

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

24 FEBRUARY 2016

STATEMENT OF THE HIGHWAYS, ROAD SAFETY, ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE (INCL BROADBAND, MOBILE PHONE COVERAGE) AND PASSENGER TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNTY COUNCILLOR DON MACKENZIE

Tadcaster Bridge

The bridge suffered partial collapse on 29 December following a prolonged period of heavy rainfall. By our officers' good foresight, the bridge had been closed to all traffic beforehand and no one was injured, but the town was effectively cut in two.

Immediately afterwards, our Integrated Passenger Transport Team set up a shuttle bus to carry residents at regular intervals throughout the day by means of a detour of several miles from one side of the River Wharfe to the other.

The events in Tadcaster, which received world-wide media coverage, and whilst dramatic and shocking, have nonetheless shown what excellent community spirit exists in that town. It is said that adversity brings the best out of people, and that has certainly been the case here.

The immediate task has been to provide a temporary footbridge so that residents are able to walk to their doctor's surgery, pharmacy, supermarket and other necessary destinations. Our officers and contractors worked seven days a week for 12 hours to erect a temporary but totally safe and DDA compliant footbridge with lighting, and this bridge was duly opened and in use by the afternoon of Friday 12 February.

At the same time, our contractor was able to start work on the damaged bridge once water levels had dropped at the end of last month. Excavators have recovered the fallen stone and divers have examined the pier supports and the extent of scouring of the river bed.

We have engaged the services of a specialist to survey the river so that we can map the flows and direction of the waters to inform the design for the rebuilding of the bridge.

Members will be pleased to know that the cost of the bridge repairs and of the temporary bridge, totalling £3.3m, will be met by central government.

The County Council has made every effort to keep local residents fully informed during this time of disruption and anxiety. A lively public meeting, attended by our Chief Executive, BES Director, Assistant Chief Executive, by my colleague, Chris Metcalfe, and by me, attracted over 600 residents. A second public meeting was held on 8 February to provide an update on the very latest situation.

A59 Kex Gill

Another casualty of the heavy rains has been the A59, a key trans-Pennine route which runs from York through Harrogate and Skipton and on to Lancashire. In early January monitors placed on the steep hillside above the A59 at Kex Gill measured movement in excess of 800mm. A decision was taken at once to close the route for critical safety reasons and a long diversion via Otley and Ilkley in West Yorkshire has been in place since 5 January.

The A59 at Kex Gill is constructed on a ledge on a very steep slope on high ground leading up to Blubberhouses Moor. There is a history of land slippage in this location in wet weather. Works are currently underway to install an improved drainage system to allow us to reopen the road as soon as possible. Although good progress is being made on site, heavy rainfall during

the works has hampered progress and has resulted in it being necessary to carry out some extra drainage works which had added approximately an extra 10 days to the original programme. At the time of writing this statement, we are half way into week 4 of the 7.5 week programme of remedial work.

We held a public meeting with local residents and businesses on Wednesday 20 January at the Millstones Restaurant on the A59 east of Kex Gill. Highways officers from County Hall and Area 6 at Boroughbridge and I explained why we had closed the road and what we were doing to get the road open again. The meeting was very well attended and many useful suggestions were made and have been acted upon.

I am very conscious of the fact that local residents are being inconvenienced and that businesses, which rely on passing trade, are badly affected. And yet, many of the attendees made a point of coming up after the meeting to thank the officers for taking the time and making the effort to keep people informed face to face.

My thanks go to my colleague, John Fort, for organising the public meeting and for his support and sound advice to me throughout this challenging period.

Work has started on preparing a plan for a re-routing of the A59 away from Kex Gill to the north in readiness for a bid for funding. This scheme has featured as a top priority in our recently published Strategic Transport Prospectus for North Yorkshire, and in the draft LTP4 document awaiting approval by members at today's meeting.

Flooding

In addition to the high profile impacts described above, flood recovery activities are continuing in many other parts of the county. Several hundred homes and businesses suffered flood damage, several of our bridges and roads were closed for short periods and many communities faced serious consequences of the heavy rainfall.

We are working closely with borough and district council colleagues to administer the government's grant schemes for householders and businesses, to enable communities get back to normal as quickly as possible.

We continue to assess the data received from many sources. The effects of the winter storms represent a significant challenge, but the county council's Local Flood Risk Strategy provides a strong and effective means to prioritise and deliver the work that needs to be done.

A684 Bedale Aiskew Leeming Bar Bypass

The roundabouts at the Bedale and Northallerton ends of the bypass are now open to traffic. The link road between Leases Rd and J51 of the A1(M) opened earlier this month and the carriageway to the west of the A1(M) is 60% built. We are on schedule for completion by the end of August.

A174 Sandsend Road Coastal Protection

The project involves the construction of 800m of concrete sea defences and supporting infrastructure including public access stairs, stabilisation of the coastal slopes above Sandsend Road and the infilling of Raithwaite Gill.

Work started on site in June 2015. The eastern slope stabilisation is almost complete. The western slope stabilisation progressed well until the heavy rains arrived after Christmas. Nevertheless, completion of the main works is expected on schedule at the end of April.

DON MACKENZIE