

Peter Stone, Grantham Canal Partnership

Impact of A46 Improvement Works on Grantham Canal Bridge 16

Public Inquiry Closing Statement, 11th February 2010

I am Peter Stone, Honorary Secretary to the Grantham Canal Partnership (GCP).

I do not intend to repeat all the facts about the Grantham Canal Bridge 16 situation that have been covered during the past month – we are confident that you are well aware of them – but I do wish to pick up on one or two of the points made in the Highways Agency's (HA) response to my evidence of 14th January and to highlight our key concerns.

I am joined, once again, by Mr Phil Walker, Associate Director of Civil Engineering and Highways at Opus Consulting Engineers, Tony Harvey, Head of Regeneration Midlands for British Waterways and Cllr. Neil Clarke, Leader of Rushcliffe Borough Council – who was also present and made representation at the 2007 Public Inquiry.

May I firstly address and set to one side two issues, on which I believe both parties are in agreement – Fosse Bridge 18 and the situation if the A46 Improvement had never come along:

- The Partnership has no in principle complaints about the HA's treatment of the canal at Bridge 18 – where an entirely new bridge is to be provided, parallel to the existing one, to carry the dual-carriageway A46 over the canal, its towpath / multi-user trail and a diverted bridleway. Until this week, details of the bridge have been sketchy (which is the only reason why we can't yet be confident about all of them) but *we have no reason to believe that the Agency is not fully meeting its obligations, under planning guidance PPG 13 and Government strategy as outlined in 'Waterways for Tomorrow', at that location.*
- Secondly, the Partnership fully accepts that, *had the A46 Improvement scheme not been approved, the task – and cost – of providing a navigable replacement for the current Bridge 16 would have fallen to the GCP and its stakeholders, at the appropriate time.*

What the GCP does strongly believe – and the HA seeks to refute – is that:

- *The Agency has failed to meet its obligations to the East Midlands community under PPG 13 and 'Waterways for Tomorrow' [since reinforced in 'Waterways for Everyone'] in respect of Joshua Mann's Bridge 16 ...and that*
- *Through its own design and construction of its own Stragglethorpe Junction – and failure to incorporate, or even make provision for, a replacement and navigable Bridge 16 – the Agency has made subsequent restoration of that bridge impractical and totally unaffordable.*

As Cllr. Clarke said, in his evidence on 14th January, we have all been in favour of improving the inadequate Fosse Way for many years. We don't necessarily all agree with how it is being achieved – but we welcome the macro scheme and accept that it went through the due processes. But, as Cllr. Clarke again said, 'the devil is in the

detail' and we are adamant that lowly Joshua Mann's Bridge 16 has been wrongly treated within the overall £350 million programme.

Furthermore, with this overall A46 Improvement scheme moving rapidly from the Inspector's conclusions, following the 2007 Public Inquiry, to the Secretary of State's acceleration of the scheme by 3 years, over Christmas 2008, as a Fiscal Stimulus investment, there has been little or no opportunity for anyone to highlight such anomalies.

We fully accept that we were perhaps lulled into a false sense of security by the HA's reassurances of 2007 and, as details of its plans have emerged, recognise the error of our – and maybe others' – ways. The GCP first brought its concerns to the attention of the senior management of the HA and Balfour Beatty on 4th February 2009 and, if we are now at the '11th hour', it is entirely due to the 'denial' policy of the Agency, as it has chosen to 'play for time'.

Subsequent representations to the Minister, strongly supported by constituency MP Rt. Hon. Kenneth Clarke and his fellow Grantham Canal MPs, have also found the Agency 'in denial' of any problems – which is why we are so grateful to you, Sir, for hearing our case for natural justice.

The GCP fully recognises that 'we are where we are' and that the A46 Improvement is progressing well. We have no intention of lying down in front of the bulldozers: we merely wish to work *with* the Highways Agency and its contractors to agree solutions to the current nonsense over Bridge 16. *It is clearly in the interests of the public and value for money to address the issue of the bridge now – whilst the men and materiel are on site and before money is wasted on elements that will otherwise have to be scrapped and reworked* – effectively, all of the works between the western Stragglethorpe Junction roundabout and the canal.

In a nutshell, the Partnership's grievances are that:

- By drawing the boundary of its A46 Improvement scheme on the eastern edge of the Grantham Canal towpath, the HA may have thought that it had avoided the nuisance of dealing with the bridge's restoration – but that wouldn't meet its public obligations under PPG 13 and '*Waterways for Tomorrow*'. It should have been obvious that restoration of the bridge was going to involve works for some distance along the road, either side of the canal – which must be allowed for.
- Likewise, full restoration of Bridge 16 to navigation requires raising the road surface by up to 3.5m / 11.5ft and it is insufficient to suggest that tying the HA's works in at the current unnavigable 'Irish bridge' level discharges the Agency's responsibilities.
- The HA's principal argument is that nothing in its A46 scheme will impede the future restoration of the Grantham Canal at Bridge 16 – which must therefore remain entirely the responsibility of the GCP. This is a complete falsehood, because:
 - It is the HA that has halved the distance between Stragglethorpe Junction and Bridge 16 – affecting stopping distances, sight lines and the like – at best severely impeding and potentially preventing a 3.5m raising of Bridge 16.

- It is the HA that has moved the junction, of Stragglethorpe Road with the A46, north-east of the existing traffic lights and introduced a bend into Stragglethorpe Road together with its resultant complications – the need for a wider bridge and acquisition of BW land, to clear horizontal sight lines, vehicle restraints etc.
- It is as a result of the HA's works, that traffic movements on Stragglethorpe Road to will increase to over 10,000 per day, making future roadworks more difficult ...
- ... and probably ruling out the attractive option of a modern hydraulic lifting bridge.
- It is the HA that, once it has set the utilities, services media and facilities in place, will make changes impossible or prohibitively expensive, given the level of temporary accommodation works that will be required.
- It is the HA that, by its siting of the private accesses (contrary to a 2007 commitment) and balancing pond, has greatly reduced the scope for subsequent layout changes and diversionary roads – and undermined the faith of local landowners.
- And, crucially, it is the Department of Transport and HA that have brought the scheme forward by 3 years, closing in 2010 the window of opportunity for undertaking this critical step in the restoration of the Grantham Canal to through navigation, which would otherwise have remained open.

It must therefore, in the opinion of the Grantham Canal Partnership, fall to the HA to provide a replacement Bridge 16 – now, whilst the opportunity exists – because otherwise it will surely be in breach of PPG 13 and 'Waterways for Tomorrow / Everyone' and block this strategic regeneration project for evermore.

It is not yet, however, too late to recover the situation and to make the required changes – in simple terms, we are only talking about inserting in-situ or pre-cast concrete culvert sections into raised earthworks and saving the work on the pedestrian crossing! All other work – road surfacing, barriers, landscaping etc. – are, to a large degree, common to both the HA's current and GCP's proposed schemes.

It is for this reason that we are unable to understand the costings on pages 6 & 7 of the HA's response. In the context of the works being carried out by Balfour Beatty whilst currently on site, we need to be considering *compensation event costs*, in terms of the NEC-type contract they are working to – not project costs that assume completion of the HA's current work on Stragglethorpe Road and then ripping half of it up again and destroying the new road surface, landscaping, 'Toucan' crossing etc. Without sight of a cost breakdown, we suggest that many of these figures are extortionate, if they are for compensation event costs – and, when it comes to savings, it's remarkable how a 'Toucan' crossing can cost £60-80,000 'all-in' if you want to install one but only £40,000 if you want to leave it out!

In pursuit of a positive solution, some months ago the GCP put forward a compromise scheme to the HA, designed to reduce the requirements at Bridge 16

and the costs of the project. This involves the incorporation of a new lock 'upstream' of Bridge 16 and the lowering and re-profiling the Grantham Canal for 1km 'downstream' of that, to Lock 8. This recommended scheme requires Bridge 16 to be raised by only 1.75 metres above its current level, to permit boaters, walkers and cyclists to safely pass under Stragglethorpe Road i.e. achieving grade separation and meeting defra recommendations 8.22 - 8.24 of 'Waterways for Everyone'.

The GCP remains convinced that, with goodwill and the full cooperation of all key parties – the HA and its contractors, Notts. CC, Rushcliffe BC and British Waterways, this alternative scheme can be made to work. It is understood that construction of the HA's current scheme still requires land acquisition from British Waterways [omitted from the Supplementary Orders] and various 'relaxations' and 'departures' in respect of highways standards from Notts. CC. *It is suggested that the 'GCP's scheme', granted a 'level playing field' – and especially if combined with a sensible road speed restriction – could be the best all-round solution.*

We have heard it suggested (not in this room) that this whole hearing might be about 'a bunch of canal nerds looking for a free bridge' – and reject that slur. I confirm that I represent, as its Honorary Secretary, the Grantham Canal Partnership – of British Waterways, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire County Councils, South Kesteven District Council, Melton and Rushcliffe Borough Councils, Natural England, Inland Waterways Association and the Grantham Canal Society

As for the question of a 'free bridge at taxpayers' expense', I would point out that:

- Far from seeking 'something for nothing', the GCP proposes taking on the much greater obligation of providing a new canal lock and the reconstruction of a kilometre of canal – both of which are being proposed as a means of halving the amount by which Bridge 16 needs to be raised and hence enabling the HA to meet its obligations ... and each of which will cost more than Bridge 16 itself.
- Secondly, as Cllr. Neil Clarke mentioned in his earlier evidence, Rushcliffe Borough Council has been judged to provide the best value for money for ratepayers, anywhere in the UK. Rushcliffe wouldn't be actively supporting this case if it weren't in the public's best interests.

We estimate that the real incremental cost of providing a navigable Bridge 16 and safe, grade-separated passage for pedestrians and cyclists *now* – compared with the unsatisfactory scheme currently proposed, should be some £300,000. Restoration in the future – which we are saying is practically impossible – would [as the HA indicates] be many times that amount. Undertaking the work in 2010 represents not only common sense but also a massive saving of public money [the HA itself indicates a c. £300,000 saving at current prices] ... and protection of investment in the regeneration of the canal and communities, which has already been made, as far away as Grantham. Attempting to undertake the work later would also render much of the HA's current work at Stragglethorpe abortive – a complete waste of public money.

It is not really our job to tell the HA and its contractors how this goal should be achieved but we suggest that it is vital that the current programme on Stragglethorpe Road itself be suspended, to avoid undertaking abortive work and incurring waste. [It should be quite possible to do this and still use the A46 slip-roads and western roundabout this spring, as mentioned at 5.8.7 of the HA's response.]

May I briefly raise the Environmental issues referred to in the HA's paper HA1. The GCP takes such issues seriously and requests the opportunity to fully examine the HA's studies. The issue of re-watering the 'dry' section of the Grantham Canal is clearly a complex one but the GCP is encouraged by the findings of its own Ecological Impact Study of the whole canal, undertaken in 2006/07, which suggested that the benefits to wildlife of joining up the two 'wet' sections of the canal would outweigh most other considerations. As for the landscape around Bridge 16, it must be remembered that, as a direct result of the A46 Improvement, the dominant feature will soon be the sight and sound of juggernauts, moving day and night across the skyline!

Finally, may I revert to the big picture:

The Grantham Canal is a 33-mile, 200-year old waterway, flowing through the stunning Vale of Belvoir to join the River Trent and national waterway network at Nottingham. Its restoration and regeneration, as a linear country park, is fully supported by all members of the GCP.

Grantham is a '*Growth Point*' and Lincolnshire County Council and South Kesteven District Council are particularly keen to see the town back on the inland waterways map of England, with boating as the centrepiece of their Grantham Canal Basin development. To this end, *emda* and the local authorities have also helped fund the reopening to navigation of the first 4 miles of the canal (from the A1 to Woolsthorpe by Belvoir), complete with brand new passenger boat, from Easter 2010.

Sustainable, viable restoration of the Grantham Canal and regeneration of the rural economy requires *through navigation* to the River Trent and access to the c.4,000 leisure boats registered in the East Midlands: hence the importance of Bridge 16. Some £7 million of public and private resource has been invested in the canal in recent years and restoration and regeneration are gathering pace. Ahead of the reopening this Easter, 2009 progress included the rebuilding of a lock and 2 bridges in Lincolnshire and a further bridge in Leicestershire ... and a major Green Infrastructure study of the area between the River Trent and Cotgrave in Nottinghamshire – including a replacement 'Trent Link'.

The HA's current plans for Bridge 16 threaten all of this. On the other hand, if the scheme recommended by the GCP and supported by British Waterways, Nottinghamshire County Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council, is implemented in 2010, it will enable the HA to meet its obligations for a very small variation to the overall £350 million A46 Improvement. [It may even be possible to recover some of this by 'value engineering' the new Bridge 18.] The GCP will be taking on the much greater challenges of building the new lock and lowering the canal.

The current situation at Bridge 16 is a bad mistake – but a practical, low-cost solution is still possible, to prevent it turning into a permanent disaster for the East Midlands. The GCP thanks you, Sir, for giving us the opportunity to convey this important and urgent message and hopes that you will be able to persuade the Secretaries of State accordingly

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