

Following the issues created by Network Rail's first 3 bridge projects in Wiltshire, the Council instructed Network Rail that it would not be considering any future applications for road closures in the County until the Council had clarified its expectations to them.

A lot of the previous issues were due to the lack of prior notification or engagement with the Council as a key stakeholder in the process. The implications of this meant that there was very poor communication to the key people that needed to know about the works and feed into process. The lack of proper engagement also meant that the Council was unable to plan and coordinate effectively and ensure that appropriate measures were put in place to mitigate the impact of the works. Wiltshire Council has now set up a project team with officers from both Network Rail and the Council who liaise regularly and meet on a monthly basis.

In terms of the Council's expectations of Network Rail, it has agreed that the following information will be provided at the application stage for any road closure so that it can give due consideration to their request:-

- Evidence of consideration of all options to undertake the works with minimal disruption to the Council's highway network, and detailed reason for discounting if appropriate.
- Detailed works programmes showing resources, working days, hours etc. to evidence their need for the occupation of the highway for that time.
- All necessary design approvals / checks / licences are in place prior to application.
- Comprehensive communication plans to engage the local stakeholders affected by their works.
- Appropriate contact points at Network Rail for project updates / local communication points.

An outline timetable has been written for their submissions, which specifies a minimum of 24 weeks' notice of all closures – the Council would expect significantly more notice for the more contentious schemes.

Since the establishment of the project group, there have been some real improvements in communication, although there are still some areas that could work better. The Network Rail officers are however keen to ensure that they get this right. Following a meeting with them today, they have agreed to supply an officer from Network Rail to work specially on these projects dealing with local communications and correspondence 4 days a week. We are endeavouring to ensure that this officer is based in County Hall for 2 of these days to ensure a joined up communication process. It is hoped that this officer will be available within approximately 3 weeks.

The Council continue to work closely with Network Rail to ensure that our statutory obligations to minimise disruptions to traffic are managed as best as possible.