

Pride Bridge has been saved – for now

The council has decided to keep the matter of the Pride Bridge firmly in its sights, but no decision was taken at its meeting on Thursday about an exact route forward.

The options for the Pride Bridge (or the Dreadnought Bridge or the Lindsay Road Bridge as it is also called) were set out by the council in the papers for Thursday's Transport Committee meeting, all [published](#) last Friday.

At Thursday's meeting the council decided to address a cross-party desire to retain the bridge in some form or another, **subject to obtaining funding** for a feasibility study to "explore alternative value-engineered deck configurations". This means that in the meantime the bridge will remain closed, and if the funding is not in place by next winter the deck will be removed as it is unsafe. A decision on this will if necessary be made at the November Transport Committee meeting.

The three options proposed included infilling the bridge underneath, and two other options which would cost between £337,000 and £1.2 million involving constructing either a modular steel footbridge across all three spans or creating a wider bridge deck at one end for use as a public seating area or community space. All options would retain the crossing over the Hawthornvale path.

Demolition was costed at around £500,000, and the Save the Bridge deputation asked that these funds were used for

preserving the bridge, rather than destroying what has become a local attraction.

The council officers were quite clear that this bridge is at the end of its expected life. Stephen Knox explained that the parapets are corroded, and from their experience with North Bridge, the outside hints that condition may be even worse once the inside is exposed during repair or reconstruction work.

Collaborative suggestion

All Ward councillors, Adam McVey, Chas Booth and Katrina Faccenda had collaborated on a cross-party Amendment noting that the bridge has become valuable to the Leith community in three ways – as a community space, as an emerging cultural landmark and as an active travel route. This was approved by councillors and now a bid will be made to Sustrans for funding to prepare a feasibility study and provide a “clear programme in a further update to the committee” with a detailed project cost.

Meanwhile the Liberal Democrats had asked that officers look at Option 1 and for this to be examined in the budget setting process which begins from next week.

During the meeting Cllr McVey said: “This is a characterful area which reflects the industrial history of the area. We want to keep as much of the structure as possible.”

Cllr Faccenda said that she attended the meeting to offer a few words of support for the “outstanding job” which The Pride Bridge campaign have done in finding a solution to retaining the bridge.

Chas Booth, Green councillor for Leith, said: “I’m very glad that the cross-party amendment from the three ward councillors was unanimously agreed at committee today. I’d like to thank

committee members, ward colleagues and especially the Save the Pride Bridge campaign for their inspiring deputation. It is absolutely clear this bridge is more than just a transport corridor: it serves as a community space and a cultural landmark for the LGBT+ community as well.

“There’s lots of hard work ahead for the council to coproduce a design alongside the community, which delivers on those three key elements of the bridge. Today’s decision is more than just another stay of execution for the bridge: it is a statement of intent to work together on something that delivers for the local community.”

Roisin Therese manager of the Dreadnought pub as well as a local resident. She presented a deputation to the meeting, saying that community feedback was clear that the width of the bridge at the end nearest the Dreadnought Bridge is important. She said afterwards: “I didn’t get everything I would have ideally wanted in a dream world, but I am pleased that the council has committed to continue to work with the community through the Save the Pride Bridge group, to explore options that may not have not been fully explored so far, to look at other potential funding sources.

“The community driven solution will have to deliver on three key points which we have identified as important to us. Primarily in order the number one thing that they picked, as being the most important key factor to bridge is the inclusion of the rainbow colours of the Pride and Trans Pride flags. Secondly, functionality to serve as a crossing. And then thirdly, size: so the scope of the bridge, the fact that it’s big, and it means that we can use it as a social gathering place, play area, kids learning to ride bikes, whatever, potential storage for bikes, potential community gardens, that kind of thing. So retaining the size of it is also quite important to us, which is one of the reasons why the steel bridge was not going to be sufficient.

“I appreciate the work that officers have put into explore other options but they just dont deliver on what the community has said. I feel like demolition should always be an absolutely last resort. If we were going to demolish and replace the bridge, it should be with something better, not with something worse. And by better I mean something that addresses the three key features that the community has identified as important.”

Morgan Class-Kirtley is a civil engineering student at Heriot-Watt University, and he and his student colleagues, Jakub Bak, Archie Calderwood and Declan Parberry have made the Pride Bridge their real life project. (They are all students of the Convener, Scott Arthur in his day job at the university. Cllr Arthur confirmed he had suggested this project to them, but for clarity he also declared an interest at the beginning of the meeting.)

Morgan said after the meeting: “I think all of the solutions themselves have their own issues. I think the the modular bridge, as I think Roisin very well put it, doesn't solve issues with the the community space and the crossing the active travel route and the the pride flag. The second option is a compromise, but again, it gets rid of half of the problem. The infill is in theory solves it, which forebodes a lot of challenging engineering issues. So I can sort of see every side and I see how it's not an easy so what do.

“The main thing we are pushing for is community driven engineering. We held an event last November which made sure that we understood the position and what the community wanted.”

The students also took part in the deputation presented to the council along with Roisin.

The bridge was constructed in 1938 and is a three-span structure with span lengths of 10.3m, 9.8m and 11.25m. Spans

are numbered 1-3 from north to south. The bridge is 85 years old and approaching the end of its functional life. The bridge was thought to carry Virgin Media cables but this was discovered not to be the case.

Virgin Media have confirmed that none of their apparatus crosses the bridge. The council has obtained diversion quotes to divert utilities and remove the bridge deck which is £459,000.

The written deputation from Save the Pride Bridge:

“The Save the Pride Bridge community organisation requests that the TEC commit to infilling the Lindsay Road Bridge, also known as the Pride Bridge. We appreciate the work done by council officers in exploring the options for the bridge’s future and, in particular, we are grateful for the seriousness with which council officers have treated community feeling towards the bridge. However, we continue to feel that infilling represents the best option for the bridge’s future, as it is the only way to preserve the multiple aspects of the bridge that are so valued by community members.

“As described in our deputation to the 6 October 2022 TEC meeting, the bridge was well used by the local community before it was blocked, and it provided the most direct and accessible walking and rolling route between North Fort Street and Annfield. The alternatives remain unsatisfactory. Crossing down to the Hawthornvale path presents significant accessibility challenges and the Lindsay Road route forces people next to a busy road with fast-moving traffic. Maintaining the route over the Hawthornvale path is the best way to improve the active travel links between Annfield and Fort areas.

“Of equal, if not greater, importance is the social and

symbolic value of the bridge to the local community. Since the October TEC meeting, Save the Pride Bridge has received lots of feedback from community members who value the bridge not only as a means of access between local areas, but as a space in and of itself. Questionnaire responses, gathered at a community meeting in November (attended by over 70 people), repeatedly showed that people see the bridge as a welcoming environment and as a safe space for social gatherings. The bridge has previously been used as a gathering space for local running groups, as a place for birthday parties, and as a beer garden by the local pub. Crucially, community members said that their perception of the bridge as a welcoming space for social activities was inextricably linked to the LGBTQ-affirmational symbolism of the rainbow colours. The bridge was initially painted in part as a defiant response to homophobic graffiti in the local area and, in a virtuous circle, its symbolic value has encouraged and is reinforced by community use of the bridge. For example, a local running group has led fun runs starting from the bridge, raising money for LGBTQ charities.

“The bridge is a unique and special community asset. It is a physical reminder of industrial heritage of north Leith which has in recent years been invested with new and important significance by the local community. It would be a significant cultural loss to the local community if the bridge were to be demolished or replaced by an option that would not permit social use. Infilling remains the most financially viable option for maintaining everything that community values about the bridge, as a convenient and pleasant active travel route, an important social space, and a symbol of positivity.”



The Pride Bridge at Lindsay Road Photo: © April 2022, Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com