

Our Ref: Stage 1 CEO 21958663

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30 June 2021

Dear [REDACTED]

Infilling of the heritage bridge at Great Musgrave

Thank you for your email dated 14 June 2021 to Nick Harris concerning the infilling of the heritage bridge at Great Musgrave. I am responding as this issue falls within my area of responsibility.

I have read your comments with regards to the selection of statements that we have released in the press, along with the various questions you have raised as a result. Given the number and nature of the questions, I will address each in the order you have raised them.

Why did Highways England not carry out the recommended repointing of the bridge?

The estimated cost of pressure pointing the bridge to achieve its full strength is circa £75,000 based on works on similar bridges completed over the last few years. This does not include costs for further ongoing maintenance. Considering whole of life costs, infilling offers better value for money and can be reversed in the future should that be required.

In what respect was the bridge “unsafe” prior to the start of infilling?

There was a risk that the bridge was being used by vehicles heavier than it's assessed capacity. Assessments showed an increase in the depth of open joints in the arch barrel, as well as a downward movement of the masonry for the arch.

Why has Highways England undertaken works that could thwart a potential railway reopening (i.e. the extension/connection of two preserved railways)?

Our priority is to keep structures safe. The cost of reversing the infilling is nominal and we would be happy to work with any rail groups and the local authority to remove the infill at no cost to them, should this be the remaining issue stopping the reopening of the railway.

Why did Highways England not pause the infilling works when the local authority raised queries about them?

We proceeded infilling works based on advice given by Eden District Council (EDC) that planning permission was not required. EDC then contacted us and recommended that we stop work so that they could re-check whether the infilling qualified to be undertaken under permitted development. As the work was substantially complete, and in order to leave the site in a safe manner, work was completed.

What is Highways England's intention with regards the removal of the infill when the six-month period allowed under Class Q expires on 24 November 2021?

Should the removal of the infill be required to reopen the railway in the future, we will do this at our cost working collaboratively with local stakeholders.

Why did Highways England not engage with the Eden Valley and Stainmore railways who had very clear interest in retaining access beneath the bridge?

The land around the bridge was previously sold to Railway Paths Limited (RPL). Following discussion with RPL we believed there was no interest in retaining access beneath the bridge by any stakeholders due to a missing river bridge further along the line. However, on reflection we acknowledge that further engagement with stakeholders including Eden Valley and Stainmore heritage railway companies could have taken place.

Could you please explain how the infilling of EDE/25 is justified in economic terms?

Considering whole of life costs, infilling offers better value for money and can be reversed in the future should that be required.

Could you please explain how stakeholders and other interested parties are expected to lodge their interest in the retention of access beneath an HRE bridge if detailed information regarding your asset management programme is being withheld and many individual schemes are not subject to planning applications?

To address this and to ensure transparency, we have recently launched a page dedicated to HRE on our website and this can be found at:

<https://highwaysengland.co.uk/our-work/historical-railways/>.

From August 21, this web page will also house an archive which will be used to make assessment reports and details about our forward programme publicly available.

In addition, the Department for Transport has recently written to all Local Planning Authorities seeking feedback on their future plans for HRE structures. This is so that we can work with them to explore their plans and take that into account in our planning for the future.

We understand that engagement with the HRE community is important and we welcome your feedback and suggestions of how to approach this moving forward.

If you would like any further information, please contact our Engineer, [REDACTED] who will be pleased to assist. [REDACTED] can be contacted by email at [REDACTED] or by telephone on [REDACTED].

As you have been dissatisfied on this occasion, we have handled your correspondence in accordance with the first stage of our complaints procedure. Further details are on our website at www.highwaysengland.co.uk/about-us/complaints-procedure/.

Yours sincerely

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Duncan Smith
Acting Executive Director for Operations

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