

Bradford on Avon Area Board, August 2016

Feasibility Study: Pedestrian Crossing of the River Avon, Bradford on Avon

Background

The need to improve pedestrian access and safety in Bradford on Avon was a major finding from the results of the resident survey commissioned by Michelle Donelan MP and is a key issue raised in the Neighbourhood Plan for Bradford on Avon. How to make the town centre more “user-friendly” to pedestrians has been the subject of recent talks between the Town Council and the Wiltshire Council Highways department.

The existing town bridge is a key area of pedestrian insecurity. The restricted width of both the pavement and the carriageway of this bridge provoke difficulties for pedestrians to pass on the bridge without stepping into the busy carriageway. There is a constant danger of pedestrians being hit by large vehicle wing mirrors as they cross the bridge.

A separate footbridge crossing over the river has been proposed in the past but architectural designs were rejected by the public at a town poll. The lessons of this failed exercise need to be understood if the project is to be successfully resurrected.

The Area Board (at its meeting on 11 May 2016) and the Town Council (at its meeting on 27 June 2016) agreed to jointly commission a fresh feasibility study to investigate options for a new footbridge.

Brief

The agreed brief for this initial feasibility study is to:

1. Review existing topographical and geological plans and appraise any constraints.
2. Analyse existing reports and identify any shortfalls in information that would be required.
3. Study the wider implications for the town centre both in terms of its existing or planned infrastructure, commercial development, any environmental issues as well as the functional aspects of pedestrian safety and mobility.
4. Evaluate the previous schemes for a pedestrian bridge over the river in the town centre and the feedback from these processes including alternative locations and options for a footbridge, in consultation with the principal stakeholders of the town.
5. Deliver a proposal to be put forward for public consultation, based on points 1-4, which should include: analysis of possible sites, types of viable pedestrian bridge and an indication of the costs involved.

All this should be done with a continuous process of community involvement, engaging the high proportion of professionals and high levels of community spirit in the town.

This initial feasibility study needs to be carried out by a multidisciplinary team with experience in urban design and planning and the design and structural calculation of pedestrian bridges; this will include assessment of broader environmental issues and will require a good understanding of all aspects of the town including its relevant stakeholders. Experience in successful community engagement schemes will be fundamental for the success of this project.

The initial feasibility study should facilitate and contribute to the development of a Strategic Brief for this project, through direct engagement with the Town Council and other stakeholders, to include business planning and fundraising for delivery of the bridge construction.

Cost

The contract value for this initial feasibility study is a very modest £ 5,000, being a £ 2,500 grant from the Bradford on Avon Area Board and £ 2,500 from Bradford on Avon Town Council.

Under Wiltshire Council procurement regulations two quotes have been sought for this work.

Fees will be paid 50% on inception and the balance on satisfactory completion of the study.

Contractor

LaBox Design <http://www.laboxdesign.com/> an architectural company in Bradford on Avon with the relevant expertise and local knowledge, has agreed to take the commission at a subsidised rate in demonstration of its commitment to the local area. Led by Sarah Gibson, the practice specialises in a community-led design approach. LaBox will sub-contract with specialist bridge engineers to provide necessary technical advice.

Project Management

The contractor will report on progress to a small project team comprising:

Councillor Magnus Macdonald, Chairman Bradford on Avon Area Board of Wiltshire Council and Bradford on Avon Town Councillor

Peter Dunford, Community Engagement Manager, Wiltshire Council

Sandra Bartlett, Town Clerk, Bradford on Avon Town Council

Project updates will be reported to the Full Town Council and to the Area Board.

Timescale

September – December 2017: technical assessments, consultation with key stakeholders

January – March 2017: community engagement, exhibition of ideas, final report on outcomes

Other Considerations

It now looks likely that the Neighbourhood Plan for Bradford on Avon will go to its referendum in early 2017. Given the history of the pedestrian river crossing issue and that it is not an appropriate matter to be considered within the Neighbourhood Plan, it will be important that the public consultations on these two matters do not become confused in the public mind or that strong feelings about the river crossing impact adversely on support for the Neighbourhood Plan.

The local elections to Wiltshire Council and to Bradford on Avon Town Council are to be held in May 2017. It will be important that public involvement in this feasibility study is concluded before the end of March 2017 to avoid the matter becoming “politicised” within the forthcoming campaigns.

Brief prepared by Peter Dunford, Community Engagement Manager

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