

# **The Case for closing Ludford Bridge**

## **Ludford Parish Council**

**April 2016**

### **Action**

Ludford Parish Council requests that Shropshire Council, as a matter of urgency and for the economic benefit for Ludlow, should activate the 2011 proposal to prohibit and divert heavy/long vehicles from using Ludford Bridge. That the diversion signage should be in place by the time that Ludford Bridge re-opens, so that HGVs presently using alternative routes do not return to Ludford Bridge.

### **The Solution**

The only suitable route into Ludlow for HGVs is at the north end of the Ludlow by-pass. A case can be made for not using Ludford Bridge, Sheet Road or Henley Road; the strength for or against each route is hard to measure and would anyway be irrelevant if the route using the by-pass were to be adopted.

None of the HGVs that use Ludford Bridge would be directed via the Henley Road roundabout and/or use the Co-op corner, It is the perceived re-direction to these Ludlow access routes that seem to provide the main argument for not introducing restrictions on HGVs using Ludford Bridge.

The main arguments raised against the diversion of HGVs using Ludford Bridge are:

**1. The additional distance travelled by HGVs.**

At many other towns distances have been increased to protect the town from large vehicles operating in unsuitable locations. Ludlow would merely be added to this list by the proposed diversion.

**2. The less than ideal right -hand turn across the A 49 to reach Ludlow travelling from the south.**

This right-hand turn has exactly the same degree of danger/safety that vehicles turning right on to the B4361 from the A49 experience now from the north direction There would be no increase in the safety aspects; the problem would be merely transferred/ relocated from one A49 junction to another.

**3. The unsuitable alternative routings**

There would be no additional HGV traffic on either the Sheet Road, or Henley Road, using Gravel Hill or the Co-Op corner. In fact if all HGVs were to be directed to the north access there would be less HGVs on these routes than there is now.

**4. Bull Ring Traffic**

The final point to counter is that the new routing would involve HGVs that currently cross Ludford Bridge having to traverse the middle of Ludlow, through the Bull Ring in the centre of Ludlow, and that this outcome would be an undesirable outcome. The additional traffic through the Bull Ring would be to/from, for example McConnells, Homecare, Countrywide.

However the validity of this point is undermined and rejected as it takes no account of the number of HGVs who normally cross Ludford Bridge and then traverse the town centre via the Bull Ring when the Bridge is open. It is probable that these HGVs occur in greater numbers now than the number of HGVs that would use the diverted route. After all, the HGV attempting to reach Tesco's that collided with the bridge would have been in this category. So it is more likely that the number of HGVs traversing the Bull Ring would diminish.

The argument against the diversion, on the basis that it would create new greater difficulties, have little or no validity. It suggests that the concerns just keep being raised as an excuse for doing nothing.

## **Background**

The narrow medieval Ludford Bridge is a Grade 1 listed Ancient Monument. It has a narrow, sharp turn on the Ludlow side of the bridge.

Ludford Parish Council has campaigned for years for restrictions on access to the bridge by long, heavy vehicles. The case for prohibiting and re-routing was featured in the Village Plan in 2004.

## **History of Incidents**

There have been frequent incidents of lorries hitting the bridge. The bridge was last closed in February 2011 for 14 weeks, and not re-opened until well into May. Frost damage caused a section of the bridge to fall in to the river, exposing the ancient rubble of the interior of the structure. However the extensive use of the bridge by HGVs, large tractors and trailers could be considered to be a contributory factor.

The main damage to the parapet of the bridge is usually caused by long lorries travelling south, from Teme side, being unable to turn sufficiently sharply when attempting to cross the bridge. Left hand drive vehicles provide a greater risk of such incidents. The two incidents prior to the 2011 closure were caused by this hazard.

Following the 2011 closure, a review and traffic survey was undertaken and as a result the Highways Agency agreed in principle to the diversion of lorry traffic from Ludford Bridge and the provision of signs on the A49. The cost was estimated at £130k. Unfortunately Shropshire Council refused to sanction the expenditure, so Ludford Bridge was then condemned to await the next incident and closure.

Ironically the next closure occurred on the anniversary, the same calendar date as the 2011 incident, on February 20<sup>th</sup> 2016. On this latest occasion it occurred when a lorry reversed down Lower Broad Street and collided with the bridge. The closure has so far extended for some 6 weeks with no definite date of re-opening.

## **The soft option proposed**

As a consequence of this latest incident there have been calls for additional and better signing to reduce the access by lorries to Lower Broad Street. However although on this occasion traffic in Lower Broad Street was a factor in the incident Lower Broad Street reversals are not usually the cause for a bridge impact. Therefore, additional signage, even if it were to prove to be affected, would not influence or remove any of the other causes of the bridge closure. It is a soft option, an excuse to avoid the overall problem and would make no contribution to other causes of the bridge closure. It has to be assumed that the short section of road, currently closed, from Lower Broad Street to St John's Road, if opened for such vehicles to re-join the main road system, would not satisfactorily resolve these problems.

## **Cost to Ludlow of lost trade and business**

There has been no indication of the cost to the economy of Ludlow or to individual traders. The loss to local businesses it is assumed would exceed the £130k required in 2011 for diversion signage and the prohibition for HGVs to access Ludford Bridge.

## **Survey results of local people**

A recent survey has shown that 90% of respondents are in favour of a lorry ban. An important factor in determining a solution.

## **Existing Circumstances**

The diversion of lorries in at the present time, when the bridge is closed, demonstrates that a permanent diversion would work.

Tom Carter

Chairman  
Ludford Parish Council