

Boxal Bridge Replacement

Frequently Asked Questions



Q1 - Why does Boxal Bridge have to be replaced?

Boxal Bridge is approaching the end of its economic life. It has been subject to regular inspections and now has significant structural defects.

Options for a range of possible actions have been undertaken and replacement presents the only sensible scenario on the grounds of safety and cost.

A formal decision is now required to trigger a detailed design stage for a replacement bridge in a timeframe that will leave the current structure available for use without the need for closure.

Q2 – But hasn't the bridge passed all its previous inspections?

The inspections alone do not determine a "pass" or "fail" of a bridge; they are used to inform structural assessments (i.e. assessment of load carrying capacity) and engineering judgement. Should the defects deteriorate to a certain level the load capacity of the bridge may fall below its basic minimum requirement, currently 44 tonnes gross vehicle weight.

An assessment carried out independently by a consultant, employed by a local community group, actually recommends that the bridge is load restricted with "immediate effect". However, unlike our review, the independent assessment has not been undertaken in accordance with the national highway bridge assessment directives and, as such, we are confident that our current approach is the right one.

Q3 – When will the bridge be replaced?

The inspections allow us to monitor deterioration and will help determine when intervention will be required so that the bridge does not have to be load restricted. This could be a number of years. The council is preparing to start design of a replacement bridge in readiness for that time.

Q4 – What will happen if the council does nothing?

No intervention (when the time comes) would result in a weight restriction being introduced on the bridge which may prohibit use by certain vehicles such as farm machinery and buses, to the obvious detriment of the local community.

Q5 – Why can't the bridge just be repaired?

WSCC has a legal duty under the Road Traffic Act to review/address highway safety issues and although a number of repair options were investigated for the existing bridge, none would address any of the safety issues identified, such as the narrowing of the road, low side (parapet) walls and the lack of protection against vehicles falling into the watercourse in an accident.

By not addressing the safety issues as part of the scheme expenditure, the council would be in breach of its statutory obligations under the Act.

A Road Safety Audit was completed at the feasibility stage of this scheme which identified the main safety issues.

Q6 – An independent highways engineer has said the bridge is in need of some attention but not replacement. Is that true?

Assessments and inspections of bridges and structures can only be conducted and reported by qualified structures engineers, which is a different discipline to highways engineering.

A highly qualified, and experienced, team of engineers are employed by West Sussex County Council (WSCC) specifically to manage its bridges and structures to the highest standards, current codes of practice and legislative requirements.

Q7 – What about the findings of the independent structural review?

The independent review completed on behalf of the local community group was not undertaken in accordance with the Assessment of Highways Bridges and Structures: BD21/01, for highway bridges, therefore the council maintains that the WSCC assessment is more accurate.

This review does, however, assess the bridge as being in a structurally *worse* condition than that reported by the council. The report recommends that a weight restriction of 10 tonnes is imposed “with immediate effect” and hence infers an accelerated programme for intervention.

The independent review also re-confirms the council’s findings of the existence of safety issues which require addressing, such as the low parapet height.

Q8 – Why would a new bridge have to be wider?

Any replacement bridge will need to conform to current legislation and standards. The narrowing of the road over the existing bridge has been identified as a safety issue in the wider context of the road and bridge approaches. The provision of two lanes will meet current standards and minimise the risk of head-on collisions.

Q9 - Won’t the works decimate the protected wildlife in the area?

As with all such highways schemes, the planning and construction requires Environmental Impact assessments and reports, and would have to strictly adhere to current legislation in place to protect our valuable environment.

Q10 – Is this proposal linked to the recent oil exploration planning proposals?

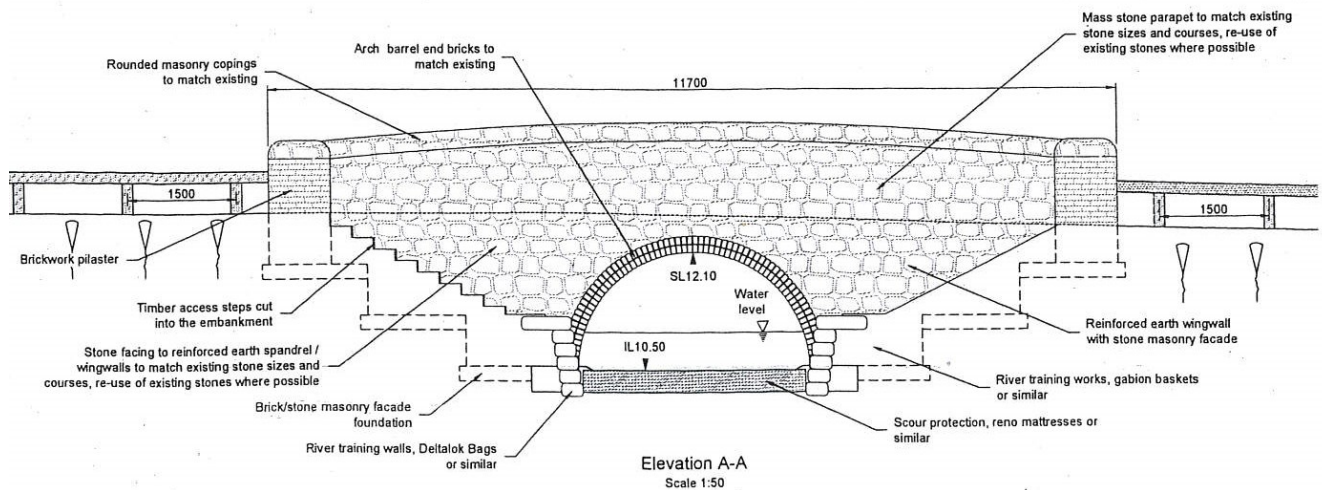
No. The recommendation for the replacement of the bridge with an appropriate structure to meet current standards has been reached purely from robust asset management considerations and by applying engineering principles.

Q11 – Will the new bridge be designed to carry heavier vehicles?

The load capacity of the new bridge will be the basic design load required by the design standards which reflects normal traffic use for vehicles up to 44 tonnes (gross vehicle weight). Any requests for abnormal load movements across the bridge will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis under the council’s standard processes.

Q12 – Any new bridge will not be in keeping with the environment.

WSCC has made a commitment to work with both Kirdford and Wisborough Green parish councils to develop a design which will match the existing bridge as far as the design codes will allow. We propose, where possible, to salvage some or all of the existing stones for re-use on the new bridge and to match the features of the existing parapets. A preliminary design drawing is shown below which indicates how some of the features may be able to be matched.



Q13 – But isn’t Boxal Bridge an asset of community value?

Whilst there is a lobby of support among local residents for the bridge to be considered an ‘asset of community value’, as a highway structure it does not fulfil the criteria for consideration as a community asset as it is neither “Land” nor a “Building” as set out in part 5, chapter 3, section 88 of the 2011 Localism Act.

Q14 – Isn’t Boxal Bridge a heritage asset and/or listed structure?

Although the bridge is included on the Chichester District Council Historic Environment Record, it is a “non-designated heritage asset” in terms of the National Planning Policy Framework. Also, it is not of sufficient historic or architectural value to be considered as a listed structure. Due consideration will be given to its recorded status during the design stage.

Q15 – Why would you consider replacing Boxal Bridge before New Bridge on the A272, which carries more traffic?

New Bridge currently has no structural issues requiring expenditure. As a stand-alone safety scheme, it is not identified as being a high enough priority within the county to warrant an upgrade at the current time.

Q16 - Why have you not listened to the objections from the parish councils and local community?

We acknowledge the petition that was raised in 2015 and have considered the views of the petitioners and the parish councils. Due consideration has been given to all points raised from individuals and groups and been responded to in detail.

In order to ensure any design option sits well in the context of the rural environment, WSCC have committed to work closely with the parish councils of Kirdford and Wisborough Green.

Q17 - Why can't you address the road safety issues with more signage or introduce a formal priority 'give way' system on the bridge??

The advanced signage on both approaches has been reviewed and it is deemed to comply with the Department for Transport guidelines.

New or additional signage would not satisfactorily discharge the council's statutory obligations under the Road Traffic Act 1988.

There is not sufficient forward visibility on the approach roads to allow a priority system to be introduced to current design guidelines.

Q18 - Isn't this going to cost a lot of money that could better be spent elsewhere?

The investment in capital outlay for a new structure and the inherent reduction of maintenance costs over many decades presents a more affordable option to the tax payer.

Due to the structural issues, Boxal Bridge has been identified as a high priority scheme.

Although a detailed design for the replacement bridge is yet to be carried out, we are working to a provisional construction cost estimate of up to £400,000, however, we must emphasise that this may change depending upon the agreed design.

Q19 - Where will the money come from to pay for a replacement bridge?

As part of the Department for Transport's annual funding to Highways Authorities, WSCC's Bridges & Structures team have an annual budget for the inspection, maintenance and improvement of the county's assets.

Following rigorous inspection regimes for all assets and after applying robust asset management principles, the engineers prioritise a programme of spend to ensure the safety and integrity of the highway structures to provide a safe and secure infrastructure for the travelling public.