

Herne Bridge - What we know

Updated 9/11/21

This information is a compilation of the facts that we know from the relevant bodies as listed and not in any way Halberton Parish Council's view or assumption.

The Parish Council has no powers or authority over the bridge or roads.

Responsibilities:

The structure of Herne Bridge is the responsibility of Historical Railways Estate (on behalf of Department for Transport who own the bridge).

The road over the structure (and all other local roads) are the responsibility of Devon County Council.

The water-main (which burst on 30th December 2020 and caused the damage) belongs to South West Water.

Wildlife and compliance with legislation falls under the remit of Natural England.

Note: Devon County Council and South West Water were in attendance initially to rectify the burst and implement traffic management.

UPDATE – 14/5/2021

Neil Parish, MP attended the Parish Council meeting on 4th May 2021 and answered questions from members of the public present.

He requested the correspondence the Parish Council had written to Natural England regarding a second ecological service and the 'risk to life' the bridge closure posed.

He undertook to speak to Natural England and to set up a meeting of all responsible bodies with the Parish Council in attendance.

Surveys of the bridge

Structural survey:

The burst pipe has created a void that is approximately 2m deep and the stability of the surrounding fill is, at present, unknown. This has raised notable concerns relating to load carrying capacity in the short term, as a result no motor vehicles are permitted over the structure.

The road fabric is eroded and the embankment leading up to the bridge is damaged, but the bridge structure itself is not affected, however, because of the damage it has been classified as 'in danger of collapse'.

From an engineering point of view and dependent on the what the investigations find, the work will likely be a combination of grouting up and installing/compacting new fill and road layers.

Ecological survey:

Ecological surveys are undertaken by appropriately qualified/experienced ecologists, in this instance employed by Historical Railways Estate, and then used to inform the plan for the works to repair the bridge. In the instance of Herne Bridge there is evidence of substantial badger activity and there is a due process to follow before repairs can be started as badgers are a protected

species. The likely time-frame for repair is the end of the year.

1. Badger sett design to be completed.
2. Badger sett design to be submitted to local Heritage/Listing officer for agreement (as it will have a visual impact on the bridge).
3. Once agreed the sett will be constructed.
4. The new sett will then be monitored to ensure that it is being used.
5. Once the new sett has been in use for circa 6 months then 'eviction' of the badgers from the existing sett can be started – one way doors, etc.
6. Upon completion of the 'eviction' measures at the existing sett it will be monitored. There then needs to be 21 days with no evidence of further use. If any is noted then the clock effectively resets again.
7. Once 21 clear days have been recorded then works can begin to the embankment.

A further issue is that the Department of Transport does not own any land locally, so will have to negotiate with a landowner in order to gain permission to construct the artificial sett before any of the above can take place. In addition, exclusion works can only take place between 1st July and 30th November.

Note: A licence is required from Natural England before the badgers can be moved to the new sett.

It is understood that the process will be put in place as soon as possible and the license is being prepared by the ecologist for the 'eviction' of the badgers from the sett but it cannot be submitted until the new sett has been designed and agreed though.

The new sett will have a visual impact on the bridge (which is itself listed), so needs approval by the local Conservation officer who is aware of the urgency of the situation.

Details on badger licensing for damage purposes can be found on our website here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/badgers-licence-to-interfere-with-setts-to-prevent-damage>

UPDATE 14/5/2021

It is understood that work on the construction of the new sett is underway.

UPDATE 24/5/2021

It is understood that Natural England will be granting the license to start the exclusion works from 1st July 2021. If after 21 continuous days there is no evidence of badgers, the sett can be considered as closed.

UPDATE 21/6/2021

Provided there is no evidence of badgers following the 21 day period, the contractors can do a detailed assessment of the work required. This should be completed by late July/first week in August.

Depending upon the findings will determine the work activities and thus the timeline for repair.

Diversions and temporary road options

Diversion

The Parish Council is monitoring the diversions in place and has requested that signs be put up at

Five Bridges, Canal Hill and Way Mill Cross reading 'no access to Halberton' and the existing diversion signs at Five Bridges be removed.

The diversion signs in place on the lanes can cause non-residents to go round in circles.

The option of a one way system could be considered but could potentially make journeys longer.

Please report any problems with traffic to the Parish Clerk (clerk@halberton.org) and any problems with the roads themselves to Devon County Council on their website [How to report a pothole in Devon - Roads and transport](#).

UPDATE – 14/5/2021

The diversion route has to be along roads of a comparable nature which is why the current route runs through Willand and Brithem Bottom.

The Parish Council requested that signs be put before Manley Lane (on the outskirts of Tiverton) and as you enter Halberton from Sampford Peverell advising that Herne Bridge was closed.

The emergency services were informed that Herne Bridge was closed when the bridge closure was first known. Contact has been made again with the emergency services to ensure that all operators are aware that the bridge remains closed.

Narrow/single lane over the bridge:

The road is too narrow, and close to the badger sett location and washed out materials. Intrusive investigation works would be required to ensure the safety of the bridge to vehicles and the view is that the bridge would not prove fit for vehicles.

Temporary road option:

The option of a temporary road is complex.

The Local Authority would have to indemnify the landowner from any/all claims and manage/maintain the road itself and it would be subject to the temporary not impacting on the badgers.

Temporary bridge:

Consideration has been given to a temporary bridge effectively spanning over the washed out area. In this instance, the changes in gradient, the state of the Herne Bridge itself and the badgers plus the resulting time to put the bridge in place is considered to be both cost and time prohibitive by Devon County Council.

Policing of the bridge

Signs and fencing are in place preventing vehicle access and local officers will be making regular checks. The Duty Public Order Planner and the Rural Crime Wildlife Officer have been briefed. Removal of the fencing would be considered criminal damage.

UPDATE – 14/5/2021

It would also be considered a criminal offence if member of the public sought to remove the badgers.

Public meeting

The Parish Council's next meeting is on Tuesday, 13th July 2021 and Herne Bridge will be on the agenda. The matter was discussed at the Annual Parish Meeting (27/4/2021) and as previously

reported (6/5/2021) when Councillors Slade and Radford together with Neil Parish, MP were in attendance.

In the meantime, as the weather improves, we would ask all drivers to take into consideration the increased numbers of pedestrians, cyclists and riders on the lanes whilst the current Government restrictions are in place and drive with due care and attention. And, where possible, use an alternative route to the lanes for through journeys.

Sue McGeever
Clerk to Halberton Parish Council

Herne Bridge update - 19/7/2021

The Parish Council understands that the ecologist will be on site this week to commence the exclusion works, and will then be attending every few days until the process is complete. In terms of the works itself, there are 2 broad options available once the badgers have been excluded.

1. Excavate all of the embankment from the bridge until there is sound material and then reconstruct the embankment.

2. Pepper the existing embankment with grout injection pipes and fill all of the voids.

The decision on the way forward, and there are pros and cons to each option, can only be made once intrusive investigation works have been undertaken. The Parish Council is monitoring the situation closely and further updates will be posted as we learn more.

Update - 3/9/2021

An update was requested of Historic Railways Estate. The response as follows :- Further in line with your following query, I can confirm that works are awaited to be awarded to the contractor soon. As soon we get the works start date, hopefully Matthew Irwin should be able to confirm you. Hope it answers your question

Update - 19/10/2021

An update was requested of Historic Railways Estate.

Intrusive investigations undertaken, initial findings was relatively poorly compacted red sand, which would likely explain how there was such a wash-out and such large badger setts.

Schedule is the second week in November to start the grout injection works, with an estimated 2 weeks duration. The contractor will then need the following week for reinstating the surfacing, etc. So it should be completed by the first week in December.

Update - 9/11/2021

The stabilisation site works starts on Monday 15th Nov (so Monday coming) and is slated to last 3 weeks all in (2 weeks for the drilling and grouting, and 1 week for reinstating surfacing etc).

Usual caveat that these things can change somewhat if something unexpected occurs, but the confidence seems pretty high on the timeframe.