

# WHITCHURCH BRIDGE COMPANY TOLL APPLICATION DATED 31<sup>st</sup> OCTOBER 2008

## Further Information: Communications

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 Paragraph 2.6 of the Toll Application states that:

“The Company has a website ([www.whitchurchbridge.com](http://www.whitchurchbridge.com)) through which it provides extensive detailed information about the Company and its operations. In addition, regular meetings with the 4 local Parish Councils have been in place for over the last 10 years. The Company will continue to pursue an open strategy to inform, involve and consult with the local communities.”

1.2 The purpose of this document is to give more details about the Company’s communications strategy, which is based on its wish to give factual information on the Company and its operations..

### **2. The Company’s website**

2.1 The Company’s website went live in June 2005. It is regularly updated and includes extensive and detailed information on:

- The current Toll Application and FAQ’s on it
- The history of the Company and the Bridge
- A description of the current Bridge and the plans for its reconstruction
- Traffic flows
- Tolls, including concessionary Tolls, a description of the Bridge Card discounted pre-pay system and FAQ’s on it
- Proposed Toll increases, and the process by which a Toll increase is applied for and granted.
- A photo gallery
- A guest book
- Links to other relevant websites.

2.2 The Company monitors the activity on its website. During the period January 2007 to October 2008 the website received around 1000 visits per month. In November and December, following the publication of the Company’s Toll Application and the Public Notices in the local press on 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> November, website activity increased by 50%.

2.3 As well as a Guest Book, the website Home page includes contact details through which any queries, comments etc may be submitted.

### **3. Meetings with representatives of local Parish Councils**

3.1 For about the last 10 years the Company has organised annual or bi-annual meetings with representatives of the local Parish Councils (ie Pangbourne, Whitchurch-on-Thames, Goring Heath and Woodcote) to consult them on matters of mutual interest. Before each meeting the Company contacts the respective Council Clerks with a draft Agenda, and asks for any additional items that their respective Council wishes to add to the Agenda. An example of such a letter is shown in Appendix 1.

3.2 At each Meeting the Company describes and explains issues etc which it believes are of interest to the local Parish Councils. Where appropriate, the views of the Parish Councils are sought, and any suggestions and questions are responded to. Notes are produced of each Meeting identifying any actions agreed. An example of Notes from a meeting is shown in Appendix 1.

3.3 The Company believes that these documents show that its consultation meetings with the local Parish Councils are conducted in good faith, and that the Company responds properly to points put to it at such meetings.

#### **4. Items in local Parish magazines**

- 4.1 The company regularly submits items to the Editors of the local Parish Magazines (ie Pangbourne, Whitchurch-on-Thames, Goring Heath and Woodcote) to inform readers about items of interest.
- 4.2 Appendix 2 shows an example of an item submitted for publication.

#### **5. Summary**

- 5.1 The Company believes that its Communications strategy, based on its website, its regular meetings with local Parish Council representatives, and the publication of informative articles in the local Parish magazines, is broadly-based and effective.
- 5.2 The Company will consider any suggestions on how it could further develop its communications.

GW

**Appendix 1**

Example of a letter inviting local Parish Council representatives to a joint meeting

**THE COMPANY OF PROPRIETORS OF WHITCHURCH BRIDGE**

(Established under the Whitchurch Bridge Acts of 1792 and 1988)

To:

Please reply to:

Martyn Jordan  
Clerk to Woodcote Parish Council  
Village Hall  
Reading Road  
Woodcote  
Reading  
RG8 0QY

Wells House  
Eastfield Lane  
Whitchurch-on-Thames  
Reading  
RG8 7EJ

Tel: 0118-984-4172

E-mail: [secretary@whitchurchbridge.com](mailto:secretary@whitchurchbridge.com)

Date: 18th March 2008

Dear Martyn,

We would like to invite representatives of your Parish Council to meet with us on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> April, at 1 pm, at The Elephant Hotel, Pangbourne.

We shall be able to update your Council with the latest information on:

1. The Bridge Reconstruction Project, including the latest position on Planning
2. Proposed Toll increases.

We will of course be ready to respond to any comments or questions you may have on these or any other issues associated with our operations.

Yours sincerely,

Geoff Weir  
Company Secretary

Registered in England and Wales No. ZC000184  
Registered Office: The Toll House, Whitchurch Bridge, Pangbourne, Reading RG8 7DF  
Company Secretary: G R Weir BSc CEng MIMechE Website: [www.whitchurchbridge.com](http://www.whitchurchbridge.com)

## Appendix 1

Example of Notes of a meeting with local Parish Council representatives

### THE COMPANY OF PROPRIETORS OF WHITCHURCH BRIDGE

Notes of Meeting held between The Whitchurch Bridge Company and local Parish Council representatives at 1 pm on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2008, at The Elephant Hotel, Pangbourne.

#### Present

**Whitchurch Bridge Company:** Mike Beckley (Chairman), Pat FitzGerald, Barney Micklem, Rob Plumb, Geoff Weir (Company Secretary), Beverley Bagnell (Bridge Manager)

**Woodcote PC:** Peter Woods. Robin Pierce

**Goring Heath PC:** Tim King

**Whitchurch-on-Thames PC:** Matilda Oppenheimer, Nigel Cabeldu

**Pangbourne PC:** Pat Wilson

#### 1. Welcome

On behalf of the Whitchurch Bridge Company (WBC), Mike Beckley welcomed the Parish Council representatives to the meeting.

#### 2. Bridge Reconstruction – Design Process

WBC updated the PC representatives on the status of this Project, and showed the current version of a Powerpoint presentation which was being prepared to show the development of the design process.

Design work over the last year has identified a substantial increase in construction costs over that previously estimated - ie £2.45 million at April 2007 prices. As part of the project development process, a contractor will be brought in to identify and quantify site-specific issues eg access, storage areas etc. However, this will not take place until there has been some progress on Planning (see item 2 below)

#### 2. Bridge Reconstruction – Planning

WBC confirmed its intention to submit a formal Planning Application by the end of 2008 for the reconstruction of the Bridge. Since the last meeting in September 2007, the Company has been in communication with South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) as Planning Authority about the process SODC wishes WBC to follow.

As a result of these discussions WBC has arranged a meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> May at which WBC, supported by its engineering advisers at Oxfordshire County Council and Jacobs, will present its proposals and the reasons for them to SODC's Conservation Officer and the Area Planning Manager.

#### 3. Change to the Regulated Toll

The 20p cash Toll is regulated and cannot be increased until WBC successfully applies for permission from the Department for Transport. The Company's current position (which may change if circumstances change) is that it will submit an Application for an increase in the regulated Tolls during the second half of 2008, and implement the revised Tolls (if approved) in 2009.

#### 4. Works during week commencing Monday 21<sup>st</sup> April

WBC explained that some exploratory boring of the abutments is necessary in order to gather information on their construction and condition. This work will involve drilling down through the roadway, which will necessitate some periods of one-way traffic control with traffic lights on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April to Friday 25<sup>th</sup> April.

This will inevitably cause some traffic delays. Toll collection will be suspended if it significantly affects the traffic flow through the traffic-light section. WBC regrets any inconvenience to Bridge users.

## **5. Issues raised by Parish Council representatives**

The following issues were raised by Parish Council representatives.

### **5.1 Local concession**

In answer to a question from Parish representatives, WBC said that there was no change in its position on a local concession ie there is no prospect of re-introducing the local concession because it was necessary to maintain the current income stream, and also it would be very difficult to administer any such scheme fairly.

### **5.2 Discount rate**

Parish Council representatives again expressed concern that any increase in the regulated Toll may lead to a large increase in the discounted Toll. WBC explained that it was their policy to ensure that the discount rate remained substantially below the regulate rate, so as to ensure that the current take-up of Bridge Cards – which account for about 50% of crossings – was maintained. This take up was necessary to maintain good internal control and efficient Toll collection, and to obviate the need for 2 Toll Collectors in the peak hours.

### **5.3 WBC responsibilities**

Parish Council representatives advised WBC that the legal etc status of WBC was not widely understood. WBC explained that, under the 1792 Act, it had a legal obligation to provide a safe Bridge crossing for vehicles in perpetuity. Parish Council representatives suggested it would be beneficial to WBC if it took whatever action it could to explain this to local residents and other Bridge users.

### **5.4 Pedestrian access during Bridge Reconstruction**

Parish Council representatives asked what if any provision would be made for pedestrian access between Pangbourne and Whitchurch during the reconstruction. WBC explained that under the 1988 Act it had an obligation to maintain pedestrian access, and that a ferry or temporary bridge were possible options which would be evaluated. A decision on this is not likely or necessary in the near future, and may not be made before 2011.

## **6. Next Meeting**

Mike Beckley thanked those present for attending the meeting, and expressed his wish that such meetings should continue in the future. The next meeting was provisionally agreed for 27<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

Geoff Weir  
Company Secretary  
21<sup>st</sup> April 2008

## Appendix 2

Example of an item submitted for Publication in local Parish Magazines

(this item was published in November or December 2007, depending on each Magazine's deadline and publication dates)

### Copy of Item for Parish Magazines

#### Whitchurch Bridge

Planning for the reconstruction of the Bridge in 2013 is proceeding in accordance with a Project Plan drawn up and managed by Oxfordshire County Council on behalf of The Whitchurch Bridge Company. Architectural and detailed design work is being undertaken by Jacobs in Reading, and is well advanced. The Company expects to submit a Planning Application and obtain Planning Approval by the end of 2008 – this will help the Company to firm up on the costs of the works and enable it to plan with more certainty. The Planning process will also bring into the public domain the details of the Company's proposals for the reconstruction of the Bridge, and provide an opportunity for anyone to submit comments.

During the next few months two surveys will be undertaken - a topographical survey (to obtain accurate data on levels on and around the Bridge and approach roads) and a geotechnical survey (to assess ground conditions under the Bridge for the new piles). The latter survey will be undertaken from waterborne craft and will involve drilling to depths of up to 30 metres under the river.

Although the Company has substantial reserves set aside for Bridge reconstruction, an increase in annual Toll income will nevertheless be required each year to help build up sufficient funds for the planned works. Toll income will be increased initially by reducing the discount given to users of Bridge Cards. The Company last reduced the discount on Monday 13th November 2006, and a further change will take place on **Monday 18th February 2008**. As from that date the discounted rate will rise from 11.1p to 12.5p - ie £5 of crossings credit will give 40 crossings instead of 45 crossings as now.

The 20p cash Toll is regulated and cannot be increased until the Company successfully applies for permission from the Department for Transport. The Company's current position (which may change if circumstances change) is that it will not apply for an increase in the regulated Toll until it has applied for and obtained Planning Permission for the reconstruction of the Bridge and has obtained more accurate costings for the reconstruction works.

There is more information about the Bridge reconstruction and Tolls on our website at [www.whitchurchbridge.com](http://www.whitchurchbridge.com) .

Geoff Weir  
Company Secretary