



Bath Heritage Watchdog

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APPLICATION NUMBER: 16/03484/DLPAO

ADDRESS: Hampton Row Footbridge, Bathwick

PROPOSAL: Prior approval for the removal, and reconstruction of the footbridge to provide gauge clearance for the forthcoming electrification of the railway line (Hampton Row Footbridge - MLN1 105M 65Ch)

CASE OFFICER: Eddie Booth

DATE: 4 August 2016

COMMENT: OBJECTION

Bath Heritage Watchdog objects to this proposal.

Though we have no objection (in principal) to the removal of the existing bridge and its replacement, its replacement must be of a suitable design, alignment and finish for the location. The application description is rather ambiguous though, because the word “reconstruction” could lead some to believe the existing bridge will be put back. Our comments are therefore wide-ranging in case others remain silent in the mistaken belief that they will see like replaced by like.

This application is for prior approval and as such means that this might be the only opportunity the public has to comment. If approved there is no chance of influencing further the design and finish, neither of which are considered acceptable.

CONTEXT OF THE FOOTBRIDGE

The problem here is the fact that the existing structure is not listed in its own right. However the structure lies just yards away from a terrace of Grade II Listed Georgian Houses, abuts the end of the Grade II Listed Canal Retaining Wall, is just a short walk away from the canal and also the Grade II* Listed Georgian Lido of Cleveland Pools. It also is within a Conservation Area and the World Heritage Site. Two Scheduled Ancient Monuments and the Cotswolds AONB are visible from its location so it follows that the footbridge is equally visible from them.

Therefore any unsympathetic design will have a detrimental impact on the environs of listed buildings and the character of the area. We believe the applicants and the local authority should treat this as they would a curtilage listed structure and apply the same standards. The location demands as much.

Though there are no detailed designs as to what is exactly proposed we fear (and the drawing provided seems to indicate) that what will be provided by default is a rather utilitarian agricultural design in green rather along the lines of that installed at Shockerwick. We would not be supportive of such a proposal. Though the existing structure is in poor condition the lattice design does show some quality. The block concrete supports are of no merit.

It appears that in order to gain the required clearance the new structure is aligned rather closer to the listed terrace and requires a considerably longer access ramp which is almost 3 times the length of that existing. It also does not connect to the canal towpath despite that towpath being the primary means of access that most people use. By contrast, the path that the drawings show as the canal-side delivery point is not a desire line and is rarely used; and those approaching along the canal should not have to wear down their own path to the bridge in order to use it.

ISSUES ARGUING AGAINST PRIOR APPROVAL

The increased height, new alignment and increased scale of the access steps and ramps will have a detrimental impact on the setting of the listed terrace and obscure a greater bulk of them from a number of viewpoints. Though the current state of the terrace is a considerable eyesore we understand there is now an extant planning permission to refurbish the terrace. If these are refurbished and occupied there could be further issues in the current proposals concerning overlooking due to the increased height and the closer positioning of the new bridge. This may also require some form of partial screening to overcome this issue.

We feel an off-the-peg design is not appropriate given the proximity of the listed assets and for a highly visible semi-rural location. It is felt a high quality heritage design, perhaps along the lines of what is proposed for areas such as Sydney Gardens, is the way forward. A bespoke design ought to offer an alternative to the proposed closer proximity to Hampton Row, and better access to the canal towpath. We are also concerned about the suggested removal of the existing access steps when no adequate replacement is guaranteed. Despite the reluctance of the local authority and the Canal & River Trust to maintain these steps, the existing steps or a suitable replacement route must be included in the plans. This would almost certainly become the preferred method of accessing the bridge, and an increased footfall over it can be expected in future given the increased awareness of and future plans for the restoration of Cleveland Pools.

The current use of the footbridge as a vantage point for photographing the railway should not be overlooked either. Whilst we understand that the current lattice structure is not compatible with electrification, it should be possible to include in the design of the replacement bridge some camera friendly views from points well clear of the Overhead Line Equipment.

It is felt that given the lack of clarity as to what is proposed in design terms the impact on the nearby listed structures and environments, and the fact that the proposals fail to comply with the relevant policies of the Core Strategy and saved policies of the local plan, the application for prior approval should be refused, requiring detailed proposals to be resubmitted after a period of consultation with stakeholders so that a more suitable replacement can be agreed.