



ENGLISH HERITAGE
SOUTH EAST REGION

Mr T Wyatt
South Oxfordshire District Council
Planning & Building Control Services
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Direct Dial: 01483 252026
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Our ref: L00106522

28 June 2011

Dear Mr Wyatt

**Notifications under Circular 01/2001, Circular 08/2009 & GDPO 1995
WHITCHURCH BRIDGE, HIGH STREET, WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES,
OXFORDSHIRE
Application No P11/E0745/LB**

Thank you for your letter of 23 June 2011 notifying English Heritage of the above application.

Summary

The proposed reconstruction is held to constitute substantial harm to the listed structure. Inadequate justification has been given for this level of harm.

English Heritage Advice

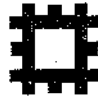
The proposed reconstruction of Whitchurch Bridge would harm its significance in a number of ways. Firstly, the aesthetic qualities of the bridge derive to a great extent from the lightness of the structure. Admittedly the original design has been compromised to an extent by the addition of strengthening members between the columns in 1921. However, these are reasonably discrete whereas the additional columns and supporting structure proposed are markedly wider than the columns and will seriously compromise the appearance of the structure. Furthermore, if reconstructed the bridge would cease to be the structure erected in 1901-2 and become a modern structure incorporating elements of the original for decorative purposes. The evidential and historical values that are dependent on the authenticity and integrity of the original structure will be lost. 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, starting with the medieval stone bridges such as Radcott and Abingdon, and



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encompassing the introduction of brick, wrought an cast iron, for instance the iron suspension bridge at Marlow (1831-6) and the cast iron bridges at Windsor (1823) and Cookham (1867).

In our view the loss or these qualities would amount to substantial harm to the significance of the structure and thus the proposals need to be assessed against HE9.2 of PPS5. Clearly continuing to provide a river crossing for vehicles of up to 7.5T is a substantial public benefit and, if it were demonstrated that the proposed reconstruction was the only way of achieving this, we would consider the loss of significance justified. However, we have yet to be convinced that complete reconstruction as proposed is necessary to solve the structural failings of the bridge.

It is clear from the work already carried out that the most immediate problem facing the bridge is cracking in the column heads caused by the lack of allowance for thermal movement in the current structure. Following our a site visit on 30th September 2010 we suggested that it would be worth considering allowing for thermal movement by introducing a slotted hole where the bolts securing the deck pass through the column head and introducing a slip membrane in sections to maintain girder support. By introducing a slip membrane in sections it may be possible to avoid the expensive piling needed to the deck of the bridge to be jacked up. I note from the 2010 principle inspection report that as designed the bridge allowed for thermal movement by this very method and presumably it functioned reasonably well until the 1940s, when the cracking in the column heads was first noticed. We also suggested that further investigative works were carried out to one of the column heads, including stripping paint to allow the construction of the head to be better understood, to ascertain the feasibility of this course of action.

There is no evidence that the applicants have seriously investigated this option; rather they have simply repeated their position held prior to the meeting of the 30th September that adding a slip membrane would entail an expensive piling operation around the bridge in order to jacking it up. We cannot consider a reasonable justification has been made until the feasibility of the option we suggested is properly investigated by the applicant's engineers.

A second issue is the structural integrity of the lattice girders themselves. The Appendix to the planning statement (p.33) stresses that there is relatively little redundancy in the structure. Specifically that a reduction of the Condition Factor to 0.95 (with a Factor of 1.0 representing the bridge in its original condition) would entail a 3T weight limit being imposed. At the time of our site visit, while some surface rust was observed no significant loss of section was observed. While the condition of the lattice girders are clearly a legitimate concern no evidence has been supplied that the condition factor of the bridge has fallen below 0.95 or is likely to do so in the



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foreseeable future and cannot be arrested. While there is a clear need to ensure that the bridge is well painted to arrest further deterioration and stripping the current paint would clearly be advantageous we suggested that this could be carried out in situ.

Catastrophic damage from boat strikes could be adequately addressed by introducing timber fenders around the columns, as proposed. While there is undoubtedly a risk of vehicles damaging the lattice girders and the occasional vehicle strike takes place as far as we are aware there has been no strike that has seriously damaged the bridge in its 109 year life. Due to weight limits and the physical layout of the bridge the speed and size of vehicles using it has remained reasonably constant over the last 20 years or so and can be expected to remain reasonably constant in the future. Therefore the risk of catastrophic damage from a vehicle impact is considered slight and cannot on its own be sufficient justification for rebuilding the bridge.

While we are well aware that there are issues with over-weight vehicles attempting to cross the bridge, particularly at night when the toll booth is not manned, we remain of the view that, unless there are clear structural reasons for reconstructing the bridge, this issue should be addressed by managing the traffic rather than strengthening the bridge. We would stress that weight limits of this type are not uncommon on bridges on secondary routes such as this.

Recommendation

Given that the proposals would entail substantial harm to the significance of the listed structure we recommend that the proposal be refused unless the applicant can demonstrate convincingly that the alternative method of dealing with thermal movement suggested is not feasible or the condition factor of the lattice girders has fallen to 0.95 or that deterioration to this level of condition in foreseeable future cannot be prevented. We are not convinced that the evidence presented to date demonstrates this.

We would welcome the opportunity of advising further. Please consult us again if any additional information or amendments are submitted. If, notwithstanding our advice, you propose to approve the scheme in its present form, please advise us of the date of the committee and send us a copy of your report at the earliest opportunity.



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Yours sincerely

Richard Peats

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cc. Jamie Preston, Conservation Officer, SODC

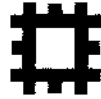
Enclosure: Checklist for notification to Government Office



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CHECKLIST OF INFORMATION FOR NOTIFICATION TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE (GOVERNMENT OFFICE)

Notifications under Circular 01/2001, Circular 08/2009, GDPO 1995 & Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990, Regulation 13

If you are required to notify the Government Office of this application, it will help to save time if you include the following documents:

- Copy of the application
- List of the drawing numbers
- Copy of the list description(s)
- Recent photographs if available
- Copy of the advertisement
- Copies of any representations received
- Statement explaining the extent to which the local authority has taken on board the advice and recommendations from English Heritage and other consultees
- Confirmation of any amendments made to the application subsequent to initial notification to English Heritage
- Explanation of why the local authority is disposed to grant consent, including copies of committee report(s) and minutes, where relevant
- List of proposed conditions



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