

REPORT TO [NAME] PARISH COUNCIL

Replacement of the public footbridge on [path reference]

Meeting	[Full Council / Highways & Footpaths Committee]
Date of meeting	[DD Month YYYY]
Agenda item	[00]
Report author	[Name, Clerk to the Council / Cllr Name]
Status	For decision
Appendices	A: Photographs B: Quotations C: Correspondence with highway authority

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. This template is a starting point, not a finished paper. Delete every guidance box, replace every square-bracketed placeholder, and delete any section that does not apply to your council. Wording must be checked against your own Standing Orders and Financial Regulations before use.

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To advise Members of the condition of the public footbridge on [path reference], to set out the options available to the Council, and to seek a decision on how to proceed.

1.2 This report also seeks approval of a budget and of the procurement route to be followed.

2. Recommendation

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. Leave this section until last. Write it only after the options appraisal at section 5 has been completed, so the recommendation follows from the evidence rather than the other way round. Suggested resolution wording is at section 12.

2.1 That the Council [.....].

3. Background

3.1 The structure

Location	[Description, grid reference or what3words]
Path reference	[e.g. FP 17, parish of ...]
Status	[Public footpath / bridleway / restricted byway / permissive path]
Crossing	[Watercourse / ditch / gully — name and approximate width]
Existing structure	[Material, approximate span, approximate width, estimated age]
Approximate usage	[e.g. school route, circular walk, sole access to allotments]

3.2 Who is responsible for this structure

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. This is the single most common source of confusion and it must be settled before the Council spends anything. Write to the county or unitary highway authority and ask, in writing, whether the structure is recorded as maintainable at public expense. Attach the reply at Appendix C.

3.2.1 Most public rights of way in England and Wales are highways maintainable at public expense. Where that is the case, the highway authority — the county or unitary council — carries the duty to maintain under section 41 of the Highways Act 1980. That duty is not removed or reduced by anything this Council chooses to do.

3.2.2 Not every path is publicly maintainable. Paths that came into existence through long use after 1949, and permissive paths, may not be. The highway authority holds the definitive map and statement and should be asked to confirm the position.

3.2.3 Section 43 of the Highways Act 1980 gives a parish or community council the power to undertake the maintenance of a footpath, bridleway or restricted byway within the parish which is maintainable at public expense. The Council does not need the highway authority's permission to exercise that power. Section 50 provides a comparable power in respect of privately maintainable footpaths and bridleways.

3.2.4 Under section 43(2) the highway authority may undertake to meet all or part of the Council's expenditure. It is not obliged to. Members should note that a request for a contribution is worth making and should not be assumed to succeed.

3.2.5 Section 56 of the Highways Act 1980 allows any person to serve notice on the body liable for maintenance where a highway or bridge is alleged to be out of repair, and to apply to the magistrates' court if the body does not act. This route remains available to the Council and is noted at section 5 as part of Option A.

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. If the highway authority confirms the structure is its responsibility, the Council still has a genuine choice: press the authority to act and accept the timescale, or fund the work itself to get it done sooner. Both are legitimate. Set out the trade-off honestly rather than presenting funding it as the only option.

3.3 Current condition

3.3.1 [Summarise the condition. Record who inspected it, when, and on what basis. Photographs at Appendix A.]

3.3.2 The following defects have been observed:

- [e.g. Decay at the beam bearing ends where they sit on the abutment]
- [e.g. Noticeable deflection underfoot at mid-span]
- [e.g. Handrail loose / parapet infill gaps exceeding current guidance]
- [e.g. Deck boards lifting; fixings corroded]
- [e.g. Algal growth on the deck surface, slippery in wet weather]
- [e.g. Scour to the abutment; debris in the channel]

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. A visual inspection by a councillor or the Clerk is enough to raise the issue but is not a structural assessment. If the structure may be unsafe, say so plainly and recommend that the highway authority be notified immediately, before any of the options below are considered.

4. Risk of taking no action

4.1 The principal risks associated with continued deterioration are set out below.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Injury to a member of the public	[L/M/H]	[L/M/H]	[Inspection regime; prompt reporting to highway authority; closure if unsafe]
Structure fails and the path is closed	[L/M/H]	[L/M/H]	[Replace before failure; note length of any diversion route]
Loss of a route relied on by residents	[L/M/H]	[L/M/H]	[Record who uses it and why in section 3.1]
Emergency works cost more than planned works	[L/M/H]	[L/M/H]	[Budget and procure in a planned way]
Reputational risk to the Council	[L/M/H]	[L/M/H]	[Communicate the position and the decision to residents]

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. Be careful with the liability question. Where the highway authority holds the section 41 duty, the liability for failure to maintain generally sits with it, not with the parish. Do not overstate the Council's exposure in order to justify spending. If liability is genuinely uncertain, say it is uncertain and take advice.

5. Options appraisal

5.1 Four options have been considered.

Option A — Take no action beyond reporting the defect

The Council reports the condition to the highway authority, monitors the structure, and presses for the authority to carry out the work. Where the structure is maintainable at public expense this is the option that places the cost where the statutory duty sits. It carries no capital cost to the Council. The disadvantage is that the Council does not control the timescale, and highway authority structures budgets are heavily committed. Escalation under section 56 remains available.

Option B — Repair the existing structure

Localised repair of the defects identified at section 3.3. Lower immediate cost and retains the existing appearance. The disadvantage is that repair addresses symptoms rather than remaining life: where the primary structural elements are decayed, repair typically buys [x] years and the Council faces the same decision again, having spent money in the meantime. Repair is most defensible where the substructure is sound and the defects are confined to deck and furniture.

Option C — Replace with a timber structure

Full replacement in treated softwood or hardwood. Lower capital cost than the alternative below and a natural appearance that suits sensitive landscape settings, which may matter where the site lies within a conservation area, National Landscape or designated site. The disadvantages are a

shorter service life in permanently wet conditions, a requirement for periodic treatment and inspection, and the use of preservative treatments, which some sites will wish to avoid near water.

Option D — Replace with a recycled plastic and steel structure

Full replacement using recycled plastic components, in some cases with steel beams for longer spans. Higher capital cost. The advantages are that the material does not rot, warp or split, requires no treatment or ongoing maintenance, and carries a longer expected service life, which changes the whole-life position materially. The material is manufactured from post-consumer waste and is recyclable at end of life. The appearance is less traditional than timber, though timber deck boards over a steel substructure are available where a natural finish is required.

5.2 Summary comparison:

Option	Indicative capital cost	Expected further life	Main advantages	Main disadvantages
A — No action	£0 to the Council	[x] years	No cost to the precept; cost sits with the statutory duty holder	Council does not control timescale; risk of failure and closure
B — Repair	£[]	[x] years	Lowest immediate outlay; retains appearance	Decision recurs; money spent does not extend life materially
C — Timber replacement	£[]	[x] years	Lower capital cost; natural appearance	Periodic treatment and inspection; shorter life in wet ground
D — Recycled plastic replacement	£[]	[x] years	No rot; no treatment; longest life; recycled content	Highest capital cost (although full-life cost is favourable)

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. Complete every cell from your own quotations. Do not carry forward a supplier's figures without a written quotation for this specific structure. Span, ground conditions, access for delivery and whether installation is included all move the number substantially.

6. Whole-life cost

6.1 Comparing capital cost alone will favour the cheapest structure on the day of purchase. Members are asked to consider the total cost of each option over a [40] year period, including replacement where the expected life is shorter than the appraisal period.

Cost element	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
Initial capital cost	£0	£[]	£[]	£[]
Installation	£0	£[]	£[]	£[]
Treatment / maintenance over period	£[]	£[]	£[]	£[]

Inspection over period	£[]	£[]	£[]	£[]
Number of replacements needed in period	[]	[]	[]	[]
Cost of replacements	£[]	£[]	£[]	£[]
Residual / end of life	£[]	£[]	£[]	£[]
TOTAL over [40] years	£[]	£[]	£[]	£[]

6.2 [State plainly which option carries the lowest whole-life cost, and by how much. If the cheapest over the period is not the option being recommended, explain why.]

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. Use a consistent appraisal period and state it. Keep the figures in today's money unless your council has a convention for discounting, in which case say what rate you have used. Members will trust a simple stated method more than an elaborate one they cannot follow.

7. Funding

7.1 The following sources have been considered:

- Existing budget / earmarked reserves — £[] currently held for [purpose]
- Contribution from the highway authority under section 43(2) of the Highways Act 1980 — [requested on DD/MM/YY; response at Appendix C]
- Community Infrastructure Levy receipts passed to the parish — £[] held, [state any spending deadline]
- Section 106 developer contributions held by the district or borough council — [enquiry made / not applicable]
- County councillor divisional or community grant — [amount, deadline]
- Grant funders — [National Lottery Awards for All, landfill communities funding, local trusts, renewable energy community benefit funds]
- Increase to the precept for [year] — an increase of £[] equates to approximately £[] per Band D property per year
- Public Works Loan Board borrowing, subject to approval — [applicable / not applicable]
- Community fundraising and local donations — £[]

7.2 On the basis above the funding gap for the recommended option is £[].

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. Where CIL money is held, check the spending deadline before the meeting. Unspent parish CIL can be recovered by the charging authority after a set period, and an approaching deadline is often the most persuasive fact in the whole paper.

8. Procurement

8.1 The Council's Financial Regulations require [state the requirement: e.g. three written quotations for expenditure between £X and £Y; formal tender above £Y].

8.2 The estimated value of the recommended option is £[], which places it within the [quotation / tender] threshold.

8.3 It is proposed that [three] written quotations be obtained on a common specification, so that the prices returned are genuinely comparable.

8.4 The requirements to be included in that specification are:

- Clear width of not less than [] metres and a clear span of approximately [] metres
- Loading appropriate to [pedestrian / equestrian] use, with the design certified by the supplier
- An anti-slip deck surface, with independently tested slip resistance figures provided for both wet and dry conditions
- Parapet or handrail height and infill arrangement appropriate to the setting and to the expected users
- A design life of not less than [] years and a statement of the maintenance regime required to achieve it
- Foundations suited to the ground conditions on site, with minimal excavation and disturbance to the watercourse
- Delivery and installation arrangements compatible with the access available, which is [describe]
- Confirmation of any consents required and who is responsible for obtaining them

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. Write the specification before you invite quotations, not after. If each supplier quotes to its own specification the prices cannot be compared and the Council cannot demonstrate that it obtained value for money.

9. Legal and consents

9.1 Confirmation of the maintenance position is at Appendix C.

9.2 Where the Council carries out works itself on a public right of way, it should notify the highway authority in advance and follow any requirements the authority sets, notwithstanding the section 43 power.

9.3 Consent may be required from the Environment Agency, the lead local flood authority or an internal drainage board for works in, over or near a watercourse. [State the position.]

9.4 Land ownership at the abutments should be confirmed and the landowner's agreement obtained for access during construction. [State the position.]

9.5 Where the site is within or adjacent to a designated site, a conservation area, or where protected species may be present, appropriate advice should be taken before works commence. [State the position.]

9.6 The Council should satisfy itself as to the insurance and competence of any contractor engaged, and as to its duties under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 where it acts as client.

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. This section is a checklist, not legal advice. Where the answer to any of the above is not clearly yes, resolve it before rather than after the Council commits funds.

10. Accessibility

10.1 The Council must have regard to its duties under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 when taking this decision.

10.2 The least restrictive option consistent with the safety of users should be adopted, in line with the duty at section 69 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to have regard to the needs of people with mobility problems.

10.3 The proposed structure would [improve / maintain] accessibility by [wider clear width / removal of a step / improved surface / gentler approach gradient].

11. Environmental considerations

11.1 [Set out the position on materials, recycled content, recyclability at end of life, the use or avoidance of preservative treatments near a watercourse, and the extent of ground disturbance required.]

11.2 [Note any relevant commitment in the Council's environmental or climate policy.]

12. Conclusion and resolution

12.1 [Two or three sentences drawing the appraisal together and stating why the recommended option follows from it.]

12.2 Suggested wording for the resolution:

It is RESOLVED that the Council notes the condition of the footbridge on [path reference]; approves Option [] as set out in this report; approves a budget of £[] to be met from [funding source]; authorises the Clerk to obtain [three] written quotations against the specification at section 8 and to place an order with the supplier offering best value; and delegates to the Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, authority to agree the final programme of works.

GUIDANCE — delete this box before circulation. Amend this wording to match your Standing Orders and the limits in your Financial Regulations. A resolution that delegates more than the Clerk is permitted to do will have to come back to a later meeting, which is the delay this paper exists to avoid.

Appendices

- Appendix A — Photographs of the existing structure, dated
- Appendix B — Quotations received
- Appendix C — Correspondence with the highway authority
- Appendix D — [Condition notes / consultation responses / site plan]

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