

Background

HBC Building Control declared the wall as being an unsafe structure earlier this year, and the east side footway in North Street was duly closed for public safety with a pedestrian diversion via Washington Road. Although the station subway is a shorter route, Network Rail are reluctant for HBC to signpost the alternative route using the subway because this is privately owned and (technically) only for use 'for business related to the railway'. This does not of course stop anyone using the subway, but we are unable to signpost it as such. Most local residents can be expected to ignore the signed diversion and use the subway, as many have been doing so for many years, especially since recent work by Network Rail has now removed the steps within the subway which has made it an accessible route.

Following extensive investigations ever since the condition of the wall was brought to our attention, Havant Borough Council has been unable to locate an owner of the wall and has therefore now used its powers to assume liability for a replacement structure. This means that a replacement structure will be provided using unbudgeted public money and so must be built to a standard which will not require high levels of future maintenance.

Current Situation

The replacement structure is now designed and approximate costs have been obtained. The wall will be formed using precast concrete 'L' shaped units fixed to a reinforced concrete base and faced with bricks to match the local vernacular as shown in the Emsworth Design Statement. Southern Gas Networks have agreed a programme for moving the private gas services which are fixed to the wall. Information about other utilities is still being obtained. Until this information is to hand, we are unable to confirm the amount of preliminary work that might be required to move buried services out of the way to enable the wall to be rebuilt. This may require the road closure to be brought forward (see below) or temporary traffic management measures introduced.

The design first requires a reinforced concrete 300mm thick horizontal ground slab to be constructed. This slab will extend (albeit under ground and so out of sight) some 350mm in front of the face of the new concrete wall to support the facing brickwork. More importantly, it will also project by up to 1.75m behind the face of the wall, under the front gardens of the properties. This is a key part of the design whereby the weight of the soil on the horizontal part of the concrete units acts to stop the vertical wall overturning onto the road. 1.75m is therefore the absolute minimum amount of vegetation clearance required in the gardens behind the wall, but more will doubtless be required to ensure the excavation's side stands up. To some degree, how much will not be fully known until the excavation is carried out. Because these front gardens are known to be in private ownership, legal notice has had to be served on the relevant owners and planning permission sought. It is expected that a planning application will be submitted in the next week.

For safety reasons the wall also has to be extended above the retained ground level, so from the road side the wall will be 1m or so higher than it is now, and the residents will be able to see a 1m (approximately) high wall at the end of their

gardens. With the removal of the trees and shrubs to make way for the construction of the wall, such a feature has to be provided to prevent people falling from the higher level. The design of this 1m high extension has been carried out in keeping with the surrounding area and will feature half round brick coping (subject to planning approval).

We are now in the process of contacting the residents in order to formally meet to explain the project to them, and its likely impact on them both short and long term now that the design has been finalised. These impacts include the partial loss of privacy once planting in their front gardens is cleared to allow the wall to be built. Local Councillors will be invited to attend this meeting.

Construction Phase

Assuming all the relevant information and permissions are obtained, we currently expect to be on site around mid September. Unfortunately in order to provide a safe working environment both for the contractor and the public, this means that North Street will have to be fully closed to vehicular traffic between Sultan Road and the bridge. The Council's Traffic Team will work up a set of alternative routes to direct traffic away from the closure point, but since North Street is the only bridged crossing of the railway between Havant and Chichester it is a popular route, and this will mean diversions and longer journey times for traffic between north and south Emsworth since Southleigh Road (Denvilles) to the west and Stein Road (Southbourne) in the east are both affected by level crossings closing up to 10 times per hour. Bus services will be unable to run through the route and Hampshire County Council is working on a scheme for alternative arrangements with the affected operators.

One potential benefit of the road closure - for pedestrians at least - is that we are likely to be able, most of the time, to allow pedestrians to revert to using North Street, using part of the closed off carriageway as a temporary footway. This will not always be possible however, especially at times when the precast concrete units are being positioned which will require the services of a large crane.

The extent of the works will require a closure of AT LEAST EIGHT WEEKS but this is dependent upon the contractor's programme. We will do everything we can to have the road re-opened for Christmas but at this stage it is too early to guarantee this.

The next email will probably be issued in early July. In the meantime if you have any queries or there are any matters requiring clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes

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