

Introduction

Oxford City Council continue to work with Stantec and the Oxfordshire County Council Engineering Team on the option of refurbishment and strengthening of the existing Gasworks Pipe Bridge. Whilst the proposed refurbishment is the preferred option by the City Council's advisors, the detail will need to be agreed by the County Council as the technical approval authority.

The closure of the bridge has raised concerns from residents and councillors in relation to diversion routes, especially in the winter months.

This bulletin provides an update on recent activities and next steps.

Update

- Following the concerns raised in relation to the diversion routes, Oxfordshire County Council has undertaken a further assessment, via its contractor Milestone (formerly Skanska), to consider potential interim measures for reopening the Gasworks Pipe Bridge in a limited way. This has looked at the bridge condition to inform an assessment of the risks and options for opening the bridge as an interim measure. Based on this assessment, agreement has been made jointly that the bridge cannot safely be opened as a temporary measure during winter months and should remain closed until the structure is refurbished or replaced.
- In terms of costs and timescales the preferred option is for refurbishment of the bridge rather than replacement. The City Council is awaiting a high level draft programme, but early indications suggest that subject to further technical feasibility, procurement, detailed design, planning and construction assumptions, the earliest that the bridge could be reopened is May 2023. It should be noted that this refurbishment option has not yet been agreed with the County and the programme will be updated once a detailed review has been undertaken.
- Officers from Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council held an urgent Stakeholder meeting with Councillor Tidball, Councillor Waite, County Councillor Brad Baines and Bob Price on 15/10/2021 to discuss the diversion routes and update them on progress. As a result of this meeting it was agreed by all that the main aim is to protect children and young people particularly in the darker winter months. Diversion by way of Folly Bridge was agreed to be a poor option due to the constrained footpaths and lack of separation from vehicles. The best diversion route is over the Gasworks Railway Bridge and through the Nature Park. The firm view was that this would shortly become dark and inhospitable. Both the Community Safety and Environmental Sustainability teams at the City Council had immediate negative reactions to high level bright lighting. The principle issue being that pools of brightness between darkness would attract anti-social behaviour hence reducing safety.

- The preferred option is to install solar wayfinding lights through the Gasworks Railway Bridge diversion route. The lights are approved by the Bat Conservation trust and have also been approved by Oxford City Council's Community Safety team as the best option for the diversion route. Although approved by the Community safety team they strongly recommend that this route is not used after the early evening when natural surveillance is greatly reduced and the route becomes isolated.
- In addition, the City Council will be cutting back foliage and lifting tree canopies to increase visibility and sight lines along the diversion route.
- City Council officers will also be placing mirrors on the approach to the railway bridge to aid viewing in the 'blind' area beneath the bridge.
- Communications on personal safety have been developed by Oxford City Councils Community Safety team and will be distributed along with this bulletin.

The Next steps include:

- The City Council and Oxford Direct services will work quickly to install the improvements to the diversion route.
- County to consider signage to Folly Bridge approach to remind pedestrians and cyclists to be mindful of others.
- By the end of November, Stantec will provide a report and scope of works to obtain an agreement in principal for the refurbishment option from Oxfordshire County Council (the technical approval authority). It is expected that County will respond by the New Year.
- By the end of November Stantec will provide a high level cost estimate based on the refurbishment option to the City Council. (Subject to approval as above.) This will be used to inform the on-going City Council budget discussions, which will conclude in February 2022.
- Officers will continue to explore other funding options for refurbishment once a more detailed cost estimate has been received.