

Emails about DCC plans to demolish the old Pye Bridge Line railway bridge at Bullbridge

1) Friday 23rd July 2010: From Freda Raphael, BASA Chairperson, to Cllr Juliette Blake:

Hello Juliette,

I've just been down to Gill's and we've dug out the DET article my neighbour had told me about. It was published on Weds 14th July.

I am assuming that the bridge DCC proposes to demolish - during THIS financial year - is the now disused LM&SR (Ambergate & Pye Bridge section) bridge crossing the A610 between Bullbridge and Riversdale.

The proposed cost is £150,000.

I would have thought that, in these constrained times there is no need to spend all that cash on an unnecessary demolition.

Also, I had been led to believe that it is important for this bridge to remain because it acts as a buffer for the main line bridge just beyond. If a vehicle strikes the redundant bridge not much harm is done (except to the bridge!). If a vehicle strikes the main-line railway bridge, then all traffic - on the road as well as the railway - has to halt until inspectors can pass the bridge as safe. I myself experienced this last year (I think) when I was trying to get to Leicester. The train was halted beyond Ambergate station because a vehicle on the A6 had struck the railway bridge in Ambergate. The train was not allowed to cross the bridge (and traffic on the A6 was halted, too). I understood later that the line was closed until inspectors could get there, some hours later.

Thirdly, this bridge is yet another part of the industrial history at risk of Bullbridge/Sawmills - which centres around its transport history. There are enough historic sites at risk as it is. English Heritage estimates that 94% of scheduled monuments in private ownership in the East Midlands are at risk. I know this bridge isn't a scheduled monument, nor do I know who owns it (DCC, presumably) but you could argue that if nearly every privately-owned scheduled monument in the EM is at risk, what hope is there for the unlisted, unscheduled historic sites?

Added to all this: why have local people (and especially as we have a very active civic society here) not been consulted? Is this yet another example of motor vehicle users and highways planners taking precedence over everything else, assuming that roads are purely for their convenience?

This bridge could, one day, become part of the greater Ripley/Cromford canal greenway. The A610 is difficult enough to cross. What better than to use an already-in-existence historic bridge as part of a greater pedestrian/cycle/greenway?

So, yes, please investigate this for us if you can.

Best regards,

freda

2) 27th July 2010: From Cllr Juliette Blake to Peter Stone and David Orton, Environmental Services, DCC:

Dear Peter and David

Sorry to trouble you with something else but I asked Chris Jackson about this and have had no reply.

I had no idea whatsoever about the removal of this bridge. I would be against its removal to be honest.

It would be great as a footbridge for people to use. Not to mention the very good point that it acts as a buffer to protect the Main Train Line!!!

When "live" bridges are hit it causes chaos on both road and rail.

Can we have a rethink about this one?

I would far rather the money was used to better use.

For example, I have been begging for years for the money to fund a pavement between Heage and Belper along the road which goes from Old Road in Heage, via Boothgate and towards Openwoodgate.

Young people walk along this stretch to go to school in Belper and it is deadly. Not to mention all sorts of other pedestrians who use it – you cannot see them in the dark shadows in winter when it gets dark early.

No pavement, fast cars = an accident waiting to happen!!!

I am frustrated that we may be thinking of spending all that money removing a bridge when schemes like this go un-funded.

Please can you get back to me on this?

Thanks guys. I really will leave you in peace now I promise!!! J

Very Best Wishes

Juliette

3) 28th July 2010: From Pete Leigh to Cllr Juliette Blake:

Cllr Blake

The removal of this redundant bridge has been on the cards for some years , but funding has to date not being made available . It has however been included in the Environmental Services Capital Schemes programme 2010/11 approved by Cabinet on 13th July this year .

Due to the number of strikes at the bridge [drivers ignoring the 13' 9" warning signs well in advance] a set of Vehicle Activated height Warning signs were provided some years ago . Unfortunately , the bridge strikes continue unabated . The latest major strike was in January this year . There is record of 21 other significant strikes since 1988 . There is lots of visible evidence on the bridge of strikes and scrapes .

It's a combination of the very low height with the limited forward visibility of the structure - and the inability [or stupidity] of HGV drivers to know the height of their vehicle and being able or interested enough to take heed of the plethora of warning signs and information given to them .

I think it is fair to say that we have been very lucky so far that we have had no serious or fatal injuries resulting from these bridge strikes , as the vehicle is usually flipped over due to the angle of approach . We are fortunate that no following vehicles have collided with the fallen vehicle or displaced load , and more fortunate still that there hasn't been a pedestrian passing under the bridge at the time .

As far as I know , the bridge serves no purpose and it has no services [it used to carry a gas pipe] and isn't accessible to the general public from private land alongside .

I acknowledge that there is another bridge with limited headroom [signed at 15' 3"] between this bridge and the A6 and it carries the main rail line . The intention is that the safety/warning features at the disused bridge will be transferred to this 2nd bridge , which has far better forward visibility , and hopefully the height signs will have more actual impact . It might be that we will need to consider if a further measure of traffic signals at this 2nd bridge may be worthwhile to ensure only one line of traffic passing through the centre arch at any one time . But bearing in mind we will have an added 18" of clearance available , the number of potential strikes from over-height vehicles should be reduced . I remain unconvinced of the argument that providing additional height clearance by removing the very low redundant bridge will lead to lots more HGV using the A610 , as there are similar limitations both north and south on the A6 from the Hurt Arms at Ambergate to restrict any very high HGV's .

As I've mentioned above , the removal of this bridge is a safety scheme and my own personal view is that we cannot afford to leave it in place any longer than is absolutely necessary . It has no known historical significance [again , as far as I know] nor is it in a Conservation area ; I've no direct knowledge of any plans/proposals for a greenway that might or might not follow this route or potentially make use of it ; and there appears to be no time-scale for this greenway construction/development .

My colleagues in the Structures Design group are already looking at the work that will be needed to remove this bridge .

If you wish to question further the inclusion of this scheme in the current Capital Programme , can I suggest you speak direct to Cllr Chris Jackson , Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport .

Regards

Pete Leigh
Senior Project Engineer

Traffic & Safety [Sth]

4) 5th August 2010: From Freda Raphael to Cllr Juliette Blake:

Dear Juliette,

Have you had a reply yet from Cllr Jackson about DCC's proposal to demolish this bridge?

We understood that the new coalition government is all for 'The Big Society' and local people being involved with local issues. Judging by the way local people are being steam-rolled by DCC Highways (pardon the pun) / Traffic & Safety (uneasy bedfellows, surely) the new government message has yet to trickle through to local government.

There is a great deal of anger locally about this. Mr Leigh seems oblivious to local reality - which is that demolishing this bridge will NOT remove the problem. The problem will move further along the road causing real problems at the main line rail bridge. Strikes to the main line bridge will result in closure of the main line until safety checks have been done.

Removing the bridge will encourage bigger vehicles to use our already over-burdened stretch of the A610. Local people are trying to get traffic lessened along this road, not increased.

Removing the bridge will force high vehicles into the centre of the road to get under the main line rail bridge - a further hazard rather than a solution to the problem.

Installing traffic lights to overcome THIS problem is, surely, another Highways Engineer's joke. How much will that cost? (On top of the £150,000 to demolish the old bridge)

Demolishing things to overcome a problem is a 1960s response - remember that we used to have the beautiful 1794 canal aqueduct spanning our valley until 1968 - when Highways knocked it down - to widen the road (so that bigger vehicles could move faster through our small community ...)

We think that it's time for Highways to begin considering people as well as lorries, vans and cars. People were here first. People were also - once upon a time (not so long ago) able to walk beside the roadway from one house to their neighbour, or the local shop, or the local school, or the local church, or wait for a bus. Can Sawmills residents do this in safety today? Ah! we have returned to those strange bed-fellows: Traffic and Safety.

Please keep pursuing this issue, Juliette.

freda

Freda Raphael
Chairperson
Bullbridge and Sawmills Area Civic society
www.bullandsaw.co.uk

5) 7th August 2010: From Cllr Juliette Blake to Cllr Chris Jackson:

Dear Chris

I wrote to you about the proposed demolition of Bullbridge Bridge but I did not hear back. I had a reply from Pete Leigh but he told me I would need to contact you to discuss the inclusion of this scheme in the Capital Programme which is why I am now writing to you again.

I have received an enormous number of letters of complaint about the proposed demolition of the bridge. I would appreciate answers so I can relay them to my concerned electorate.

Please can you let me know whether or not there will be a formal consultation on the demolition of Bullbridge Bridge to allow local Members and residents to have their say?

Do you know if Network Rail have any plans to upgrade the Riversdale/Ambergrove bridge?

I have no doubt that if the Bullbridge bridge is removed, strikes on the Riversdal/Ambergrove bridge will increase, it's difficult to use light beams to protect a barrel vaulted bridge arch.

I am also concerned that if vehicles have to reverse back from that bridge because they ignore the warning signs then it will add to the distance they have to reverse along the A610 and therefore the hazard this creates along the A610.

Can you tell me when or if the Bullbridge Bridge became a Council responsibility? Is it still owned by Network Rail or was it transferred to the County when they purchased the rest of the line towards Buckland Hollow?

There is a great deal of anger locally about this. Demolishing this bridge will NOT remove the problem in my view. The problem will move further along the road causing real problems at the main line rail bridge. Strikes to the main line bridge will result in closure of the main line until safety checks have been done. In a previous job I worked at Railtrack as the Finance Manager for debt recovery for bridge bashes and level crossing hits. I know only too well how many hours the trains can be delayed for which has enormous cost implications (tens of thousands of pounds and sometimes hundreds of thousands of pounds which are passed on to the rail travelling public we should be supporting and encouraging in the new environmentally friendly aware world) not to mention safety concerns for rail users / road users / pedestrians when "live" bridges are hit.

Removing the bridge will encourage bigger vehicles to use the already over-burdened stretch of the A610. Local people are trying to get traffic lessened along this road, not increased.

Removing the bridge will force high vehicles into the centre of the road to get under the main line rail bridge - a further hazard rather than a solution to the problem.

Installing traffic lights to overcome this problem would no doubt cost our council tax payers a lot of extra money. How much will it cost on top of the £150,000 to demolish the old

bridge? I am amazed in the current severe deficit position for public services locally and nationally that this scheme is being considered even!!!

I have been told that demolition of this bridge would result in service pipes having to be buried under the road as the pipes were used to carry gas from the landfill site behind the Moorlands Road development.

Some residents are annoyed that removal of this bridge would result in removal of the chance for Lockwoods to use rail not road in the future – and have mentioned that the Conservatives said prior to the elections that redundant railway lines would be protected.

Demolishing things to overcome a problem is a 1960s response - remember that the area used to have the beautiful 1794 canal aqueduct spanning the valley until 1968 - when Highways knocked it down to widen the road (so that bigger vehicles could move faster through the Ambergate, Sawmills and Riversdale small communities).

My electorate and I feel that Highways need to consider people as well as lorries, vans and cars. People were here first. People were also - once upon a time (not so long ago) able to walk beside the roadway from one house to their neighbour, or the local shop, or the local school, or the local church, or wait for a bus. Can Sawmills residents do this in safety today? The answer is no they cannot. I once waited over 15 minutes to cross the A610 from the village hall to the post office.

I am incredibly frustrated Chris that amongst other things I have been fighting to get a pedestrian crossing installed at Riversdale and at Sawmills and I have been flatly refused due to financial constraints. I would much prefer this £150k plus whatever the traffic lights will cost to go on installing pedestrian crossings at these two locations (indeed I am sure there would still be money left over to fund a crossing on Church Street at Heage as well) – maybe even more money would be left to satisfy other pedestrian safety priorities that I have for my Division.

So please can we have a rethink on this Chris? I am furious that as the local Elected Member I have not been consulted on this issue and neither has my electorate. I have spent the best half of the last month on the phone and on the email dealing with very angry and upset residents. Surely as the local Member elected by the local people to fight their corner I am entitled to have a say on priorities within my Ward? The argument that it is being done for health and safety reasons does not wash with me when I have been fighting for years for pedestrian crossings and anti speeding measures which have fallen on deaf ears. All of the safety improvements I am asking for e.g. the pavement between Heage and Openwoodgate plus the anti speeding measures and pedestrian crossings could result in fatalities if they are not addressed. They could probably all be done if this project to spend £150k+ was cancelled. I feel very strongly that as funding is so restricted local knowledge and public opinion should take priority to make the decisions as to what, when, how and at what cost. In fact it is the intention of our new Government to give local people more say from now on.

I am copying this to the interested parties who are on email. Please reply as a reply to all for information. Since the article appeared on 14th July my telephone has not stopped

ringing and I have spent a huge number of hours trying to correspond with people individually on this issue. It would make life much easier if everyone can be kept "in the loop" and they can then hear your reply straight from the horse's mouth.

Many thanks.

Very Best Wishes

Juliette

PS: I just want to stress the point that by far the greatest majority of bridge strikes happen to vehicles travelling west (Ripley to Ambergate). If the bridge is removed that leaves the main line bridge totally exposed. I am only aware of one hit coming from vehicles travelling east.

Very Best Wishes

Juliette

6) 10th August 01.55am: From Cllr Juliette Blake to BASA:

Hi Freda (and everyone!!!)

I spoke to Chris Jackson today (well actually yesterday!!!) and he has promised to put the bridge at Bullbridge on the agenda at his Highways meeting tomorrow (well actually today now!!!) with a view to having a rethink about it. I well and truly bent his ear!!!

So fingers crossed!!!

I promise to forward it on when I hear more.

Very Best Wishes

Juliette