

SUBJECT **DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION REPORTS** **ITEM 7**

REPORT OF Head of Planning & Building Control

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| APPLICATION NOS. | P11/E0743 and P11/E0745/LB |
| APPLICATION TYPE | Full and Listed Building |
| REGISTERED | 18 th May 2011 |
| PARISH | Whitchurch-on-Thames |
| WARD MEMBERS | Pearl Slatter |
| APPLICANT | Ann Ducker MBE Mr Geoff Weir – Company of Proprietors of Whitchurch Bridge |
| SITE | Whitchurch Bridge, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames |
| PROPOSALS | Reconstruction of bridge involving the partial demolition of the listed building |
| AMENDMENTS | None |
| GRID REFERENCE | 463666/176836 |
| OFFICER | Tom Wyatt |

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This application is referred to Committee at the discretion of the Development Manager.

1.2 The application site (which is shown on the OS extract **attached** as Appendix A) comprises Whitchurch Bridge, which forms part of the B471 road and provides a main crossing over the River Thames between Whitchurch-on-Thames and Pangbourne accounting for around 6000 vehicle crossings per day. A bridge has been in this position since 1792, however, the original bridge has been rebuilt on two occasions with the current steel bridge originating from 1902. The bridge is Grade II listed with the listing description as follows:

Road bridge over River Thames. 1902, to the designs of Joseph Morris; built by Cleveland Bridge and Engineering Company Ltd. Steel lattice-girder construction, of four spans; the three piers comprising pairs of steel posts, with diagonal bracing between, support the carriageway, which is on transverse beams and steel jack-arches. The parapets are the lattice-girders. Red brick abutments with stone dressings and terminal piers. NOTE: The first bridge was built in timber in 1792, by Act of Parliament, to the designs of John Treacher, surveyor to the Thames Commissioners. It was a toll bridge and its original tollhouse (qv) still exists. The bridge was rebuilt in wood in 1852 and again in 1902, in steel.

1.3 The bridge also lies within the Whitchurch Conservation Area and within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Although most of the bridge lies within South Oxfordshire, the section on the southern bank lies within West Berkshire and as such applications for the proposal have also been submitted to West Berkshire Council. These applications have not yet been determined.

2.0 **THE PROPOSAL**

2.1 The application seeks planning permission and listed building consent for the reconstruction of the bridge. The proposal would involve dismantling the existing bridge and carrying out off site repairs to several elements of the bridge before replacing these elements along with new structural elements primarily consisting of 6 new longitudinal steel plate girders spanning between the existing pier positions and new columns with cross bracing. The existing deck structure will be replaced by longitudinal steel plate girders with concrete infill. The existing lines of girders either side of the bridge and the existing column supports will be retained as a result of the development for aesthetic reasons but will no longer have a load bearing function.

2.2 The off-site repair works are proposed to take place on land adjoining the bridge in Pangbourne Meadows. This site is entirely within West Berkshire and as such an application for this part of the proposals has only been made to West Berkshire Council.

2.3 Copies of the current plans accompanying the application are **attached** as Appendix B. Other documentation associated with the application can be viewed on the council's website, www.southoxon.gov.uk. The supporting documentation accompanying the applications includes the following:

- Arboricultural Report
- Construction Management Plan
- Design and Access Statement
- Ecology Report
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Heritage Asset Assessment
- Noise Assessment Report
- Planning Statement
- Transport Impact Report

3.0 **CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS**

3.1 **Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council** – The Parish Council objects as the proposals do not provide for any improvements to pedestrian safety in terms of the alignment and width of footpaths on the approach to and across the bridge. The Parish Council is also concerned about arrangements for traffic management during the period of construction.

3.2 **Goring Parish Council** – Objects due to serious concerns about the lack of detailed information relation to the problems that are likely to be encountered by the extra traffic that will need to be diverted through Goring.

3.3 **Woodcote Parish Council** – The Parish Council has stated that they have no strong views on the application but do raise concerns about pedestrian safety, noise from construction activities and the impact of diverted traffic on the surrounding area.

3.4 **Goring Heath Parish Council** – The Parish Council has no strong views but notes that the dangerous footways are not being addressed in the scheme.

3.5 **English Heritage** – The proposal would harm the significance of the bridge. Its aesthetic qualities derive from the lightness of the structure and the reconstructed bridge would cease to be the original structure as the original elements would only be for decorative purposes.

The consultation responses from English Heritage are **attached** at Appendix C.

- 3.6 **Conservation Officer** – The proposals would have a substantial impact on the significance of the bridge. The alterations would diminish the engineering interest of the structure and the appearance of the bridge from the riverside would be significantly altered. It is not clear why a combination of repairs/strengthening works and the use of appropriate traffic management cannot address the future requirements of Whitchurch Bridge.
- 3.7 **OCC Highway Liaison Officer** – No objections. The closure of the bridge raises a number of implications for the network in terms of redistribution of traffic and parking near the bridge. The following measures are required through agreements and conditions as appropriate should the application be approved:
- The temporary footbridge should be kept open to pedestrians through the reconstruction works.
 - A signage strategy will be required in relation to diverted traffic
 - Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders will be required to avoid parking in certain areas to avoid obstruction of the highway.
 - A bus route will need to be rerouted requiring a shuttle bus to Pangbourne via Goring. The developer will need to provide funding for this.
- 3.8 **Environment Agency** – No objections but the temporary compound structures should be raised as much as possible. (N.B the compound is proposed on land entirely within West Berkshire).
- 3.9 **Environmental Health Officer** – Noise from the bridge demolition and construction has high potential to cause disturbance to local residents. A condition is recommended to help reduce this impact.
- 3.10 **Forestry Officer** – No objections. The trees marked for removal (within South Oxfordshire) have no great arboricultural value. The tree works and tree protection measures detailed in the submitted arboricultural report should be secured by condition.
- 3.11 **Thames Water** – A water main crosses the site and needs to be diverted at the developers' cost. No impact piling should take place until a piling method statement has been approved.
- 3.12 **County Archaeologist** - No objections
- 3.13 **Countryside Officer** – No objections subject to a condition requiring the mitigation and enhancement measures outlined within the submitted Ecological Scoping Survey to be carried out.
- 3.14 **Chilterns Conservation Board** – No comment
- 3.15 **Whitchurch Traffic and Pavements Advisory Group** – The proposal provides a unique opportunity to improve the pedestrian approaches to the bridge. Such improvement measures should be incorporated into the proposal.
- 3.16 **Goring and Streatley Amenity Association** – The plans submitted for coping with the displaced traffic from the bridge closure are considered inadequate. An improved traffic plan should be agreed prior to the grant of any planning permission.
- 3.17 **Pangbourne Medical Practice Patient Participation Group** – Concerns expressed regarding noise and vibration in relation to the working environment at the Boathouse Surgery in Pangbourne and also in relation to the health of patients.

3.18 **Neighbour Representations** – 69 individual representations have been made raising the following concerns and comments:

- The pavements approaching the bridge should be increased in width and the pavement across the bridge should be placed on the downstream (eastern) side.
- The pavements should be realigned and the pavement approaching the bridge from Pangbourne should be diverted through the Adventure Dolphin car park
- A safe crossing needs to be provided on the Whitchurch approach to the bridge
- Noise impact from demolition and construction works
- Parking problems in the vicinity of the bridge whilst works take place
- Loss of trees
- Lack of provision for a temporary road bridge
- Need to remove on-street parking in Streatley to avoid congestion
- Parking congestion will take place in Whitchurch
- Work should be done during the summer
- The bridge should be widened
- Useable width of footpath across bridge is only 1.3 metres due to the ironwork
- Parking provision should be made on both sides of the bridge including disabled parking
- There is a lack of detailed plans for alternative routes during the bridge closure
- Increased journey times
- Noise and vibration impact on the doctors' surgery

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 None directly relevant to this proposal.

5.0 **POLICY AND GUIDANCE**

5.1 Policies of the Adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP):

- G1, G2, G6, C1, C2, C3, C4, C6, C8, C9, CON1, CON3, CON5, CON7, CON11, EP1, EP2, D1, D7, D11, R8, R9, CF1, T1, T2, T3

5.2 Government Guidance:

- PPS1, PPS4, PPS5, PPS7, PPS9, PPS25, PPG13, PPG24

5.3 Supplementary Planning Guidance

- South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2008 (SODG)

5.4 Other Guidance

- Whitchurch-on-Thames Village Plan

6.0 **PLANNING AND LISTED BUILDING ISSUES**

6.1 The issues that are relevant to these applications are:

1. The impact on the architectural and historic interest of the listed building
2. The impact on the wider Conservation Area and Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
3. The impact on local residents and businesses
4. The impact on highway safety and congestion
5. The impact on trees and ecology

The Impact on the Architectural and Historic Interest of the Listed Building

- 6.2 The existing bridge has been Grade II listed since 1995. Policy CON1 of the SOLP states that proposals for the demolition of any listed building will not be permitted. Policy CON3 of the SOLP states that any alteration to a listed building must respect its established character and not diminish the special or architectural qualities which make it worthy of inclusion on the statutory list. Policy CON5 of the SOLP seeks to ensure that development does not adversely affect the setting of a listed building.
- 6.3 In relation to guidance contained within PPS5, the bridge is a designated heritage asset and having regard to Para. HE9.1 of PPS5 ‘there should be a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated heritage assets and the more significant the designated heritage asset the greater the presumption in favour of its conservation should be....significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. Loss affecting any designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification’.

Para. HE9.2 of PPS5 goes on to state that ‘Where the application will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance local planning authorities should refuse consent unless it can be demonstrated that:

- i) the substantial harm to or loss of significance is necessary in order to deliver substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss; or
- ii) (a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
(b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term that will enable its conservation; and
(c) conservation through grant funding or some form of charitable public ownership is not possible; and
(d) the harm to or loss of the heritage asset is outweighed by the benefits of bringing the site back into use.

- 6.4 In relation to this proposal the key issue is whether the proposal will result in substantial harm, and if so whether there is justification, having regard to Para. HE9.2 of PPS5 as stated above, to allow the proposal. Where the impact of a proposal is deemed to be less than substantial harm, having regard to Para. HE9.3 of PPS5 it is still necessary for the local planning authority to weigh the public benefit of the proposal against the harm and to recognise that the greater the harm to the significance of the heritage asset the greater the justification will be needed for the loss.

- 6.5 A Heritage Asset Assessment has been submitted in support of the application, and within the summary of this document it states:

The cultural heritage significance of the bridge rests largely on its aesthetic qualities, particularly its graceful curved deck which complements the gentle undulations of the surrounding landscape but it is also of interest through its contribution to the important variety of bridges on the Thames. It adds to this variety through its character, form and historical origins as well as its function as a private toll bridge. Another area of significance is the sense of historical continuity generated by the fact that the current structure operates in the same way as the late 18th century bridge.

- 6.6 The summary of this document goes onto conclude:

The fact that the most important aspects of the bridge's significance will be least affected (ie aesthetic value and contribution to the collection of Thames bridges) and that the areas of greater impact are concentrated on areas of less significance (evidential value and historic fabric) means that it is considered that the overall impact of the current proposals will be less than substantial on the heritage significance of the bridge.

- 6.7 English Heritage and the council's Conservation Officer have been consulted on the application. In contrast to the conclusions of the Heritage Asset Assessment English Heritage consider that the proposal constitutes substantial harm and that inadequate justification has been provided for this level of harm having regard to Para. HE9.2 of PPS5. English Heritage considers that the proposal would harm the significance of the bridge through the diminution of its aesthetic qualities through the addition of the new structural elements. The new structural elements would also mean that the reconstructed bridge would cease to be the structure erected in 1901-02 and become a modern structure with the original elements having a decorative role only. As such English Heritage considers that the evidential and historical values of the bridge, which are dependant on the authenticity and integrity of the original structure will be lost.
- 6.8 In their consultation response, which is **attached** at Appendix C, English Heritage states that, 'While the Heritage Statement supplied as part of the application makes it clear that the bridge was built using tried and tested technology and is not structurally innovative the bridge is of evidential and historical value as an example of how this existing technology could be pushed to produce structures of apparent lightness. It is also of interest as part of a series of bridges spanning the non-tidal Thames that illustrate the technical development of bridges.
- 6.9 The council's Conservation Officer concurs with English Heritage regarding the level of harm to the bridge and given this position it is necessary to assess whether the works are necessary to deliver substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm.
- 6.10 A bridge has been in place in this location for over 200 years and the bridge is clearly of significant importance as a road crossing over the Thames. The bridge carries around 6000 vehicles a day as well as providing a vital local link between the communities of Whitchurch-on-Thames and Pangbourne. As a result of the substantial public benefits of maintaining a crossing in this location, the level of harm to the listed building may be justifiable. However, English Heritage is firmly of the view that the applications have not demonstrated that the proposed reconstruction of the bridge is the only way of ensuring the future retention of the bridge so that it can continue to provide substantial public benefits.
- 6.11 The application submission seeks to demonstrate why the proposed works are necessary. It states that there are a number of structural failings with the existing bridge that have accelerated in recent years and that significant strengthening works are required to maintain its capacity. It is stated in the supporting information that the bridge deck needs waterproofing, that it needs to be repainted including blast cleaning back to bear metal, that there is continuing cracking in the cast iron pier caps due to the movement of the structure and that urgent works are required to isolate the load bearing girders from the columns to remove the cause of the cracking. These works cannot be carried out without the closure of the bridge, and the application submission states that the bridge has to be reconstructed to remain open in the longer term.
- 6.12 Whilst it is clear that there are some structural failings with the bridge, particularly in terms of cracking to the column heads, English Heritage is not convinced that the proposed works are necessary. They have suggested that more localised repairs to the

bridge including the possibility of introducing a slip membrane to allow for the thermal movement in the structure should be fully considered. They have suggested that the feasibility of this course of action should be examined by opening up and inspecting the column head. English Heritage has suggested that the proposed stripping and repainting of the bridge could be carried out in situ. In addition justification for rebuilding the bridge based on the possible damage to the existing structural elements from vehicle strikes is not considered to carry much weight due to the lack of such incidents to date and the low risk of such incidents in the future.

- 6.13 Clearly it would be advantageous to increase the weight limit of the bridge, and in this regard the applicant seeks to increase its weight limit to 44 tonnes but maintain the existing enforceable weight restriction of 7.5 tonnes. The application submission advises that it is mandatory for new construction works to be designed to the standards specified in the European Structural Design Codes (Eurocodes). The Eurocodes require the UK as being a member of the EC to comply with the requirements of the Construction Products Directive and Public Procurement Directive, and since the withdrawal of the UK National Standards, Eurocodes have become the standards used. The Interim Advice Note 124/11: 'Use of Eurocodes for the design of Highway Structures', which is issued by the Highways Agency and dated July 2011 states at Annex A that Eurocodes must be used for the design of new highway structures and as the basis for the design of modification works including strengthening or upgrading works, and structural element replacement, unless otherwise agreed with the Technical Approval Authority.
- 6.14 Whilst there may be some flexibility regarding the use of the 44 tonnes as the design load, there does not appear to be any special dispensation for either listed or private bridges. The potential solutions suggested by English Heritage are likely to be strengthening works and therefore they would also need to be designed to the Eurocodes standard of a 44 tonnes design load. In light of the Eurocodes requirements it is apparent that there is limited scope to design new strengthening works to less than a 44 tonne design load.
- 6.15 In answer to the criticism of English Heritage the applicants' engineer has stated that the cast iron column heads supporting the lattice girders would need to be replaced due to the extensive cracking that has occurred. This would require the entire bridge to be jacked up by approximately 300mm to provide space to allow the column heads to be replaced. It is also stated that this operation may also damage the piles, and would also put the bridge structure at risk of distortion. The engineer again raises the issue that new construction works should be designed to the Eurocodes standards.
- 6.16 English Heritage has maintained their objection to the proposal and reiterated their view that the proposal would amount to substantial harm of the listed building. It is considered feasible to maintain the condition and structural integrity of the bridge through maintenance and the replacement of damaged elements. English Heritage has maintained that they cannot accept demolition of the building until the condition of the column heads can be properly assessed along with the feasibility of adding a slip membrane to allow for thermal movements. In summary English Heritage has stated that it 'remains of the opinion that the case for complete rebuilding in order to maintain the current 7.5t weight limit and two way traffic has yet to be made. It is recommended that a strategy of repair in situ is pursued. The council's Conservation Officer has also reiterated his objections to the scheme based on the substantial harm to the listed building and the lack of justification for the proposed works at the present time.
- 6.17 Although it is evidently important that the bridge remains open for use as part of the highway network and as a vital link between the communities lying to the north and

south of the Thames, it is also important that the proposed works are fully justified particularly where substantial harm to the building would be caused. It is clear that works are needed to secure the longer term future of the bridge as part of the highway network, and it is apparent that the works should be designed to Eurocodes standards. The applicant has maintained that there is no option but to reconstruct the bridge, and has stated that the bridge may need to shut if such works are not undertaken due to insurance being declined.

- 6.18 Notwithstanding the application of the Eurocodes standards, the proposed works would allow for a long term solution to the existing structural problems. It would mean that the bridge would be subject to relatively low levels of maintenance and this would secure the long term future of the bridge to the considerable benefit of the local community and the convenience of the highway network. Again, notwithstanding the Eurocodes standards, Officers accept that more localised repairs of the bridge could address its immediate structural failings and would be a more acceptable solution having regard to the historic and architectural qualities of the bridge. However, such a solution is not guaranteed to be successful and would inevitably result in higher levels of on-going maintenance with the associated impact on the local communities and highway network.
- 6.19 In light of the Eurocodes requirements and the substantial public benefits that derive from the reconstruction of the bridge and securing its long term future Officers consider that the engineering solution put forward by the applicant is reasonable and that, on balance, this outweighs the harm to the significance of the bridge as a heritage asset.

The Impact on the Conservation Area and Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 6.20 Policy CON7 of the SOLP seeks to ensure that any development within a Conservation Area does not harm the character or appearance of the area. Policy C2 of the SOLP seeks to ensure that development within an AONB respects the natural beauty and landscape qualities of the area whilst Policy C3 of the SOLP seeks to ensure that the distinctive character of the River Thames and its valley and the settlements on its banks are maintained and, if possible, enhanced.
- 6.21 Officers consider that the proposal would cause harm to the significance of the listed building. However, Officers do not consider that the proposal would cause this level of harm to the wider Conservation Area, which is also regarded as a designated heritage asset having regard to PPS5. Whitchurch Conservation Area includes virtually all of the village lying immediately either side of the B471 and extends some 750 metres to the north of the bridge. The bridge represents the southern limit of the Conservation Area and the land immediately to the south of the bridge in Pangbourne does not form part of any Conservation Area.
- 6.22 Whilst the bridge is undoubtedly a very important structure within the Conservation Area due to its location, function and listed status, it represents a relatively small element within the Conservation Area. The proposed visible works to the bridge are generally confined to the new structural elements between the river and the deck of the bridge and whilst these elements would cause substantial harm to the listed bridge, Officers do not consider that these alterations would have a wider impact to the detriment of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 6.23 The bridge has considerable aesthetic qualities and makes a positive contribution to the appearance of this section of the River Thames. The bridge can be seen from several public vantage points, and is particularly prominent when viewed from Pangbourne

Meadows to the east, which are crossed by the Thames Path. In these views the bridge is viewed against an attractive backdrop comprising the river and mature trees, and has a rural setting despite connecting two adjacent villages. The proposal would significantly reduce the aesthetic qualities of the bridge and the increased bulk of the structural elements below the deck of the bridge would be easily apparent in close range views from Pangbourne Meadows in particular. This would detract from the bridge's contribution to the local landscape but Officers do not consider that this impact on the distinctive character of the River Thames or the wider Chilterns AONB would be so harmfully apparent to justify the refusal of the application.

The Impact on Local Residents and Businesses

- 6.24 The closure of the bridge will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the local community in terms of severing the vehicular connection between the villages of Pangbourne and Whitchurch. This will mean that local residents and those living further afield will need to travel further and for longer on the diversion routes, and this will result in a considerable inconvenience to many people during the period of closure. There may be a knock-on effect on local businesses, local services and community groups and there will be an impact on local communities along the diversion routes, particularly at Goring and Streatley in terms of having to accommodate additional traffic movements and potential congestion.
- 6.25 However, provided that the works to the bridge can be fully justified Officers do not consider that the impact of the bridge closure can be resisted. If the works are necessary to secure the longer term future of the bridge, it would certainly be in the wider public interest for the bridge to be reconstructed. The applicant is proposing the construction of a temporary footbridge which would be in place during the closure of the main bridge. This would maintain a vital pedestrian and cycle link between the villages of Whitchurch and Pangbourne and would maintain essential community access to Pangbourne for services such as the doctor's surgery and local shops and to Whitchurch for access to such facilities as the primary school and the continuation of the Thames Path.
- 6.26 Maintaining a footbridge without vehicular access may encourage some people to try and park near the bridge. However, this can be controlled through temporary parking restrictions if necessary. The applicant has stated that a parking space will be available next to the Toll House in Whitchurch for use by doctors from the Boathouse Surgery in Pangbourne.
- 6.27 One of the main impacts of the proposals on the amenity of local residents and nearby properties, including the Boathouse Surgery will be the noise and disturbance caused by the reconstruction of the bridge. Policy EP2 states that proposals that by reason of noise or vibrations will have an adverse impact on existing or proposed occupiers will not be permitted unless effective mitigation measures will be implemented. The construction works will potentially cause significant noise and vibration due to processes such as grit blasting the existing metal work and the piling operations. Again if the works are deemed necessary it would not be reasonable to refuse the planning application based on these relatively short-term impacts. However, the construction activities would need to be properly controlled and the applicant has proposed some mitigation measures including the potential use of the quietest pieces of plant where possible, screening, and communication with local residents about the timing of various works.
- 6.28 The council's Environmental Health Officer has been consulted in respect of the application and has raised no objections providing that the applicant applies to the

council's Environmental Protection Department for a Control of Pollution Act 1974 Section 61 Agreement, which will enable the council to control the noise and vibration. The Agreement will allow for such matters as noise levels and hours of work to be agreed.

The Impact on Highway Safety and Congestion

- 6.29 The closure of the bridge will inevitably have major consequences for the surrounding road network as the approximate 6000 vehicles that use the bridge daily will need to be diverted across the river at alternative bridges. The nearest diversion routes would be through Goring-on-Thames and Streatley to the north west and Reading to the south east. Both diversions could add considerable distance and time to journeys depending on the traveller's point of origin and destination.
- 6.30 It is accepted that some major works are required to the bridge to maintain its use as part of the road network and therefore, the impact of diverted traffic should not be a reason to resist the proposal. The application is accompanied by a Transport Impact Report and this outlines various traffic management measures that may be put into place but would need the agreement of three separate highway authorities, namely Oxfordshire County Council, West Berkshire Council and Reading Borough Council. Potential measures could include temporary parking restrictions to restrict existing on-street parking in Streatley to allow the free flow of traffic through this diversion route.
- 6.31 The Highway Liaison Officer from Oxfordshire County Council has been consulted on the application and has not raised any specific objections to the proposal but considers that traffic management measures will be needed in relation to the proposal. Such measures will include a signage strategy to inform motorists of the bridge closure and diversion routes. Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders will be required to restrict on-street parking in Goring and Whitchurch (Streatley lies within Berkshire). The bridge closure will have a detrimental impact on the subsidised bus route (142) which will need to be rerouted. A shuttle bus will be required to be provided to Pangbourne via Goring, and the applicants will need to fund the cost of meeting this service (£150 per day).
- 6.32 Many of the local residents who have taken the time to comment on the application as well as local Parish Councils and interest groups have raised concerns regarding the safety of the pedestrian footways on both approaches to the bridge and along its length. Many of the respondents have stated that the reconstruction of the bridge should be used as an opportunity to improve the footways around the bridge. Such improvements could involve widening and re-alignment of the footways so that there is a continuous safe and sufficiently wide footway running between Whitchurch and Pangbourne so as to avoid the need to cross the main carriageway and to reduce the risk of being hit by vehicles.
- 6.33 The council is keen to support any measures to improve pedestrian safety around the bridge, however, it has to be borne in mind that the reconstructed bridge would not result in any worsening of the footway provision around the bridge. It would not be justifiable to resist the proposal on the basis of a failure to improve pedestrian safety where there is no further detriment to pedestrian safety. However, the council has encouraged the applicant to consider any improvements to the footways as part of the overall scheme due to the opportunities that the works would present. In particular it would appear that moving the footway across the bridge to the eastern side would be relatively straightforward and would be advantageous to pedestrians as it would negate the need to cross the B471 in the vicinity of the toll booth on the northern approach to the bridge.

- 6.34 In discussion the applicant has indicated that improvements to the route of the footway may be considered, however, the applicant considers that these issues are outside the scope of the current application and should be considered at a later date, and would be subject to discussions with adjacent land owners and the relevant highway authorities. As outlined above Officers do not consider that the failure to provide for works to improve the pedestrian footways can be used to refuse the application.

The Impact on Trees and Ecology

- 6.35 There are several trees on both approaches to the bridge that may be directly affected by the proposals. However, only the impact of the development on trees within South Oxfordshire is considered in this report. An Arboricultural Report has been submitted with the application, and this demonstrates that few trees would need to be removed to facilitate the proposals. The council's Forestry Officer has considered the proposals and has no objections to the proposals as the trees proposed for removal are of low arboricultural value and the mature trees behind them will ensure that tree cover is maintained along the river bank.
- 6.36 An Ecological Scoping Survey has also been submitted with the application. This concludes that the proposal will not have a significant impact on habitats or individual protected species. The proposed works are scheduled to take place between September and April and this will minimise any ecological impact. Proposals for ecological enhancement include the provision of a number of bat boxes into the abutments of the bridge. The council's Countryside Officer has considered the proposals and has not raised any objections.

Other Material Considerations

- 6.37 Due to the direct impact of the works on the Thames and its floodplain, the Environment Agency (EA) has been consulted. A Flood Risk Assessment has been submitted with the application and the EA are satisfied that the measures detailed in the FRA are acceptable.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The application proposals are broadly in accordance with relevant development plan policies and national planning policy, as on balance Officers consider that the harm to the significance of the listed structure is outweighed by the public benefits of the proposals. Subject to conditions, the proposals would not have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, and the amenity of neighbouring occupiers.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 **Planning Application P11/E0743**

It is recommended that the grant of planning permission be delegated to the Head of Planning, subject to the prior completion of a Section 106 planning obligation with Oxfordshire County Council to ensure infrastructure payments are made towards public transport provision, and the following conditions:

- 1. Commencement 3 years**
- 2. Development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans**
- 3. Development to be implemented in accordance with the mitigation and enhancement outlined in the Ecological Scoping Survey**
- 4. Tree works and tree protection measures to be carried out in accordance with the details contained within the Arboricultural Report**

5. **The temporary footbridge shall be provided and open for use prior to the closure of the bridge and shall be available for public use at all times throughout the proposed works until the bridge is reopened for public use**
6. **Temporary footbridge to be removed within three months of the reopening of the main bridge**
7. **A construction traffic management plan to be submitted and approved prior to commencement of work**
8. **A signage strategy shall be submitted and approved and shall be implemented prior to commencement of work**
9. **A scheme of temporary Traffic Regulation Orders shall be submitted and approved and shall be implemented prior to commencement**
10. **Notwithstanding details shown on the approved plans the footway and carriageway arrangements for the reinstated bridge shall be submitted and approved prior to the reinstatement of the bridge**
11. **Development to be carried out in accordance with the Flood Risk Assessment**
12. **Details of measures to control noise and dust to be submitted and approved prior to commencement**
13. **Piling method statement to be submitted and approved prior to commencement**

8.2 Listed Building Application P11/E0745/LB

It is recommended that listed building consent is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. **Commencement 3 years**
2. **Works to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans**
3. **Detailed record of existing structure to be submitted prior to works commencing**
4. **Details of any new brickwork and mortar to be approved**

Author: Mr T Wyatt
Contact no: 01491 823154
Email: planning.east@southandvale.gov.uk