



Department  
for Transport

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Date: 17 June 2025

Dear Ms Smith

**THE OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (OXPENS RIVER THAMES  
PEDESTRIAN/CYCLE BRIDGE) SCHEME 2024 (“the Scheme”)**

**SECRETARY OF STATE’S DECISION – SCHEME TO BE CONFIRMED WITH  
MODIFICATIONS**

1. I refer to your application, submitted on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council (“the Council”) for confirmation of the above named Scheme. The Secretary of State for Transport (“the Secretary of State”) has decided to confirm the Scheme, with modifications, and this letter constitutes her decision to that effect.

2. The confirmed Scheme will authorise Oxfordshire County Council to construct over the navigable waters of the River Thames the bridge specified in the Schedule to the Scheme as part of the highway. This will be between the Oxpens Meadow in the north and the Grandpont Nature Park in the south in the City of Oxford, in the County of Oxfordshire.

**MODIFICATIONS**

3. A minor modification is proposed to be made to the Scheme, which has been agreed to by the Council. This is to delete the wording: ‘marked ‘The Oxfordshire County Council (Oxpens River Thames Pedestrian/Cycle Bridge) Scheme 2024’ from under the heading in the Schedule: ‘Plans and specifications of the Oxpens River Thames Pedestrian/Cycle Bridge’.

**OBJECTIONS**

4. Thirty-six objections were received to the Scheme, none of which were statutory under Schedule 1 of the Highways Act 1980. Many of the objections to the confirmation of the Scheme were not specifically to navigation issues, these can be summarised as follows:

- concerns with regard to the cost of the Scheme including future maintenance costs;
- damage to the Grandpont Nature Park and Oxpens Meadow and an increase to the carbon footprint and damage to the environment and harm to local wildlife;
- the unattractiveness of the design of the bridge; the procedures regarding the planning permission had not been carried out correctly; lack of consultation on the proposals;
- there was no need for the Scheme with there being other bridges available nearby which could be adapted to provide the same facility; lack of information regarding the closure of footpaths;
- safety issues regarding pedestrians with the proposals encouraging cyclists in this area without adding restrictions and other safety precaution;
- due to the area being flood prone will often mean the cycle track will be inaccessible; and
- the proposals mainly benefit post-graduate students and not local people.

## DECISION TO DISPENSE WITH A PUBLIC INQUIRY

5. The Secretary of State by letter of 24 June 2024 advised the objectors that the aspects raised in the objection correspondence that were not to the effect on navigation of the proposed Bridge would be disregarded as not being valid objections to the Scheme. The objectors were given opportunity to expand upon their objections with regard to the navigational effect of the proposed Bridge. The Secretary of State subsequently, in a letter dated 14 August 2024, notified the parties that the Secretary of State had, under Schedule 1 paragraph 14(2) of the Highways Act 1980, decided to dispense with the holding of an Inquiry.

6. The issues regarding the Scheme's effect on navigation were raised in the following objections:

██████████ was concerned that the planned works would severely disrupt river traffic and would be dangerous and a threat to their lifestyle, and to the vibrant culture of the historical Isis stretch of the river through Oxford. ██████████ regularly cruised this part of the river to fill up with water and dispose of waste.

██████████ was concerned that the closing of the river especially if for over a year would affect not only working on the Oxford River cruises but also life on a houseboat where the boat is taken up to Eynsham to get water rubbish dropped off and wastewater gotten rid of.

██████████ did not consider that there was a need for navigation to be closed as bridges across the River Thames had been both built and repaired in the past without the need to close navigation. She was also concerned that contractors would take their own time rather than sticking to any agreed or contracted time frame and cited the recent experiences with Network Rail closing Oxford's Botley Road to replace the railway bridge, and Oxford City Council taking 5+ years to re-open the Marlborough Road footbridge.



10. It was not possible to provide exact details of the river closure needed to construct the bridge. That this detail will be developed alongside the construction programme and will require the agreement of the Environment Agency.

11. The main bridge sections will be constructed off site and will be transported to the site by road and will then be craned into place. The river will need to be closed whilst these sections are craned. It is currently proposed that these works will take approximately 3 days. Thereafter there will be a short period (approximately 2 weeks) whilst the bridge sections are permanently attached together.

12. In order to minimise disruption, the on-site construction of the bridge scheme works will need to take place in during the winter period (as defined by the Environment Agency being the period 1 November – 15 March), when river traffic is at its lowest.

13. Discussions have been sought with the Environment Agency to explore opportunities to minimise the river closure and impact on river users.

14. It was important to clarify that the bridge (once constructed) has a soffit level over the river, agreed with the Environment Agency. It will not block any craft that can access this stretch of the river currently and is clear of any flood impact. As such the scheme will not impact on navigation of the river once built.

15. In terms of the consultation regarding the making of the Scheme, the Council confirmed that the requirements set out within Paragraph 11 of Schedule 1 to the Highways Act 1980.

16. With regard to consultation in terms of the river closure; as referred to above discussions are taking place with the Environment Agency to minimise disruptions to river users, once details are available it will be possible to consult with river users and those impacted well in advance of any closure.

17. The Council confirmed that planning permission for the construction of the Oxpens Bridge (planning reference:23/02506/CT3) was granted by Oxford City Council on 8 July 2024 and that there was an application for judicial review of this decision was received by the City Council on 19 August 2024. Subsequently, on the 12 March 2025, the Council confirmed that the Judicial Review had been dismissed.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR DECISION

18. The Secretary of state needs to be satisfied:

- i) under section 107(1) of the Highways Act 1980 that the reasonable requirements of navigation over the waters affected by the Scheme have been taken into account; and that
- ii) under section 107(2) of the Highways Act 1980 that the Scheme includes such plans and specifications as are necessary to indicate the position and

dimensions of the proposed bridge including its spans, headways and waterways.

19. The Secretary of State has complied with the public sector equality duty and has had due regard to the matters set out in section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010 in accordance with section 149(3) to (5) concerning the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic or persons who do not. She has considered these issues where relevant.

## CONCLUSION

20. The Secretary of State has considered carefully the objections to the Scheme. She notes that no objections were received to the Scheme from the Environment Agency and that the navigable waters at this point are not tidal. Most of navigation issues raised by objectors were to the effect of the construction of the bridge on navigation and the length of time the river would have to be closed during those works. The Council have stated that the main bridge sections will be constructed off site and will be transported to the site by road and will be craned into place. The Council have advised that the river will need to be closed whilst these sections are craned and that it is currently proposed that these works will take approximately 3 days. Thereafter there will be a short period (approximately 2 weeks) whilst the bridge sections are secured. The Council have confirmed that they are proposing to liaise closely with the Environment Agency in relation to the construction of the bridge and to seek to minimise disruption as much as possible. The Council have also referred to the Environment Agency's advice that any construction works would only be permitted for river closures during the winter period 1 November and 15 November.

21. The effect on navigation, both during construction and after, due to the proximity of other bridges has been raised. Whilst not being aware of any particular study with regard to the proximity of other bridges, the Secretary of State is satisfied that any effect of the close proximity of the existing bridges would have been considered by the relevant navigational authorities in the statutory consultation on the Scheme and no objections by those authorities have been raised.

22. Furthermore, as referred to above, the Council are to liaise closely with the Environment Agency during construction of the bridge and the Council have also confirmed that the bridge, once constructed, will have no effect on navigation.

23. With regard to the concerns with regard to the consultation on the Scheme proposals, the Council has advised the Secretary of State that they have carried out the statutory requirements in relation to the publication and service of notice of the Scheme had been complied with (such requirements being as laid down in Paragraph 11 of Schedule 1 to the Highways Act 1980).

23. The Secretary of State is satisfied that the reasonable requirements of navigation have been taken into account by the Council and that the Scheme would be unlikely to conflict with those requirements. Furthermore, the Secretary of State is satisfied that the Scheme includes such plans and specifications as are necessary to indicate the position and dimensions of the proposed bridge including its spans, headways and waterways.

24. Having considered all aspects of the matter the Secretary of State is satisfied that there are no compelling reasons brought forward which would justify not confirming the Scheme. Accordingly, the Secretary of State has decided to confirm, with modifications, 'The Oxfordshire County Council (Oxpens River Thames Pedestrian/Cycle Bridge) Scheme 2024'.

25. In confirming the Scheme, the Secretary of State has relied on the information that the Council and others have provided, as contained in the Scheme and any related plans, diagrams, statements, or correspondence, as being factually correct. Confirmation is given on this basis.

#### AVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENTS

26. A copy of this letter has been sent to the objectors, to other interested parties and to relevant Members of Parliament. Copies will be made available on request to any other persons directly concerned. Please arrange for a copy of this letter to be made available for inspection at <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxpens-bridge> and the offices the Council used at making stage. Copies will be made available on request to any other person directly concerned.

#### RIGHT OF CHALLENGE

27. Notice is to be published of confirmation of the Scheme. Any person who wishes to question the validity of the confirmed Scheme, or any particular provision contained therein, on the grounds that the Secretary of State has exceeded her powers or has not complied with the relevant statutory requirements in confirming them may, under the provisions of Schedule 2 to the Highways Act 1980, do so by application to the High Court. Such an application must be made within six weeks of publication of the notice that the Scheme has been confirmed. The High Court cannot entertain an application under Schedule 2 before publication of the notice that the Secretary of State has confirmed the Scheme.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Tim Brimelow.

**TIM BRIMELOW**  
**National Transport Casework Team**