purpose of the meeting was not for open debate but rather an opportunity to gather the perspectives from members of the community to inform the Parish Council position on the future use of the bridge.

At this time, the options for the bridge included to return to normal operation following repairs, to restrict use by HGVs or to pedestrianise and restrict all vehicular traffic.

Introduction of responsible parties

The bridge was part of the highways infrastructure and a scheduled ancient monument. As a result, the Norfolk County Council Highways Authority had a duty in relation to the highways network and road maintenance and Historic England had a duty in relation to the protection of heritage and historic environment.

The Broads Authority as the planning authority for the area would be involved in so far as consideration of any proposed changes and had no view on the matter at hand at this stage.

Overview from Highways

Over the Christmas period a pothole opened up on the crown of the bridge. A temporary traffic regulation was ordered to divert traffic and the Bridges Team investigated shortly after Christmas. The Bridges Team produced plans to fix the bridge, liaised with Historic England and agreed on a phase 1 repair. The repair would take place in the next 4-6 weeks and it was assured that repairs would not take place during easter week. It was estimated works would take up to a week to complete and that the road would reopen on completion.

Phase 2 related to the fabric of the bridge to repoint with approved material and it was noted that the waterway may need to close for the work to be carried out and for the material to cure. Phase 2 repairs were subject to consent by historic England once Phase 1 was complete.

It was noted that the Highways Authority did not hold a view on whether the bridge should remain closed and that the remit for Highways was to keep the road network open to all users as much as possible.

If stakeholders fed back to the Parish Council that there was a desire to close the bridge, a feasibility study would be required to detail reasoning for closure.

It was noted there was no funding available from the Highways Authority to conduct a feasibility study or for bridge closure at this time but would be happy to consider outcomes from a feasibility study should this be carried out.

It was noted that any decision to close the bridge was multi-faceted and would need to be considered as part of a feasibility study. As an indication, the following factors would need to be considered as part of any feasibility study:

- A Traffic Regulation Order to close the road
- Highways modifications either side of the bridge to provide a turning head
- Loading and access needs for businesses
- Direction sign changes and physical closure of signing and diverting traffic
- Removal and decommission of traffic signal heads
- Provision of bus stop positions leading back to the A149
- The study could also be not just about closing the bridge but could be about how pedestrian safety could be improved at the bridge

Once a study was completed, capital funding would be required to undertake any works and it was noted this would be a significant sum.

Overview from Historic England

That Potter Heigham Bridge was a scheduled monument, with parts dating back to the 14th and 15th century, with elements from the 18th century added at a later stage. It was noted that the bridge was a grade II listed building and was of national importance as an example of an early bridge.

As a scheduled monument the bridge was legally protected and as such any changes, repairs, or amendments to the bridge required schedule monument consent from the Secretary of State, administered by Historic England.

It was noted that Historic England had a statutory role to advise on the management of the monument and make recommendations when liaising with Highways to ensure materials were appropriate for repair work.

That Historic England was not a driver in discussions regarding whether the bridge should be closed but would respond to any consultations should the community wish to consider the closure of the bridge to vehicular traffic.

As part of any consultation, Historic England would want to ensure that there was appropriate provision for the management of the monument as a historic structure to ensure it was properly maintained.

In considering the possibility of closure to vehicular traffic it was noted that this could result in little negative impact on the fabric of the bridge and for this reason would be unlikely to receive any objections from the view of Historic England.

Overview from Broads Authority

That the Broads Authority was the local planning authority for the area including the river and the areas immediately adjacent to the river. The Broads Authority deal with planning applications for the area and write the planning policies including what development will be allowed and what the aspirations are to change or improve the area.

If there were to be changes to the bridge and if the community wanted the bridge to be closed, the Broads Authority could include this within their planning policies and would conduct a formal consultation. It was noted this would be in response to community views and not driven by Broads Authority.

Comments from Organisations

Organisations present included, Broads Society, Repps with Bastwick Parish Council, Broads Local Access Forum, Tenants Association, Royal Mail and the Traffic Action Group.

Suggestions and comments from organisations included:

- To pedestrianise the bridge citing benefits for members of the public following the Weavers Way trail, enhancement of the areas improving the general atmosphere and experience of the area for locals and tourists, safety.
- To keep the bridge open to traffic but introduce a lower vehicle weight restriction
- To remain open to traffic, pedestrians and horses but restrict use by buses and coaches
- To keep traffic open to the Staithe if the bridge is pedestrianised
- To consider the increase in traffic within the village during peak times such as summer and the impact on postal routes and residential access to driveways
- To consider the impact of increased tourism/traffic and the availability of parking in the area should the bridge be pedestrianised and the area enhanced

Comments from Businesses

Businesses present included, Causeway Caravan Park, Day Boat Hire, Riverside Holidays, Lovelys of Potter, Norada Grill & Tavern, Latham's, Holidays Lets, Bridgestone's and Martham Boats.

Suggestions and comments from businesses included:

- To pedestrianise the bridge citing benefits of preserving the bridge, better enjoyment of the area and development as a tourist attraction instead of a through-route, safety of holiday makers using the bridge by foot often carrying bags and fishing equipment
- To support pedestrianisation of the bridge providing that traffic management is in place for Station Road, car parking is available and bus access outside local businesses
- To keep the bridge open to traffic but reduce the weight limit to restrict certain HGVs and restrict bus access
- To restrict the width of the bridge to incorporate a footpath and recalibrate the traffic signals to give people time to cross the road safely
- To keep the bridge open to traffic and consider building a separate footbridge for use by pedestrians

Comments from members of the public

Suggestions and comments from members of the public included:

- To introduce cameras to enforce weight limits
- To phase traffic signals to give adequate time for pedestrians to pass
- To build a roundabout outside Latham's to help with bus turning
- To build a mini roundabout outside the Post Office to assist traffic calming
- To ensure changes to the bridge, if any, consider access for emergency vehicles
- To ensure traffic management is in place to accommodate increased traffic during peak season and access to residential driveways causing traffic jams and irresponsible driving
- To reduce the width of the bridge and add a barrier to create a path for pedestrians
- To allow buses to access businesses on Bridge Road and turn, should the bridge be closed to traffic

Other comments raised

It was noted that some years ago, a student conducted a bridge closure study as part of their architectural studies and that this was submitted to the Broads Authority for consideration.

It was noted that some time in the early 90s a representative from the Broads Authority, drafted plans for the adjacent triangular marsh for use as car parking.

It was believed that a previous survey had been undertaken by the Broads Authority that could be useful if any feasibility study is carried out.

That the temporary bus stops were causing some confusion for members of the public and were placed in locations that meant users were getting on and off on people's gardens.

It was believed that the bridge was rotating over towards the north (Hickling side). Over the past few years it was believed this rotation was increasing and could be in a worse state than currently believed. It was noted that the water was continuously high over the past 20 years and was washing out material that was never meant to be submerged and required further investigation.

That the road surface on Bridge road was not in good condition and required resurfacing, including potholes and faded red slow signs.

That double yellow lines on Station Road and Bridge Road required repainting and that they were missing outside Latham's as you come out of the car park on the left.

That the bridge traffic lights have been frequently faulty over the past year and required attention.

Response from Highways Area Manager

In response to comments regarding the weight restriction of the bridge it was confirmed that the weight restriction was an environmental weight restriction and was introduced to divert traffic around Potter Heigham, not because the bridge was considered weak. It was noted for information that the bridge was assessed at a 40 tonne loading capacity and fit to take the weight and that the weight restriction of 7.5 tonnes applied to HGVs only and that buses were not included in the Traffic Regulation Order.

In response to comments regarding the perceived rotation of the bridge, it was confirmed that this would be reported back to the Bridges Team for further investigation.

In response to the condition of Bridge Road it was confirmed comments would be fed back to the Highways Engineers and that the yellow lines outside Latham's would be repainted. It

was noted that line marking was generally avoided where possible during the winter months because the work doesn't last.

It was confirmed that the traffic signal fault at the bridge would be reported back to the traffic signals team.

It was confirmed that navigation would not be closed during the season during the daytime.

That ideas suggested by members of the community could be explored as part of a feasibility study. As an indication it was noted that a footbridge adjacent to the bridge would cost in the region of hundreds of thousands of pounds and that a roundabout on the junction of Station Road and the A149 would be in the region of £1,000,000.

That a feasibility study could cost approximately £10,000 and that the study would be required to be completed by the Highways Team followed by a consultation. It was noted that the Community could conduct their own feasibility study if it chooses.

Cost to cover a feasibility study could be supported by the Parish Council, the Parish Partnership Scheme, key stakeholders such as businesses and residents and contributions from the County Councillor.

It was reiterated that there was no funding for any modifications for Potter Heigham at this time and that for the foreseeable future the bridge would be repaired and reopened.

Summary of Events and Next Steps

Thanks were shared to Cally Smith for her support in organising the evening and to Chris Alston and James Albone for their presence and input. It was confirmed that notes from the meeting would be available on the website in due course and shared with the relevant stakeholders via email.

It was noted that a village survey would be distributed to every household during April to support the Council in determining its position on behalf of the community. Attendees were advised that more information on when and how to complete the survey would be provided in due course and were encouraged to complete the survey.