

Traffic jams on race days in Musselburgh could be avoided

Hundreds of vehicles could be forced to travel along Musselburgh High Street if agreement cannot be reached over the continued use of the town's Electric Bridge on race days.

Musselburgh Racecourse are reviewing traffic management procedures after learning that the bridge, which carries traffic from New Street to the racecourse, will be closed from 2 January 2020.

A long standing arrangement between the bridge owners ScottishPower and East Lothian Council ensured the bridge was opened on race days and so provided an alternative route for local residents and race goers.

But it now seems that Scottish Power are no longer willing to facilitate this arrangement and while discussions are ongoing, it seems certain that access will be denied to racegoers attending the 3 January raceday. The racecourse fears that once ScottishPower close the bride it will never reopen.

The Electric Bridge was built to carry traffic involved in the construction of Cockenzie Power station in the 1960s and is traditionally opened on race days to assist traffic through the town.

When the power station closed in March 2013, ScottishPower decided there was no longer an operational need to manage or maintain the structure and closed the bridge which spans the River Esk. That decision was later revised after the racecourse agreed to certain conditions including providing

personnel at the bridge to direct traffic.

Musselburgh Racecourse general manager, Bill Farnsworth, called on ScottishPower and East Lothian Council to come to an agreement that would secure future access on race days.

He said: "The Electric Bridge is in perfectly good working order and this decision to close the bridge will put further strain on the already very busy High Street. It will cause disruption to not only our racegoers but to local residents who find it a useful alternative route when we are racing.

"The council's own Air Quality Action Plan has identified in recent years that Musselburgh High Street road traffic related pollution does not meet acceptable standards and this misguided move will increase traffic and pollution and add to inconvenience for local residents, businesses, shoppers and visitors to the town.

"I would urge both ScottishPower and East Lothian Council to reconsider this decision and to put their heads together to come up with a solution which benefits the entire community. ScottishPower have benefited commercially from the Cockenzie facility for more than 50 years and they could leave behind a meaningful legacy if they were to agree that the bridge can continue to be used to ease traffic congestion on race days."

Musselburgh's Betway New Year's Day race meeting on 1 January, which is expected to attract a sell-out 6000 crowd, will not be affected by the decision and the Electric Bridge is expected to be open on that day.



PHOTO Martin P McAdam