

**Minutes of the Huntworth Railway Bridge Committee Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2019  
at Moorland Village Hall commencing at 7:45 pm**

- 1. Attendance** – Cllr Alan Bradford, Cllr Julian Taylor, Cllr Richard Ives, Cllr Bill Revans, Cllr Richard Brown, Rod Latham (Town Clerk), Toby Elliot, Scott Pillinger, Matthew Thompson (Network Rail) and a large number of local residents.
- 2. Introduction.** Cllr Bradford opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. He thanked the representatives of Network Rail for coming a considerable distance to attend the meeting. He stated that Cllr Brown had been delayed, but that he would be chairing the meeting when he arrived.
- 3. Update.** Mr Elliott addressed the meeting. He stated that he had not expected the format to be that of a public meeting, but had anticipated that it would be a discussion with councillors about progress and about the content of a letter that Network Rail had drafted to all residents. He then went on to outline the steps that had been taken since the meeting in December. The start date had been reset to 13<sup>th</sup> February, but the end date remained 26<sup>th</sup> June. There would be fortnightly working meetings with Somerset County Council Highways to deal with access and related matters. A Q & A would be issued the following week covering the various matters that had been raised so far.
- 4. Discussion.** Members of the public raised a wide range of issues which included the following:
  - a.** The alternative route out of the village was prone to flooding, even if there was not a major incident. Network Rail (NR) agreed to discuss this with the County Council (SCC) at the next meeting on Friday, but reminded the meeting that the diversionary route had been agreed by SCC and it was their responsibility to deal with road problems.
  - b.** The possibility of a footbridge over the line was raised. NR said that this was not viable.
  - c.** A number of residents spoke about the financial, practical and economic impact that the bridge closure would have on their lives and again raised the question of being compensated. NR stated that, as a rule, they did not pay compensation, nor were they required to do so. However they did receive claims, which were dealt with by a specialist department. They agreed to provide details of how such claims should be made in the forthcoming letter.
  - d.** Again a number of people questioned why it had taken so long to instigate the work to the bridge, when it had been identified as being unsafe several years ago. NR said that it had originally been planned to repair the bridge, but, on detailed inspection, this was found to be not viable and so the decision had been taken to replace it. This had meant that the authorisation and scheduling process had to be restarted.
  - e.** The question was asked as to why the works had to take place during the winter, when there was a greater risk of flooding and snow blocking the alternative route, rather than delaying it for a few more months, which would also include the school holidays. NR were clear that their funding approval meant that the work had to go ahead as now planned.

- f. A special alternative route had been negotiated across private land, but this was only available for official school transport and emergency vehicles at present. People asked whether this could be extended to other specified categories of people such as children not currently entitled to school transport, people collecting prescriptions, people who could not otherwise get to work on time, refuse collection vehicles, mail and so on. NR agreed to look into this, but stressed that much depended on the attitude of the various owners of the route. It was also suggested that parents should check with SCC about arrangements for children not currently using school transport. It was agreed that temporary signage would be installed so that permitted users were aware of the special route.
  - g. There was a general feeling that NR should use some of the money saved by adopting a project plan that closed the bridge for 17+ weeks, as opposed to shorter but more costly options, to pay compensation to residents who were, effectively, paying the price for such an approach. NR re-iterated that the current arrangements were the most cost effective and that there was no spare funding.
  - h. Several residents with engineering knowledge questioned why the contract had to take so long and, why, for example, faster curing concrete could not be used, working hours could not be extended and so on. NR's view was that the current plans were the best way to proceed.
  - i. Assurance was sought that, given the fact that the new bridge would be single track, that all current users would still be able to cross it. NR agreed to check this.
- 5. Summary.** Cllr Brown summarised what he saw as the key questions that required answers as follows:
- a. Where would the emergency access be in the event of flooding or other weather event?
  - b. What were the details regarding compensation and insurance claims?
  - c. Why couldn't the project be delayed to later in the year?
  - d. What would be done about children not currently using school transport?
  - e. Was a "works" minibus a possibility?
  - f. Could the alternative route be improved by, for example, creating more passing places to put it on the same footing as the current route?
  - g. Could residents see the project plan?
  - h. Could the range of people accessing the special route be extended?
  - i. Could other alternative routes be explored?
- 6. Future communications.** At the suggestion of NR a small contact group of residents was set up. Members were: Kate Symonds, John Griffin and Edward Florey, together with local councillors. The next meeting was scheduled for 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2019 at 7:45pm. NR expressed their preference for a drop in style of meeting that could take place during the day.

The meeting closed at 9:50 pm

*Subsequent to the meeting Network Rail have stated to the Town Council that they would not be prepared to attend any further public meetings about the project. They also requested that, in order to ensure a response, future communications should be channelled via the Town Clerk who would have a single point of contact within NR. Any future meeting, should there be one, should be in a closed session with named attendees arranged through this single point of contact.*

Rod Latham  
Town Clerk  
North Petherton Town Council  
5 Acland Round  
Cotford St.Luke  
Taunton  
TA4 1JL  
01823 431702  
[Townclerk@nptc.info](mailto:Townclerk@nptc.info)