

Boot Street Bridge – a synopsis of events.

In February 2017, following an accident that damaged the parapet of the bridge, SCC proposed a priority scheme for the Boot Street bridge. The Parish Council objected on the basis that it would cause disruptive stationary traffic to the west of the bridge especially during rush hours and did nothing to alleviate the issue of speeding down the hill from Hasketon Road on the approach to the bridge. These concerns were especially relevant to residents of Boot Street itself.

At the 14th March meeting of the PC a letter was agreed and subsequently sent to SCC raising these concerns and asking that SCC consider an extended 30mph limit along Hall Farm Road as far as the Rosery Lane junction. The letter also asked for information on traffic speeds which SCC had gathered from their monitor.

Given the concerns expressed, the matter was then put to the PC AGM in May 2017 with 4 options for consideration: do nothing, create a priority scheme (eastbound or westbound), extend the speed limit, or a combination of the above. The meeting was in favour of an extended speed limit rather than a priority scheme.

The PC wrote to SCC accordingly seeking their further consideration of the option to extend the speed limit as an alternative. The letter was copied to the traffic management department whereas the previous exchanges had been with the 'structures' department, responsible for the bridge itself.

In June 2017 we received a letter from Mr Buckingham at SCC setting out the reasons why an extension of the limit was not an acceptable solution for SCC. He gave reasons for this decision but fortuitously also included the formal guidance used by SCC for such situations. Our own reading of the guidance suggested quite the opposite interpretation and in July we wrote back to Mr Buckingham accordingly.

After further correspondence and many delays in obtaining responses from SCC, we then requested that Mary Evans, cabinet member for traffic, might visit the site so as to see the situation for herself. We were supported on this by Robin Vickery, who was then our SCC ward councillor. After further delays the visit finally took place in September 2018.

After that meeting we had to chase SCC repeatedly until we finally got a response in June 2019 stating that it would cost the PC £1,000 for a full survey and assessment to be carried out. Despite the cost, we accepted that the PC would be prepared to pay for the assessment. Further lengthy delays then occurred in finding out what progress was being made in terms of carrying out such an assessment.

During this time Robin Vickery, our SCC councillor, had been ill and was eventually removed from his responsibilities. Andrew Reid was asked to represent Great Bealings on all SCC matters and CPB wrote to him asking for support. This undoubtedly changed the way the matter was being handled in SCC. The dropping of the Ipswich Northern Relief Road scheme probably also helped focus on the risks associated with Boot Street and its use as the *de facto* northern bypass.

Finally in February 2020 we got a letter from David Chenery at SCC telling us that the case for extending the speed limit was now accepted by SCC, but that the cost to the PC would be £12,000. We wrote back and said that such a cost was way beyond our resources and asking for funding suggestions. We also asked Colin Hedgley to find out if ESC were able to help.

In May 2020 Andrew Reid informed us that SCC had now been able to allocate £8,000 to the scheme and because it was now going to be an SCC expense, it would not be necessary to charge overheads or VAT and the cost had therefore reduced to £10,000. He asked the PC to undertake to cover the balance of £2,000 which we agreed to do.

In June 2020 SCC proposed a scheme which would have entailed extending the 30mph limit over the bridge and creating a 40mph limit from the bridge as far as the Rosery Lane junction. We wrote back asking them to consider 30mph rather than 40mph due to the issues around the Hasketon Road and Lower Street junctions, and specifically to protect pedestrians as they crossed the road at the entrance to the church. We also asked for the limit to be extended up Hasketon Hill.

Our proposals were finally accepted in full and work is now under way to get the necessary legal approvals so as to issue the Traffic Regulation Order required. The PC is fund-raising to cover the balance of £2,000.

Charles Barrington

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