

# WHITCHURCH BRIDGE COMPANY TOLL APPLICATION DATED 5<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2014

## Bridge Utility and the Community

### 1. Introduction

1.1 This document sets out details about the Bridge in the context of the local community.

### 2. History of the Bridge

- 2.1 The Company of Proprietors of Whitchurch Bridge arose from an idea by Robert Micklem, who with Samuel Gardiner and Vanderstegen, father and son, promoted the Act of Parliament in 1792 for the purpose of building a bridge at or near the point of the existing ferry over the river Thames, from Whitchurch in the county of Oxford to the opposite shore, in the parish of Pangbourne, in the county of Berkshire. The original proprietors grew to ten in number by the time the Act was passed to take over the ferry rights and to build at their own costs "a good and substantial bridge" which was described as being "of great utility and advantage to the public". In return for their investment the Proprietors were given the right to charge tolls.
- 2.2 The Company of Proprietors is required by this Act to repair and to re-build the bridge "such that at all times passage was provided for travellers, cattle and carriages". The Bridge is considered under the act to be extra-parochial, thus not assessable for rates, taxes or duties, and not considered a county bridge subject the counties of Oxfordshire or Berkshire. This was at a time when the Turnpike system was common throughout the country. However, in more recent times laws have been introduced which affect such undertakings as bridges, namely the Transport Charges etc. (Misc Provisions) Act 1954 which gave the Minister of Transport power to regulate tolls etc.
- 2.3 As a result of these changes the Company in 1988 promoted a further private Act of Parliament to link the changes in the 1954 Act to Whitchurch Bridge. The Company relies on the tolls collected to cover the day to day costs of operating this service together with building up a fund to cover the cost of replacing the bridge in the future and prides itself on the high standard of maintenance carried out on the bridge based upon expert professional advice.
- 2.4 The first bridge was built by Mr Treacher, a gentleman well known for numerous works erected on the Thames at that time, "as surveyor to the Commissioners". It was rather steep, supported on about twenty piers, and just wide enough to take a carriage and was entirely constructed of wood. The balustrades were a sort of two-railed fence, the posts of which bulged out below, probably for elegance or strength, and were fixed to the ends of the transverse beams which supported the roadway. There was an upright ornament on each side near the middle.
- 2.5 The second wooden bridge was built late 1852 and completed in spring 1853 and was similar to the earlier one but was less steep and had only half the number of piers, the balustrade was perpendicular with a criss cross fence somewhat like the present one but simpler, and with no central ornaments. There was a wide gate across the road from the toll-house porch door. When this bridge showed signs of deterioration in 1902 the present iron bridge was built. Again a ferry was operated during re-building using the same route as 49 years previously.
- 2.6 This bridge - the third - was designed by Joseph Morris and built by the Cleveland Bridge and Engineering Company Ltd. Construction was started in late 1901 and finished in early 1902. It is gently arched and consists of 4 spans with riveted lattice girders along the 2 outer edges; these act as the main load bearing members and also as parapets. The roadway and footway are supported on transverse beams and steel jack arches. The main piers are pairs of vertical steel columns beneath the lattice girders, and each pair is braced by diagonal steelwork, (strengthened in 1921). These piers have been protected by fenders on the upstream side since they were constructed in 1902, and during the spring of 2005 fenders were added on the downstream side. The abutments are of masonry and brickwork.

- 2.7 The Toll House dates back to 1792 and is built close to the road so that tolls could be collected from the porch door, which at that time faced the road. As recent as 1977 a 'front door' was added to the north facing wall. Both the Toll House and the Bridge itself are designated as Grade II Listed Structures.
- 2.8 In recent times a brick-built toll booth, with swing-arm barriers, has been built at the northern end of the bridge in the middle of the carriageway. In 2006 a computer controlled toll collection system was introduced using proximity cards known as "Bridge Cards", which enable motorists to pay a discounted Toll and to operate the swing-arm barrier automatically.
- 2.9 In 2013-2014 the Bridge was reconstructed. The design combined the key visual elements of the 1902 Bridge with new structural elements to meet current highway structural standards.

### **3. Local Transport infrastructure**

- 3.1 The Bridge carries the B471 highway between Pangbourne in West Berkshire and Whitchurch-on-Thames in Oxfordshire.
- 3.2 The adjacent road crossings are
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| Upstream:  | Streatley & Goring Bridge, which carries the B4009 between Streatley in West Berkshire and Goring on Oxfordshire.<br>Road distance from Whitchurch Bridge: 4 miles approx<br>Cost of not using Whitchurch Bridge @ 40p/mile: £3.20<br>Time to avoid using Whitchurch Bridge: 15 – 20 minutes |
| Downstream | Caversham Bridge, which carries the A4155 between Reading and Caversham<br>Road distance from Whitchurch Bridge: 7 miles approx<br>Cost of not using Whitchurch Bridge @ 40p/mile: £5.60<br>Time to avoid using Whitchurch Bridge: 30 - 40 minutes   |

### **4. Planning issues**

#### **4.1 Conservation Area**

- 4.1.1 The Bridge lies within the Whitchurch Conservation Area, which was designated on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1978.

#### **4.2 Listing Status**

- 4.2.1 The Bridge was designated as a Grade II listed structure by South Oxfordshire District Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1995. The listing details are as follows:

“Road bridge over River Thames. 1902, to the designs of Joseph Morris; built by Cleveland Bridge and Engineering Company Ltd. Steel lattice-girder construction, of four spans; the three piers comprising pairs of steel posts, with diagonal bracing between, support the carriageway, which is on transverse beams and steel jack-arches. The parapets are the lattice-girders. Red brick abutments with stone dressings and terminal piers.

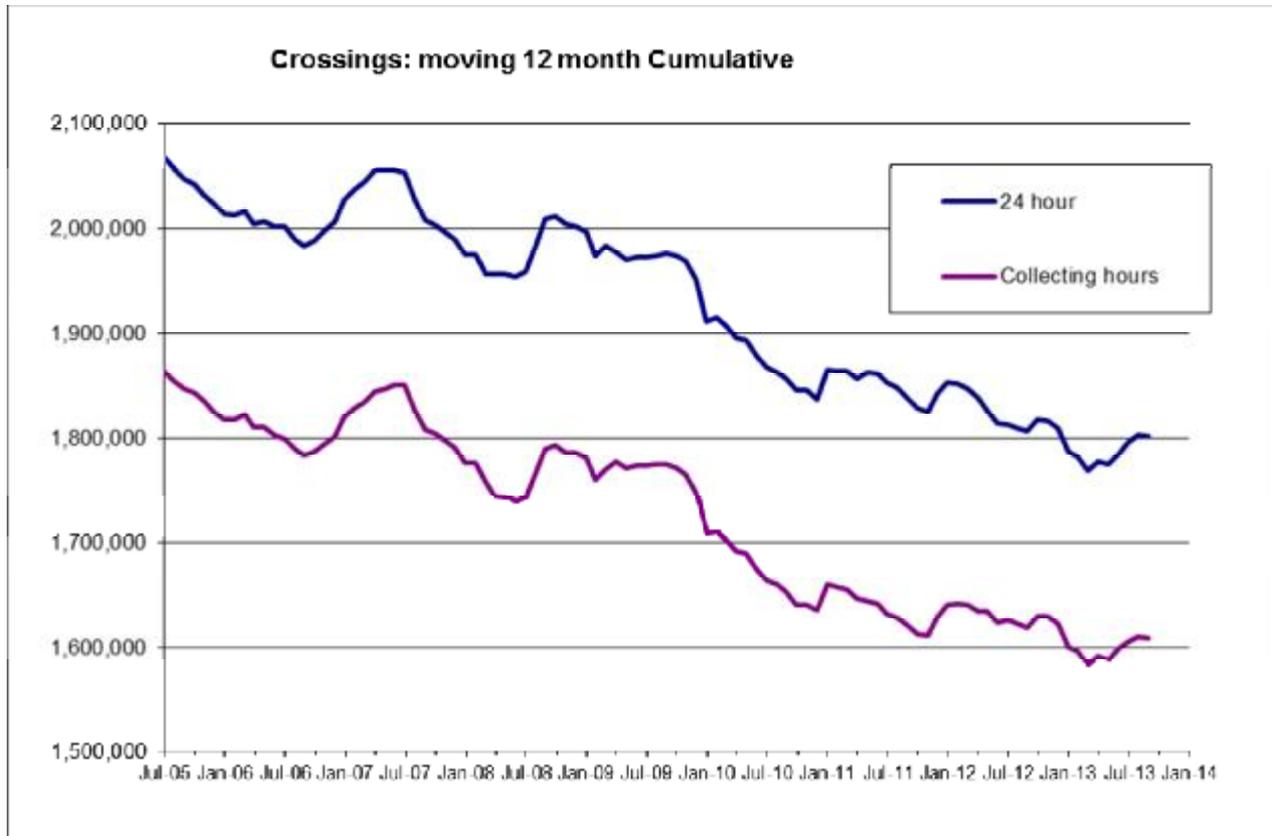
“NOTE: The first bridge was built in timber in 1792, by Act of Parliament, to the designs of John Treacher, surveyor to the Thames Commissioners. It was a toll bridge and its original tollhouse (qv) still exists. The bridge was rebuilt in wood in 1852 and again in 1902, in steel. SOURCES: [1] Colvin, H., A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1660-1840. [2] Company of Proprietors of Whitchurch Bridge, A Short History of Whitchurch Bridge, [08/01/1995]”

#### **4.3 Design of the Reconstructed Bridge**

- 4.3.1 The Company commissioned architectural and engineering design services to develop a design for the reconstructed Bridge which met Listing and Planning requirements to retain the character and visual appearance of the Bridge whilst ensuring that current Highway standards were met.

## 5. Traffic Flows

5.1 The Company installed an axle counting system in 1993. Traffic count data was provided by a system supplied by Golden River until 2013, and by the Parkare system from 2014, and is shown below. Over the last 5 years traffic volumes have decreased by approximately 2.2 % per year, compared to 0.6 % per year as forecast in the 2008 Toll Application. As a result, traffic volumes in the year to September 2013 were 11 % lower than in the year to September 2008, and 8 % lower than forecast in the 2008 Toll Application, as shown in the graph below:



5.2 Based on an analysis of registered Bridge Cards, about 60 % of journeys originate in the local RG8 postcode.

## 6. The Local Community

6.1 The Bridge is a prominent feature of the local community, both as a structure and a privately-owned transport infrastructure business. The Company is aware of the need to maintain good relations with the local community - the Company's communications strategy is set out in a separate document.

6.2 The Company is an employer of 2 local residents as Directors, 1 as Bridge Manager, and 12 other local residents as part-time Toll collectors, ranging in age from 17 – 67 years.

6.3 The Company has given financial support to local good causes in recent years including the local schools.

6.4 The Company is happy to allow the placing of advertising banners etc at the Toll Booth by local organisations, and at Christmas the South Chiltern Lions bring their "Father Christmas" event to the Bridge to collect for charity.

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