

Transcript of Welcombe Radio Interview with Friends of Lucy's Mill Bridge
– December 2017

Louise

Well I'm sitting with a couple of Friends of Lucy's Mill Bridge, who very kindly have given up their time to talk to me here and also bring in some of the illustrations. But let me first introduce.

I have Roger Clay and he's the Avon Navigation Trust Engineering Director and a Friend of Lucy's Mill Bridge. And I also have Mike Sheard who is the Project Manager acting for Avon Navigation Trust and he's offering his services as a Friend to Lucy's Mill Bridge and your project. So welcome to you Roger.

Roger

Thank you and it's a great pleasure to come and try and explain some of the features of what we we've been trying to do.

Louise

Ok, so how did you first get involved?

Roger

Ok, well I first got involved with this because a well known local councillor, the late Joan McFarland, who sadly died about a week ago and persuaded me, perhaps a couple of years ago, to attend the meetings of Friends of Lucy's Mill Bridge. I went along and listened to what they were trying to do, which was in effect to improve the crossing, but they hadn't really focused on how they wanted to do that. About 6 months or more ago, I had a look at the bridge in detail and from the research which had been done and the examinations that had been done by the County Council, it seemed pretty clear that a brand new bridge on that site was never going to happen. But, that the deck of the bridge was reasonable, it was being heavily used so therefore we started to look at perhaps the possibility of providing approach ramps to get up to that deck.

Having made that decision then Joan involved a local team of architects, Hawkes Edwards, who have very kindly given their time for free so far on the project and they took the original Avon Navigation Trust ideas and developed that into what we think is a workable system of approach ramps. Obviously these have had to be DDA compliant, only a 1:20 slope to get you up to the deck of the bridge. We proposed doing the absolute minimum to the deck, merely removing 2 panels of railings to get you on to the deck and that's the basis of the idea and it's then being carried forward by the team of people that we have working with us.

Louise

Well, before we go a bit further into the project, let me say welcome to Mike.

Mike

Thank you very much, nice to meet you and yes, here with Roger just to give you a bit more background. My background, I am the project manager and that role

involves organising and coordinating a range of disciplines who might then be able to realise this outcome and that also involves liaison with the public, interested parties, statutory bodies and the like. So, having met with Trevor Edwards of Hawkes Edwards, as Roger says who are conservation architects and heritage architects from Stratford upon Avon. We then arranged a structural engineer to have look at joining the team but firstly scoped and then procured a topographical survey of the embankment. So what this is, is a measurement in three dimensions of the plan and the elevation, the shape of those embankments and the existing structure and the adjacent structures, like houses and the Seven Meadows Road bridge. That enables you to determine how much space you have to play with and in getting that is our springing off point for our feasibility study, which is being progressed largely such that we have been able to use some reasonably detailed isometric and birds eye views and plans of elevations in two dimensions as well as a computer generated birds eye view of the proposal, which is really helpful to explain to lay people and technical people alike, what is happening and what this thing might look like once it goes in.

Louise

Well I'm looking at some of the boards that have been bought in and as Mike has just said and as Roger gave a brief description, you can see how the two elevated ramps fit in with what's already there and I think that these were on display at their recent exhibition that they had an open day at the Town Trust, but it really gives a very clear idea and also shows the amount of work that's gone in already to the thought processes and the project so far and I know Roger when we were talking a bit before that you were saying about the broad spectrum of expertise and also in terms of yourself with the Avon Navigation Trust and the experience you've had and not just with necessarily water?

Roger

Yes, thank you Louise. Indeed the Avon Navigation Trust, not looks after the river and the locks and the weirs, but we do get involved in structures, moorings etc, along the river itself and indeed providing a great deal of back up to the various local authorities responsible for bridge structures in particular. Perhaps the 2 most noteworthy, we were major subcontractors to the construction of the brand new bridge at Evesham and also took a large part in, particularly the follow up, of the disaster at Bidford bridge, the ancient bridge, which was hit by an agricultural tractor-that had to be made safe, scaffolding etc, put in place. There are a number of other bridges we have been involved in but I won't bore you with that, but just to make the point that the Trust are not strangers to bridge work – we are quite familiar with that all the way along the river. Hence why Joan, I think, dragged us in (if that's the term), encouraged us to become involved.

Louise

Yes, I think she knew what she was doing and I was asking you Mike, how did you get involved?

Mike

Ok, yes thank you.

Well Roger and I go back a number of years and in fact we were passing underneath this same bridge, bringing up a maintenance vessel from Wye Piddle, which is where the Avon Navigation Trust are based. We bought this maintenance vehicle up in early spring and we were passing underneath it and Roger and I looked at it and Roger said 'Oh look I have been asked to look at this and I think this might be a solution to this particular problem, what do you think Mike'. So I took up the challenge and the two of us then have been scratching our heads and organising our other advisers and consultants to come up with the solutions that we've now got to show you.

Louise

I just need to make a note that I said Town Trust and of course the open day was in the Town Hall.

Also, Roger you mentioned the DDA and that's Disability Discrimination Act. So how many people currently use the bridge?

Roger

Thank you Louise.

Well in fact the Friends of Lucy's Mill Bridge have been carrying out quite a detailed survey at various times of day and have recorded and analysed all the various classes of people that use it and indeed people that turn up and can't use it, which surprisingly is quite a number of people where the message has not got across that you can't get across in a wheelchair, you can't get across with a pushchair and you will struggle to get a bicycle across.

So far, we are coming up with figures, which even out of the summer season, are between 50 and 150 an hour during the daylight hours, which is surprising number really for a tiny little footbridge of this nature.

Louise

And presumably, what you've also been observing is that those are the people that can use it, and so there's a huge number that are not able to?

Roger

Absolutely, anybody with a pushchair, you sometimes see a mother and a father carrying a pushchair up steps but these existing steps are so precipitous that even that is impossible. A single mother on her own could not possibly get a pushchair up there. Wheelchairs, disability scooters, anything like that, forget it. If you're not fit enough to put your bike on your shoulder and climb up the steps, you are not going to get your bicycle across and to be honest somebody like myself, who's pretty fit and able to walk, it won't be long before I won't be able to get up the steps. Also, some dogs can't get up the steps, so it is very very limiting but the raw figure is something like 100 people an hour.

Louise

That's really quite a lot more than I had thought, I don't know about you Penny?

Penny

Hi, I've just arrived and looking at these beautiful plans and it will make such a difference to people. My husband has very restricted mobility and there is absolutely no way that he could come up on there and we went on there and watched the Duck Race for Welcome Radio and it was sad because quite a lot of people who wanted to come up and watch the Duck Race, which is in aid of The Shakespeare Hospice, they couldn't get up there, so even if it's just for Shakespeare Hospice's Duck Race, that is going to be marvellous.

Louise

We were looking, I just briefly mentioned about the public exhibition, and how did that all go? I think Penny's actually just looking at a fantastic short video that was put together by Trevor at Hawkes Edwards. Can you just give a description while Penny is looking at it?

Mike

Well yes, this is as I said earlier is a bird's eye view and it shows the ramps placed on the recreation ground side and actually behind the edge of the willow trees, which frame and soften the riverbank. So much they, the bridge itself, the ramp to the bridge will be concealed behind the trees, there will be glimpses through to the riverbank rather than this ramp completely 'in your face', as it were. It then abuts the existing bridge, kisses it if you like, it doesn't take any structural support from the existing bridge, by cantilevers.

You go across the bridge and then over to the Mill Lane side, the exit ramp if you like, if you are going that way, does a similar thing, and comes down parallel to the existing Seven Meadows Road, over sailing the embankment to the road bridge. So it is taking a shorter length because the path that it joins is moving up, so the exit ramp if you like, is a lot shorter than the entry ramp going in that direction.

The exhibition was reasonably well attended, in the Town Hall. Roger was there, I was there and a number of the Friends were there and we showed this big video, we had a number of different boards showing the proposals.

We had the competition winner, which I think you'll talk about later from the primary school. Her winning display, her winning solution ideas on display and we asked people to come and have a look and then fill in comment forms, which they did and we have then collated those and we are now analysing the results of those comments, good and bad if you like, so that we can then take from that anything that we can in terms of refining the design to suit all classes of user and all interested parties.

Louise

Mike just talking a little bit about the primary schools and so what was all that about?

Mike

Yes that was very interesting, the Bishopton Primary School locally, the teacher there James Greygoose was our contact and a very helpful chap indeed, together with the headmaster, they ran a competition to their pupils to come up with a solution to effect improvement to this bridge. So 50 or 60 terrific ideas from 6 year olds up to 12 year olds was submitted and then studied and some quite innovative solutions, some very amusing - we had a number of toy shops located on the access ramps, we had lighting, we had a lot of feathers, we had slides up and down, which Roger, may be useful for you in your not too distance future—its coming!.. as well as ramps and these were judged by the committee if you like, a number of people from the Friends of Lucy's Mill bridge and then I went along to an assembly at the school, when the prizes, the first prize and three runner up prizes were awarded and I gave them a speech, a talk rather, about what we'd done – shown them the video, shown them these drawings that you're seeing to try and explain and to perhaps stimulate some interest in the younger folk about a career if you like, or an interest in making stuff happen, in engineering if you like as well, but generally making stuff happen in your environment.

So, I hope there was some interest sparked but nevertheless it was an enjoyable time, the first prize winner made a model actually of her solution, which was on display in the Town Hall –very very innovative materials used and well received and all good and a great thing to do.

Louise

What was her first prize, just out of interest – do you know?

Mike

Yes, she had a piece of jewellery, a pendent necklace, donated by one of the local businesses, name escapes me, and then there was three runner up prizes of gift vouchers, again from local businesses of £10 each which went towards that particular recipients' Christmas I would think.

Louise

When Penny and I met Richard on the bridge a couple of weeks ago and we walked across and actually saw it for ourselves, he also showed us on one side at one of the early foundations where, as different bridges had been built, some sort of records of different dates so how old are some of the foundations?

Roger

Thank you Louise

Well as you say, this is a very ancient crossing point and looking at the foundations of the bridge piers and knowing some of the dates of previous bridges, those are at least mid 1600's, so you are talking best part of 400 years old. But in fact there may have been a bridge before then. I mean the type of stone and the style of the stonework is exactly like the ancient locks, some of which/few of which still exist on the river which were built sort of 1640's, 1650's.

Louise

Ok, so people have been crossing at that point for a long long time and the classic maybe Shakespeare may have walked across it, probably one of those that always gets asked – ‘he drank in this pub’ and ‘he went to school here’.

But bringing it up to now, Penny you mentioned obviously that your husband isn’t so mobile that therefore that he would really appreciate.... Mike you were saying you did some work on making sure that what was being proposed could accommodate wheelchairs and pushchairs and all that.

And did you want to say anything Pen?

Penny

Does it take electric wheelchairs as well?

Mike

Right yes, ok all good points. We’re keen obviously to make this a bridge for everyone and in that regard we were looking at trying to test the turning capability of all classes of pushchair and motorised wheelchairs onto the plan shape of the arrangement that we’ve got. So, a couple of months ago Roger and I got out chalk out and our measuring sticks and marked out in the district car park in Stratford, the shape of the existing bridge and particularly its junction with our new ramps. What that did was enable us to then test the turning around the corners and to drive, or somebody, to drive these junctions. Because there are a couple of right angle bends approaching the bridge intersection and there have been some comments ‘oh I don’t think I will be able to get round that’ etc, so we had a couple of wheelchair users, motorised wheelchair users and Elizabeth Dixon from the District Council, come to meet us at that cold and I think it was wet/damp afternoon and they drove the route, and it past with flying colours in terms of trying to get vehicles round. A lot of wheelchair/electric wheelchairs are 600mm, which is 2’ in old money, wide, some of the large ones are 2’ 6” (750mm) wide and they negotiated it without an issue at all. I hope I’m not misquoting Elizabeth but she was very very happy, she went away happy with the result and was very pleased to be consulted at such early stage.

Louise

And looking at some of these beautifully illustrated pictures, you’ve also pointed out that the additions are put in such a way that the vista of the bridge is maintained from the town side and what kind of bridge is it at the moment? When was it built/What is it? You were saying something about art deco?

Roger

The existing bridge, or shall we say, the existing deck structure was built in 1934 in typical art deco style of the time, which of course many people find quite attractive, it’s a feature of Stratford. As you say Louise, we are careful to preserve the view from the town side of the bridge and make sure that the ramps came in behind the bridge, if you like, between the footbridge and Seven Meadows Road bridge. If you want the technical details, it’s steel beams, which are submerged cast into a concrete deck, so it looks all concrete but it is reinforced by steel beams

Louise

Fascinating really actually.

Which does bring on to next steps, in terms of where the project's going or what you're waiting on? So, from you Mike, what's from your point of view?

Mike

Ok, thank you. Well, we have progressed our feasibility and the drawings that people may have seen or have seen the video and there's a website available as well, which people might like to look at www.lucysmillbridge.co.uk

The ideas have been shown on that, but this is a feasibility study and it's showing routes and capability of inserting ramps within the confines of the available space. What we haven't done yet is design the parapets and the style of the bridge deck and the like of the materials. That is for our more detail design once we have an amber light, if not a green light from the parties which control the/or keep the keys to this bridge. It is a County Council owned bridge, District Council are very involved as well, our next steps are to meet with both parties again. We've met with the District Council once, we are seeing their technical people and planning people in the new year. The County Council we've met twice and again we will be furthering their discussions and, depending on positive feedback, we will then be moving it on to the next stage

Louise

And from you Roger, you said at the moment it's yourselves and obviously the expertise that the Avon Navigation Trust brings and also the expertise of the people already involved as friends, but at some point obviously the environmental agency will be involved?

Roger

Yes, in any structure which in effect is built within a flood plane, of course the Avon Navigation Trust operates totally within the flood plane, everything that we build or everything we construct or plan requires consultation with the environment agency. In some cases you need consent from the environment agency for a particular structure, landing stage etc, so we are in almost continuous dialog with the environment agency. On a structure like this, when it comes to the point, or if it comes to the point of formal planning permission, then again the environmental agency is a statutory consultee for that structure within the flood plane or adjacent to a main water course, which of course, this is.

Louise

So really what we would like to say is; after some of your meetings next year, would you be happy to come back and give us an update?

Mike

Yes, indeed we can do that with pleasure. There is a small matter of funding as well to address and that is for the new year to, so don't ask us too much about that at the moment. But hopefully we'd have more to report on that when we have more to report on the technical responses as well.

Louise

And from you Penny, having had a chance to have a little look at some of the drawings and the video?

Penny

Well I think it's such a good idea, because the number of people who have various disabilities and it's not just people in wheelchairs or people with walking sticks, should be able to see our beautiful river and look at the different vistas and see some of the activities that go on over the river. So it will be so interesting to see how this develops.

Louise

I couldn't agree more with that. Ok and thank you so much. We'll obviously finish with your last piece of music and just want to say, really really appreciate your time in having come to show us and talk to us and we look forward to hearing more about what's going on.

Mike

A pleasure, thank you Louise

Roger

Ok, likewise, goodbye