

Downton Bridge Over The Avon

Background

It was suggested some years ago that it would be a good idea to have a footbridge/cyclebridge over the river to connect the two ends of the village. The bridge would be in the area of the Millenium Green but the exact location and the connecting footpaths were open for discussion. A bridge would significantly reduce the distance between the "top end" and the "bottom end", making it easier for top-enders to access the shops and schools. The Parish Council decided to investigate the matter and to come up with suitable plans.

Bridge News Press Release - published 20 February 2021



Press Release – Feb 2021

Downton's Dream of a Footbridge over the Avon and a Traffic Free Path to the Village Centre NOW IN DOUBT



This press release is to update you of recent events and to help find a solution for where we go from here.

But first a brief history and description of this project:

- The idea (not a new one as this has been thought about for years) is to build a foot/cycle bridge across the Avon in the Moot Lane area linking to a path over the fields to the village centre via South Lane
- For 'Top Enders' this allows a pleasant and quick traffic free route to the schools, Coop, industrial estate and other amenities. For 'Bottom Enders' it will mean easier access to the recreational areas of The Moot, the Moot recreation ground and Millennium Green. It would reduce traffic, particularly at busy times, in the Borough and by encouraging cycling and walking, reduce carbon emissions so improving air quality.
- The project was resurrected and adopted by the Parish Council (PC) in 2013. Surveys carried out in 2015 showed a high level of support and it was subsequently included in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- The route from the bridge goes over farmland belonging to the Longford Estate so discussions were held with them and the farmer throughout. The Working Group was delighted when, in 2016, agreement (in principle) was received from the Estate Trustees to create this permissive path.

On the back of this agreement the aim was to get the project 'shovel ready' so that construction could start straight away when funds became available. Since then, the working group has been busy:

- Refining the route
- Held discussions with relevant agencies including the Environment Agency and Natural England
- Organised improvements to route 66 (the path between the Moot and Millennium Green)
- Commissioned a project feasibility/ design study
- Researched bridge designs, costs and commissioned bridge design drawings
- Commissioned an Ecology Study.

Finance for the project, approximately £7,000 to date, was released by the PC from the Charles Church S106 money, given to improve access, and PC funds. The next step was to submit a planning application.

However, on 22nd January this year, the PC received a bombshell from the Longford Estate suddenly withdrawing their agreement in principle to the project. This feels like a great disappointment for the village and incomprehensible as the Working Group members believe that nothing of substance has changed since the agreement in principle was originally given.

The route is believed to be even more important now with the new housing developments and the closure of shops in the High Street.

So what's the solution?

The Working Group has written a letter to the Estate answering their concerns and offering to discuss them further. The aim is for the Estate to rethink their decision and to be made aware of how much the project will enhance the lives of Downtonians.

If you want more information on this project or how you can help in the future, please contact Ian Campbell (01725 512113 or ian.m.campbell@hotmail.co.uk) or Cllr Jane Brentor (07979 630588 or janebren555@gmail.com).

It is noticeable that the Press Release makes no mention of the footpath on the South Close side of the bridge - this path is around 1/2 mile long and for almost all of its length is a muddy bog in winter, completely unsuitable for anyone wearing normal shoes or with a bike. It is also unlit.

It has been suggested that the reason why Longford Estates has withdrawn permission is due to the lack of a plan (and

costings) to upgrade this path to being 'all weather' - the Estate and the tenant farmer does not wish to be blamed in the future for this lack of upgrade.

The Neighbourhood Plan

On page 40 of the plan, it states: TP2 - Downton Parish Council to support local people to establish a new footbridge across the River Avon together with associated cycle paths, including liaison with landowners and developers.

Current Situation

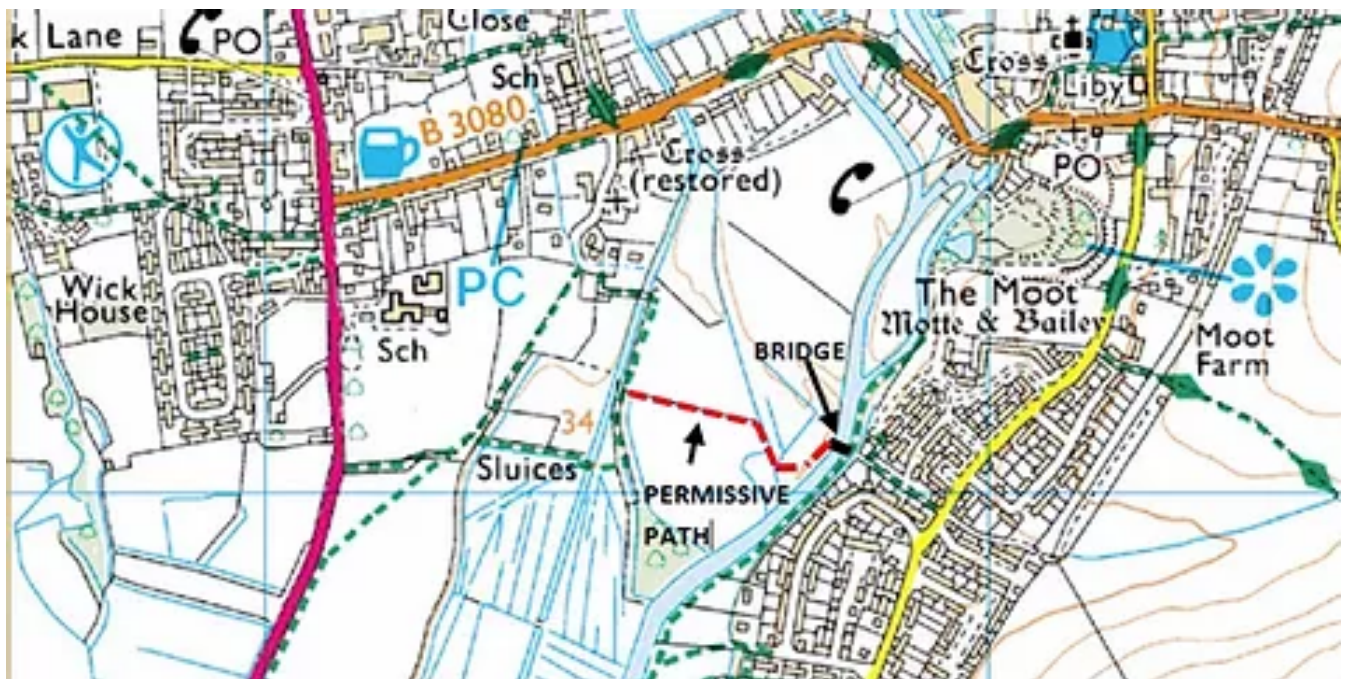
We believe that the Parish Council now have permission from the landowner and are currently considering whether to apply for Planning Permission, so that if some money should become available, there would be nothing to stop the project from going ahead.

Hence if anyone should have objections to the plans when they are put forward they should contact the County Council to make their views known.

Bridge News - as at September 2020

The Parish Council are currently considering the merits of an application for planning permission for a foot and cycle path bridge over the river, as part of a new permissive pathway which would link Moot Lane to the market cross, crossing the water meadows and opening up an alternative route (avoiding the main road) for pedestrians and cyclists. The bridge project work has been undertaken by the Parish Council's Amenities Committee and the Council is now waiting for topographical and ecological studies as well as design drawings before making a decision.

The preferred route for the new path is from Avon Meadow car park by the pumping station along the footpath accessing the river and crossing at that point. On the west side, the bridge would come out on the field currently farmed with bull cattle. The path would turn immediately left and then cross the field, emerging onto the current footpath to the rear of South Lane. This route also links to the existing public footpath along the eastern river bank from Downton Moot gardens to the Millennium Green.



Map of the proposed route

The bridge design has not yet been decided - a design survey has taken place and two different designs are under consideration. One is preferred but this may be changed if planning permission demands it. The proposed bridge will be 1.15m high, with the deck being 1.0 m above flood river level.

An ecological survey is being carried out and will make recommendations as to what might need to be done to support the riverbank and counter erosion. Because cattle are grazed in the meadow at some times of the year, fencing would be put in place either side of the path, with a low flexible barrier to allow flood water to flow through if necessary. As with any footpath, people will use the footpath at their own risk, including the existing river-side footpaths.

In 2016, the parish council consulted all residents on the East side of the river and residents in South Lane on the West side - but further consultation will be required if planning permission is granted. The County Council's planning department will take responsibility for notifying residents who will be most affected about the detailed plans. The Radnor Estate gave their permission for a 'permissive path' (on a minimal lease) in April 2017.



A model of the proposed bridge

It is proposed that access for construction traffic will be via the east side along the Avon Meadow footpath which has a width of at least 3m. Until more details are confirmed, the exact period of construction cannot be determined, although it is expected to be days rather than weeks. Further work would be required to create the paths on either side.

The Parish Council's Amenities Committee believe that this new pathway has the potential to make a great deal of difference to school children from the east of the village, reducing traffic along the High St and Borough and reducing the need for parking. Early consultation showed a high level of public support for using the proposed route, as it would significantly reduce the length of the journey to and from different parts of the village. Consultation with the primary school also showed strong support.

A model of the proposed bridge will be available at the Green Fair on the 27 September in the Memorial Gardens.
