

DRAFT REPORT – for consideration by the Working Group

PROPOSED DOWNTON FOOTBRIDGE AND CYCLE PATH – STATUS JAN 2021

1. Current status

The Amenities Committee Working Group have steered this project for the past 6 years and gathered sufficient information for a Planning Application to be lodged by the Parish Council. However advice provided about the planning process is that this is likely to be iterative so further information may still be required and the bridge design may develop.

Although Longford Estates gave “approval in principle” in May 2016 David Canty, their latest Land Agent, has expressed reservations, therefore important discussions need to take place to obtain the Estates’ views before the Parish Council proceeds with a Planning Application.

The only contact by the Parish Council with Longford Estates’ Trustees has been through their Land Agents. So consideration should be given to arrangements for discussions with the Estate.

This document summarises information that is current to the project. Much has been obtained but due to the long period of time some resides in correspondence archives and has to be accessed by searches.

2. Requirements to proceed

Four conditions need to be met for the foot bridge and cycle path project to be delivered:

a. Political:

The Parish Council needs to affirm to Downton’s Parishioners its commitment to this project.

The village has already expressed its strong interest in several previous surveys. The Parish Council took on the proposal in 2013 and it was confirmed in the 2016 Neighbourhood Plan and is part of the Council’s current 3-year Strategic Plan. In the intervening time studies have been commissioned by the Parish Council that now enable a detailed Planning Application to be lodged.

Technical studies and surveys have been undertaken for the bridge location and permissive path route and there is now little scope for public opinion to alter these. However if Planning Permission is granted a further public survey could be conducted as to whether Downton wishes to proceed with the project.

Similarly Longford Estates needs to affirm its previous “approval in principle” to the original proposal, which is largely unchanged, and enter into detailed discussions with the Parish Council.

b. Legal

Planning Permission has to be obtained.

This process enables both the project and comments from the community to be evaluated professionally by the statutory bodies that the Planners are required to consult, e.g. Wiltshire Council, the Environment Agency, Natural England and the New Forest National Park.

Wiltshire Council may need to be involved regarding the legal Rights of Way and bridge ownership.

An Agreement will be required from Longford Estates for permission for the bridge to land on their river bank and for a permissive path to cross their water meadow.

It will be for them to consult their tenant farmer in this process.

c. Practical

Although the general arrangements for the project have been evaluated and there are no outstanding problems there remain some details that have not yet been completely specified and will require further work, e.g. aspects of the bridge design and its installation, also aspects of the path and fencing specification and construction. These details will necessarily involve the contractors who will be responsible for the construction.

d. Financial

It has always been supposed that grants would be sought to finance the bridge, which would be specific to the bridge and path so not available for other projects. Previous grant investigations revealed that typically the project would have to be delivered within 1 year. Hence it is necessary for the political and legal requirements to be well advanced before funding can be obtained.

Budget estimates for the bridge and path were provided in the Parish Council's proposal to Longford Estates. These were based on the delivered costs of similar projects and were confirmed by subsequent estimates provided by Wiltshire Council for the path and CTS in their Bridge Feasibility Study. Costs may have increased due to the passage of time but the estimates are less than half the cost of the Memorial Hall extension.

As this is a public project it will be necessary to follow a tendering process for the construction and as a result it is likely that practical details will vary between tendering organisations so the detailed specifications cannot be fully determined.

2. Longford Estates' response to the "In Downton" article:

The autumn 2020 edition of the "In Downton" print and on-line magazine contained an article about the Footbridge plans. This was written to inform residents about how the plans were progressing and addressed some frequently asked questions from residents based on information that was already in the Parish Council's records.

Will Dickson and David Canty complained to the Parish Clerk that they had not been given prior warning of the content however little had changed from the 2016 proposal to Longford Estates and the 2019 site visit by CTS Bridges, at which both were present.

Plans for the footbridge were also included in the Parish Council's 2016 Neighbourhood Plan and January 2020 public document "Planning for the next three years " and the "In Downton" article was an opportunity to publicise plans that had been gestating slowly.

The first sentence of the on-line article was "The Parish Council is currently considering the merits of an application for planning permission" and this remains the situation. Contrary to some opinions an application has not yet been made and offers have been made to meet with David Canty to discuss a Planning Application as this is an important part of considering its merits.

3. Bridge Design

The current bridge design is based on a study conducted for the Parish Council by CTS Bridges. They confirmed it would be possible to install a bridge with the required 30m span to cross the river Avon from Avon Meadows on the Moot Lane side of the river.

Tim Kent was commissioned by the Parish Council to produce drawings for a Planning Application and these show the truss bridge supported on piles to the required height above flood levels with approach ramps from Avon Meadow and to the river bank on the western side.

4. Permissive path route and construction

The proposed permissive path route remains essentially that proposed to Longford Estates in 2016, which was selected following surveys and consideration of three other options. However during subsequent site visits Will Dickson expressed concern that the path would cut off a corner of the water meadow so the current drawings show a modification to reduce this cut off with the western ramp set at right angles to the bridge to land on to the river bank before the path crosses the water meadow.

The construction cost for a surfaced path was estimated as £150/m in the proposal to Longford Estates, which was based on the permissive cycle path built at Marchwood. Subsequently Wiltshire Highways gave a budget cost of £170/m. Councillor Peter Quarmby contacted the Environment Agency and obtained information about acceptable path and fencing construction across the flood plain however details will only be confirmed when a Planning Application is evaluated.

Tim Kent recommended The Canal & River Trust Towpath Design document as a reference for the path and the cycling organisation Sustrans also have path specifications. There are local examples of cycle ways and recent permissive path construction in Hamptworth and Langley Woods that demonstrate it will be feasible to construct a suitable path.

5. Current Documents

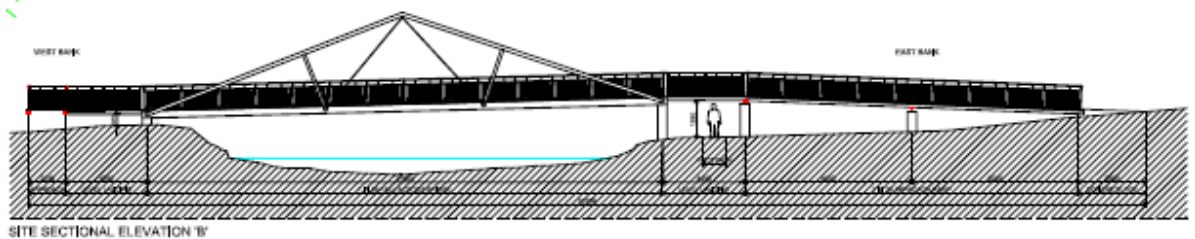
A large correspondence and data file exists but the following documents contain most of the relevant information that remains valid to date:

1. February 2016 New Downton Footbridge and Path Proposal to Longford Estates Trustees from Downton Parish Council
2. May 2016 Letter from Longford Estates to Downton PC giving “approval in principle”
3. Downton Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2026
4. May 2019 CTS Bridges Feasibility Option 4653, Ref “190529 Outline Report.pdf”
5. 20/11/2019 Wiltshire Council Development Services letter to PC following Planning Pre-app meeting
6. 7/1/2020 Environment Agency letter to PC re pre planning application
7. December 2020 CGO Ecology – Ecological Survey for the bridge site

6. Drawings

The drawings supplied recently for the Planning Application are:

1. Existing Foot Bridge Site Plan and Elevations 1262-01A – *based on a topographical survey that provided accurate ground levels and contours.*
2. Proposed Foot Bridge Site Plan and Elevations 1262-02A – *similar to 1. But better as it shows the bridge with a part copy below*



3. Proposed Foot Bridge Block Plan – *1:500 scale*
4. Proposed Foot Bridge Location Plan – *1:1250 scale and similar to 3. but shows a bigger area*
5. Proposed Permissive Path route sketch plan 2020-12-02 V02

Site Meetings

Prior to the May 2016 Longford Estates “approval in principle” Site meetings were held with members of the Working Group, Will Dickson, the tenant farmer, and Alasdair Jones-Perrott, Longford Estates Land Agent at the time. The two subsequent meetings of substance were:

1. 3/4/2019 Visit by Roger Clegg from CTS. Present J Brentor, W Dickson, D Canty, T Kent, I Campbell
2. 13/11/2019 Planning Pre-app with Emily Jones Planning Officer. Present J Brentor, I Campbell, B Cornish