

THE MARLOW BRIDGE – REPORT TO MEMBERS.

The closure of the Volvo footbridge across the A404 Marlow By-Pass on 31 Aug to 2 Sep 18 was a programmed event preceded by discussion and coordination between the Highways Agency and Bucks Highways. The Marlow Society Executive was advised by Cllr Collingwood, our Bucks County Councillor that, In view of the debacle on 24 Sep 16 when the Girtewka lorry crossed the Marlow Bridge, Highways England would provide 24 hour protection of our bridge during the closure of the by-pass. As we all know, this was not done and, as a result, 40ft lorries came down the High Street with the intention of crossing the bridge.

Members of your executive committee alerted Highways England, the Bucks CC and the Marlow Town Council of the absence of bridge protection on the Saturday morning. Our Town Clerk, Hilary Martin, became the lead player in communication with the other authorities but, as many residents reported on social media, the promised protection was not provided.

During the weekend I and other colleague advised drivers of heavy vehicles going towards the bridge to turn back. None of the drivers was aware of the weight limit.

I have spoken with Cllrs Collingwood and Scott to establish the facts. I am advised that Highways England contracted Kier Services to remove the Volvo Bridge. Kier subcontracted to a company named Chevron to provide marshals on both sides of the bridge throughout the time of the road closure. This they clearly did not do and our bridge was therefore put at risk.

I am advised that Highways England installed diversion signs which were verified by Bucks CC as being fully compliant with the relevant regulations. Unfortunately they were nor legally required to place signs warning of the weight limit on the bridge. Did anyone see a weight limit sign on any of Marlow's roads last weekend? Clearly a driver of a heavy vehicle diverted into Marlow or relying on a SatNav would have no knowledge of the weight restriction until within sight of the bridge. In this case following the rule without applying common sense applied.

Do not fear. It will all be sorted when the By-Pass is closed again on 13-14 Oct 18.

Now see the official excuse.

Statement from Buckinghamshire County Council

ST 10186
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APPROVED for Immediate Release

Marlow Bridge misuse – Statement by TfB and Deputy Leader Mark Shaw

Last weekend, (1-2 September), Highways England (HE) closed a section of the A404 at Marlow to remove the Volvo footbridge for restoration works.

Given the location of the closure, and its proximity to the Grade 1 listed Marlow Bridge, Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB) worked with HE and their contractor, Kier, to agree how the bridge would be protected from misuse by vehicles exceeding 3T. The agreement was for Kier to provide traffic management marshals to man both sides of the bridge and deter overweight vehicles.

The past weekend's activity, backed up with photographs from the public and personal statements from local councillors, has shown that the agreed measures were not fully implemented. The bridge was open for all to use, including drivers who chose to ignore the official diversion and clear weight restriction signage on the approach to the bridge.

Highways England issued this brief statement to TfB on Tuesday this week: 'We are aware of reports that the traffic marshals may not have been in place at all times: we are speaking with the teams working over the weekend to establish the facts.'

TfB understands that HE's investigation is ongoing, and as such is simply prioritising plans to ensure the same will not happen again when the Volvo footbridge is reinstated under another weekend closure of the A404 in October.

TfB is acutely aware of the impact on the town of the enforced closure of the bridge following the Girtoka incident in November 2016 and has no intention of allowing a repeat of that incident.

Mark Shaw, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Transportation, commented "The abuse of the bridge last weekend is extremely troubling, and frustrating because we thought it would be protected, as firmly agreed in the weeks before the closure.

"I urge Highways England to act quickly on their investigation now, because we, and the residents of Marlow, have been waiting since the weekend to understand why this happened.

"In the meantime, we are all focused on how to best protect the bridge in October, a task which I would now rather was handled by Transport for Buckinghamshire. Whether that means marshalling the bridge ourselves, or closing it for the weekend –

a decision we would not take lightly – remains to be seen."

He added: "I'm appalled by what happened last weekend and want to assure Marlow residents and businesses that the last thing we want is a repeat of what happened in 2016."

Further closures

Residents may also be aware that the A404, Bisham to junction 8/9, is shortly to be closed overnight for lining works (Tuesday 18th and 19th September). It is TfB's intention to close the bridge to all traffic whilst this A404 closure is in place. As the works are scheduled for overnight only, the impact on the town will be minimal.