

Statement to Corporate Panel – 9th May 2022 – Councillor Joanna Wright

Referred to the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Panel – 27th June 2022

Fixing Cleveland Bridge

As Ward Councillor for Lambridge, many residents on the east of Bath are repeatedly asking why are the renovation works on Cleveland Bridge taking so long?

The disruption of these works is significant to all sections of society. From local residents impacted by long lines of unmoving traffic causing pollution, the impact to traders on deliveries and connections, the hospitality and tourist industry, cyclists forced to deal with signs littered across the cycling space. - in short the closure of this bridge has caused an increase to journey times and distances and further added to Bath's congestion issues and is having a detrimental impact on Bath.

On the 28th April 2022 B&NES Council released a press statement in which Cllr Manda Rigby stated that:

"In January contractors unearthed a complex engineering and safety critical issue which reports show does not have a straight forward solution. Engineers need to be 100 per cent certain any solution will not cause a structural failure on other sections of the bridge. This will take time to model and for this reason we are extending the temporary traffic regulation order for another six months. We had aimed to open the bridge to two-way car traffic during this period, but we have been informed by technical experts that this cannot be done safely."

As the previous Joint Cabinet Member for Transport who was central to these works commencing I would like to ask the Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel to investigate the reason why Cleveland Bridge is still in the process of renovation and why did it take so long for the works to begin?

In one of my first conversations with Officers on becoming a Cabinet member I was informed of the absolute necessity to fix Cleveland Bridge.

I was clearly told how Cleveland Bridge was a deteriorating heritage asset, listed Grade II* which sits on Bath's Primary Road Network (PRN).

And that B&NES Council is a Highway Authority, which is directed by the Department for Transport (DfT) to manage the Primary Road Network and has a statutory duty to keep its highways structures safe.

As the Highway Authority, B&NES operates a bridge assessment process to National Standards. The process can be broken into two parts: the Assessment of the bridge, and the Technical Approval of the assessment. Both functions require a high degree of competency as ultimately the Technical Reviewer is accountable for approving the bridge as safe or agreeing mitigations. The assessment and technical review are an evidence-based process that leads to a safety-critical decision being made regarding the safe use of the bridge. This process is based on technical evidence and is free from external influence.

However, on passing to Cabinet the critical need, from a technical report as to why Cleveland Bridge must be fixed, it became apparent to me that delays to the bridge renovations were a clear political priority for some. The Temporary Weight limit restrictions had stopped HGVs from crossing Cleveland Bridge and this was seen as politically convenient.

Over many months obstacles of various sorts were put in place to delay Cleveland Bridge from being fixed, resulting in Officers making the renovations an operational decision.

I am therefore concerned that the early political delay led to further structural corrosion on Cleveland bridge, which has forced the original 7 month closure to a point where the Council presently is unable to confirm when this bridge will be fixed or open again for two way traffic.

Please can I ask that the Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel looks into this matter?

Joanna Wright

Green Party Councillor for Lambridge