STREETSCENE AND ENGINEERING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present: **1 December 2017**

Chairperson:	**Councillior S.M. Penry**
Councillors:	R.Davies, W.F.Griffiths, C.James, A.McGrath, J.Warman, R.W.Wood and S. ap Dafydd
Officers In Attendance	D.Griffiths, M.Roberts, R.George, H.Hasan, A.Lewis and Brumby
Cabinet Invitees:	E.V. Latham, A. Wingrave

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1. **MINUTES OF THE STREETSCENE AND ENGINEERING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 8TH SEPTEMBER 2017**

   The Scrutiny Committee noted the minutes.

2. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18.**

   The Scrutiny Committee noted the work programme.

3. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

   The Committee selected the following items:

   3.1 Traffic Order – Shelone Road, Briton Ferry

   Officers provided an amended form of wording for the recommendation, as follows ‘that the proposed implementation of a 20mph Speed Limit and Traffic Calming Measures at Briton Ferry (exact locations as detailed at Appendix 1 to the circulated report), be implemented.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the recommendation to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

3.2 Streetscene and Engineering Performance Indicators for Quarter 2 of 2017/18

Members considered the quarterly performance management data for the second quarter of 2017/2018 as contained within the circulated report.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

3.3 Langy Bridge, Glynneath

Members received an overview summary in relation to the condition of Langy Bridge as contained within the circulated report.

Members were informed that Langy Bridge was originally built in the 1800's and carried a section of rail line across the River Neath. The bridge has pedestrian access on one side and now only serves as a footbridge, the railway having closed and the track on either side having been removed.

It was also explained that the footbridge is not a registered footpath, adopted, or historically listed structure but is sited on the southern side by land owned by the local authority and on the northern side by land owned by the Aberpergwm Estates.

The bridge serves no direct access although remains popular with walkers and dog walkers as a leisure route with responsibility for maintaining the bridge currently vested with Streetcare Services.

The Head of Streetcare went on to explain that in April 2017 the Council's Engineering Section carried out an inspection on the bridge and shortly after advised that it should be closed to the public and access prevented until such time as the bridge was removed or remedial works undertaken.

Members were then informed that an attempt was first made to close off the footbridge using a pedestrian guardrail in November 2001. Following installation the guardrail was immediately torn down and, following legal advice warning

signs were displayed advising the public ‘footbridge is unsafe – to be used at own risk’.

Since this time the Head of Streetcare pointed out that the condition of the bridge has continued to deteriorate and following the latest condition report a new barrier installed. In October 2017 this barrier was removed and another installed which was also taken down. A further replacement is currently being put up.

Problems identified within the inspection report included:-

- Damage to the cutwaters that protect the masonry piers and undermining due to water scour;
- Missing pedestrian guardrail on the spans themselves and above the wing-wall at the southern end
- Hole in the concrete deck slab and severe spalling to the soffit of the slab
- Severe corrosion of the bridge support brackets

Following the completion of the inspection report, Members were informed that three estimates were obtained.

Estimate one involved the refurbishment of the bridge to footbridge standard (£444,150). Estimate two involved installation of a new 50 metre span footbridge (£681,750), while estimate three outlined demolition of the existing superstructure, leaving the abutment walls on either side but including reducing the height of the bridge piers to one metre (£90,000).

The Head of Streetcare proceeded to inform the Committee that as the bridge superstructure spanned the boundary of the Glynneath and Blaengwrach county borough electoral wards, the three associated local members had been informed of the safety concerns and the various options.

It was then pointed out to Members that taking into account the budget position of the authority, the ongoing inspection and maintenance liabilities, and the prospect for future investment, the recommendation of officers would be to support estimate three.

Members were also advised that in response to the proposed options put forward representations had been received from local members and Glynneath Town Council outlining their opposition to demolition of the structure. In addition, the Town Council and local Members voiced their support for replacing or refurbishing the bridge as a strategic feature to support regeneration of the Valleys and boost the local tourism economy by reinstating the old railway line and utilising any available grant funding, if viable.

The Head of Streetcare informed the Committee that should the superstructure be removed, the abutments could still potentially be refurbished and reused at a later date if future funding were obtained to install a new single span footbridge.

Furthermore, the Head of Streetcare made clear that whilst capital refurbishment/replacement schemes have been estimated with respect to maintaining a footbridge, officers believe there is little or no prospect of funding for such schemes being available from Council resources due to competing priorities.

Members were also told that as far as any restatement of the railway is concerned, this would need to be subject to a rail feasibility study covering the whole of any proposed route and any scheme would be a project costing multiple millions to realise.

The Head of Streetcare also highlighted that for Langy Bridge alone, the cost of reconstruction to modern standards would be several million pounds and emphasised that the section of railway concerned did not form part of the former main railway line.

Following the conclusion of the overview summary by the Head of Streetcare one of the local Members asked to address the Committee to speak in favour of maintaining or replacing the current superstructure,

The member highlighted the community support for retaining the bridge following the submission of a petition signed by 803 local residents. In addition, the member explained that the bridge was regularly used by walkers, dog walkers and runners and if the structure was removed this would result is the loss of

a significant access point and local feature enforcing a considerable diversion for individuals utilising the current route.

Furthermore, the member pointed out that the bridge was located in an area that had been designated for re-generation as part of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys and enquired whether potential funding to invest in a new footbridge structure could be accessible via the Pen-y-Cymoedd wind farm community chest fund, along with any funds currently allocated for potential demolition of the bridge structure.

In response, the Head of Streetcare emphasised that he took absolutely no satisfaction in recommending that the current footbridge span should be removed. Nevertheless, the Head of Streetcare reminded the Committee that the Council has finite resources with a total of 450 bridges and roads located throughout the County Borough that have to be inspected and maintained via one single maintenance budget fund reduced year on year due to ongoing budget austerity measures. This has resulted in Members having to be asked to make very difficult decisions with regard to council owned structures.

The Head of Streetcare also explained that as the current footbridge was not a registered footpath or an adopted or historically significant structure it was unfortunately not eligible for any grant funding including community chest funding.

Members then proceeded to ask the Head of Streetcare whether the option of an asset transfer of the structure to a local Town or Community Council had been considered.

The Head of Streetcare told Members that he would be more than content to proceed with a community asset transfer of the structure to a local town or community council.

However, he cautioned that such an action could place an exceptional financial burden on the relevant town or community council as they would be required to take responsibility for all risks and liabilities associated with the structure as well as ensuring the safety and security of the bridge going forward.

It was also pointed out that in order to fund the cost of replacing the current bridge structure (excluding insurance premiums,

inspection and health and safety costs) would be just over £680,000. This level of upfront funding without access to external grant funding could be financially crippling for any town or community council to undertake.

Following further discussion Members enquired whether there was any possibility that remedial measures could be put in place to make the bridge safe while further discussions continue on a possible community asset transfer arrangement to a third party organisation.

The Head of Streetcare responded by re-stating his view that the bridge was dangerous, unsafe and unfit for use with significant corrosion and spalling to the superstructure and sub-structure. In addition, the Head of Engineering and Transport explained that even to make remedial repairs to the bridge (for example, repairing the masonry piers) would result in initial costs of £250,000 which would have to be met by a town or community council, or other organisation, following any asset transfer and exclude any works which would then bring the structure back into safe public use.

Members also raised their concerns about the continued and persistent vandalism of the barriers placed at the bridge for the safety of members of the public and the potential risk of an accident occurring at the site due to the structure's deteriorating condition.

The Head of Streetcare and the Head of Engineering and Transport responded by confirming to Members that they had the same concerns and as such, in the absence of alternative options would advise Members that the current bridge superstructure should be removed and the masonry piers lowered.

In addition, the Head of Engineering and Transport informed Members that works to commence removal of the structure would not be possible until April, 2018 at the very earliest due to National Resources Wales (NRW) restrictions associated with working in the river. As such this would offer a window of opportunity for interested third parties to submit any formal propositions in relation to the possibility of a community asset transfer.

Following scrutiny the Committee were supportive of the recommendation to be considered at Cabinet Board.

Officers also confirmed they will meet with elected representatives from Glynneath Town Council in due course to re-consider the liabilities of pursuing a potential community asset transfer, while progress continued with tendering arrangements with demolition contractors.

CHAIRPERSON