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18 December 2024

Open letter to Otley community via Local Ward Members, Otley Town Council, regarding the footbridge works

Dear all,

We write to update you on the current position in relation to works to the Otley Bridge.

Safety for all users of Otley Bridge remains our paramount concern. To that end, twice weekly safety inspections are taking place to ensure safe pedestrian use of the footbridge. This follows temporary repair work undertaken to install yellow panels since the defects were identified and further remedial works on 3 December 2024.

However, the footbridge has come to the end of its serviceable life and will be replaced before next winter.

This work is guided and constrained by:

- Safety to all highway users being paramount.
- Bird nesting season, which is typically from the end of February running through to August, with the exact dates varying each year.
- The River Wharfe being a fish spawning river, meaning certain types of in-channel works cannot take place between the end of September and mid-June.

Our work over the last year has defined two feasible engineering options for this work:

- A temporary footbridge, necessitating the loss of the large Oak tree and the smaller tulip tree; or
- Closing the existing footbridge and installing temporary traffic signals on the main existing bridge structure for a lengthy period estimated to be around six months, to allow safe pedestrian passage across the existing structure.

We have sought to keep elected ward members informed of the options and in September and beginning of October 12 community consultation events were undertaken at the Otley Community Hub & Library. Feedback from the events and on our website was overall in support of the temporary bridge option.

At this time our position remains that the preferred approach is to provide a temporary footbridge, necessitating the removal of the trees. This is because of the significant impact that installing of 3-way temporary traffic lights (including a pedestrian crossing) on the bridge over such an extended period of time will have in the town. This includes lengthy vehicle queues, air pollution, pedestrian safety, general congestion in the town centre and potential negative impact on local businesses.



However, we acknowledge that feedback in recent weeks from certain local community groups is against the felling of the trees, and recognise the strength of feeling around this.

Consequently we have decided to pause the felling of the tree(s). No further action will be taken by Leeds City Council or its contractors in regard to the oak tree or the other trees before Monday 6 January 2025 at the earliest. We will also seek to protect the tree during this interim period by installing more fencing.

At this point, it is worth reiterating the condition of the footbridge continues to deteriorate. With this in mind, the council is concerned about crowd gathering on the footbridge to watch a swimming event that will take place in the River Wharfe on New Year's Day. This is a significant safety concern, so we have decided to close the footbridge for this event and to install temporary traffic signals from 30 December 2024, along with closure of Mill Lane up to Manor Street. This will allow pedestrians to use one of the bridge's vehicle lanes safely, instead of the footbridge.

The traffic signals will be in place until 3 January 2025 to allow for further detailed investigative work on the footbridge, subject to no major issues being found or arising. This is in line with normal practice for such projects, given the reduced traffic flows during the holiday period.

Assuming that we will later proceed with the installation of a temporary footbridge, it will be necessary to remove the trees before the bird nesting season.

Works to install the temporary footbridge will commence in March for around 12 weeks, with the temporary bridge expected to be open in spring 2025.

We would begin to removing the existing footbridge in spring 2025, with work lasting around 20 weeks.

The new permanent footbridge is expected to be open in autumn 2025.

All dates are dependent on weather and river conditions, and subject to the condition of the Otley Bridge once the existing footbridge has been removed.

Thank you for your engagement on this important matter to date, and hope the above helps explain the constraints we are working to, and how difficult a situation this is for all concerned.

I look forward to completing all works as swiftly and efficiently as possible, allowing this significant investment to proceed so the new footbridge can provide key benefits for the community for many years to come.

Further information and 'frequently asked questions' are available at <https://otleybridge.commonplace.is/>.

Yours faithfully,



Councillor Jonathan Pryor

Deputy Leader of Leeds City Council and Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Sustainable Development

