

**AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET**

**Name of Committee** Warwick Area Committee

**Date of Committee** 23rd January 2007

**Report Title** Proposed 3 Tonnes Weight Restriction on Longhole Bridge, E2994 Ridgeway Lane in the Parish of Offchurch

**Summary** A Traffic Regulation Order to impose a 3 tonnes maximum gross weight restriction on Longhole Bridge was advertised on the 2nd November 2006. Objections have been received. This report details the objections and makes recommendations to Area Committee for consideration.

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**Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?** Yes/No

**Background Papers** Plan and objection letters.

**CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-** *Details to be specified*

Other Committees  .....

Local Member(s)  Councillor M Doody  
(With brief comments, if appropriate) Councillor R Stevens

Other Elected Members  .....

Cabinet Member  .....  
(Reports to The Cabinet, to be cleared with appropriate Cabinet Member)

Chief Executive  .....

Legal  I Marriott - agreed

Finance  .....



**Warwick Area Committee - 23rd January 2007**

**Proposed 3 Tonnes Weight Restriction on Longhole Bridge,  
E2994 Ridgeway Lane in the Parish of Offchurch**

**Report of the Strategic Director for  
Environment and Economy**

**Recommendation**

That the proposed 3 tonnes weight restriction order for Longhole Bridge on E2994 Ridgeway Lane be made as advertised.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 E2994 Ridgeway Lane is principally a non-tarmac surfaced, Unclassified County Road (UCR) which runs through the parishes of Hunningham, Long Itchington, Offchurch and Ufton. In the parish of Offchurch, E2994 crosses the Grand Union Canal via a bridge known as Longhole Bridge, which is owned and managed by British Waterways (BW).
- 1.2 E2994 is the longest un-surfaced UCR in Warwickshire, which is a popular route for recreational motor users, walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- 1.3 On the 8th November 2005, an 18 month Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) was made restricting vehicles (except motorbikes and cyclists) from using Longhole Bridge following a structural assessment by BW that rated the bridge as having a zero ton gross vehicle weight (GVW) carrying capacity.
- 1.4 Since making the temporary TRO, BW has re-assessed the bridge and revised their assessment to 3 tonnes (3T) GVW. However, further works are required in the near future to sustain this assessment. British Waterways propose undertaking these repairs during 2007 (May time) if a 3T GVW restriction is imposed. The repair would involve removing the current tarmac deck (which is thin) and replacing it with a thicker concrete deck.
- 1.5 The works in principle were agreed with Design Services and Countryside Recreation because a 3T GVW restriction is not considered restrictive to the ordinary traffic known at the time to be using the highway. A Land Rover (4 x 4) weights approximately 2.5 tonnes. The proposed order is not intended to restrict the types of traffic which have been using the highway. To the contrary we have sought to agree a repair that accommodates the ordinary traffic, including 4 x 4s.

- 1.6 A TRO proposing the 3T GVW restriction was advertised on the 2nd November and five objections were received. A copy of the TRO consultation plan showing the proposed signs is attached as **Appendix A**.

## 2. Responses to the Objections Received against the Proposed 3 Tonnes Gross Vehicle Weight Restriction

- (i) **Objection** - A 3T weight limit will not prevent 4 x 4s or tractors because they weigh less than 3T. A 3T limit will encourage heavier vehicles to use the lane and this use would be inappropriate. 4 x 4s should be banned by imposing a 1 or 1.5 tonnes limit. There is no farm traffic which uses the bridge so in effect all traffic will be able to use the bridge resulting in the bridge wearing out more rapidly and at a higher cost.

**Response** - The 3T GVW limit is not intended to prevent 4 x 4s from using the bridge. BW are under a duty to maintain the bridge to a standard which will accommodate the 'ordinary traffic of the neighbourhood', which in the case of E2994 includes 4 x 4s. The law does not permit a 1 or 1.5 tonnes limit to be imposed. The lowest limit that is permissible is 3T. Opposing objections relating to farm traffic are detailed below.

- (ii) **Objection** - Access is needed to both sides of the bridge with a medium sized tractor power unit that un-laden, weighs over 7 tonnes. Two of the objectors reside on the north side of the canal and have an interest in a five acre (approx) strip of 'scrub/woodland' ('the wood') on the south side of the canal. This land is likely to be entered into an Environmental Stewardship scheme with a view to improving biodiversity and they will require access to manage the wood, including the extraction of timber. A minimum weight limit of 17.5 tonnes is required to permit access for a tractor and laden trailer, a 24-25 tonnes limit would be preferable.

**Response** - It would be fair to say the wood has not been actively managed for years and consequently the land has not been accessed by tractors and trailers for sometime. No objections have been lodged against the lack of access imposed by the current temporary TRO which has been in operation for over 12 months.

If the land is brought into active management, it is anticipated that the need for heavy plant access will be infrequent taking into account the restricted size of the site. If as predicted heavy plant access will be infrequent, this use would be considered 'exceptional' traffic and not part of the ordinary traffic that BW are duty bound to accommodate. However, it is appreciated that until the landowners know what woodland operations are required, they wish to keep their options open by having a higher weight limit.

If a 3T GVW restriction is imposed, heavy traffic would be able to access the land from the south, albeit the access route is longer.

If a 3T GVW restriction is imposed, this does not preclude a higher limit being made in the future if it can be justified.

BW has advised that they will investigate increasing the carrying capacity of the bridge to 7.5T GVW by increasing and improving the quality of the fill over the bridge. Unfortunately, this solution will exacerbate the vertical alignment of the track on the approaches and over the crown. Investigations will require a detailed survey of the profile of the arch to confirm the full requirements of any works but are estimated to cost £15,000.

To provide a 17 tonnes gross vehicle weight, BW has advised that a structural saddle would need to be constructed over the bridge. The current estimated capital cost of this work, excluding access costs and fees is £150,000. This is a cost they do not feel can be justified as an alternative access route is available and it would draw funds away from structures in far worse condition.

- (iii) **Objection** - The proposed signage is out of keeping with the rural character of the road. They are more suited to roads carrying large volumes of traffic. Smaller and more discreet signs should be used.

**Response** - E2994 is a public highway and any signs erected on the public highway must comply with Statutory Instrument 2002 No 3113; 'The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002'. If the order is made, only four signs are proposed (as illustrated on the plan in **Appendix A**) two advance warning notices and one either side of the bridge at a location where there is space for vehicles to turn around. In recognition of the road's character, the signs will be as small as legally permitted. If the signs do not comply with the regulations, the order would be un-enforceable.

- (iv) **Objection** - The current warning signs are adequate.

**Response** - The current signs were installed as part of the temporary TRO which prohibits vehicles (except motorbikes and cyclists) from using the bridge. If a 3T GVW restriction order is made, the current signs would be misleading and inadequate because they would not advise drivers of the weight restriction.

### 3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Having considered the objections to the proposed weight limit, it is considered that the Weight Restriction Order be implemented as advertised.

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2nd January 2007