

## **COX'S WALK FOOTBRIDGE**

The following addresses commonly asked questions concerning the proposed refurbishment works to Cox's Walk Footbridge.

### **Tree felling in the context of the Climate Emergency**

In March 2019 Southwark Council declared a Climate Emergency and is currently working on a strategy to help address this. The declaration sits alongside a number of policies and initiatives have already been introduced across the council, to mitigate the effects of climate change.

These include tree planting initiatives, [the promotion of cycling and walking](#), the introduction of [engine idling fines](#), [School Streets road closures](#), and [school air quality audits](#) – to name a few.

We are passionate about Southwark's trees and committed to preserving, protecting and caring for the trees in the borough. We would never fell a tree unless there was a very good reason to do so. But, when we have no choice, we always plant at least one new tree wherever possible. In this instance, we have already planted 15 oak trees along Cox's Walk, in advance of the removal of the two trees. We would never remove a mature tree without thoroughly explored all other options.

### **The bridge is in need of immediate repair works**

The 2018 Assessment Report demonstrated that the footbridge was in a hazardous condition, due to the potential failure of the abutments (supporting walls). A more recent inspection has also determined a further, significant safety issue with the timber parapets, which were due to be completely refurbished as part of the overall works.

It was considered in 2018 that the risk to the public was relatively minor as works were planned to be carried out within 18 months. However, the deterioration in the condition of the timber parapets, in addition to the potential failure of the abutments, is such that the safety of the structure is now significantly compromised and we have no option, other than to close the bridge.

### **The council has thoroughly explored all options and tried to save the trees**

The May 2018 Assessment Report set out the detailed and comprehensive problems associated with the footbridge abutments and initially proposed repairing the brickwork and retaining the trees. However, as a result of further detailed designs to implement the preferred repair option, it quickly became obvious that full abutment replacement was the only feasible refurbishment option.

In addition to this, we looked into relocating the trees, but this was found to be unviable on this occasion, as there is no guarantee of success. The process of undercutting and the severance of roots would need to take place over a number of years, before removing the trees with a tree spade, all at a great cost.

We also investigated moving the bridge to another location, but there was no way to do this without cutting down even more trees and it would also be extremely expensive.

We sadly reached the conclusion that repairing the existing bridge was the only viable option and given the trees' proximity to the bridge, 1.5 meters, the trees could not be retained due to the working and construction space requirements. There is unfortunately no feasible construction option that allows the retention of the trees. This has been thoroughly investigated and a report prepared by a consultant that can be viewed at the council website.

### **The planning decision is final**

At this stage in the proceedings the decision is final and there is no viable right to challenge this.

### **The London Wildlife Trust (LWT) have been involved throughout**

The LWT opposed the tree removal at the planning stage. However, we have since worked closely with the LWT with respect to the footbridge works and the associated proposed tree removals and will continue to do so over the specific replanting regime once the abutment and adjacent embankments are reconstructed. The Trust understands the rationale for the tree removals, following a full explanation similar to that provided to the tree campaigners.

### **The works can not be delayed**

Cox's Walk is a public highway and this places a statutory duty on the council to maintain the footpath and keep it open at all times, other than when essential maintenance or repair works are required. There are no diversions that could be implemented within legislation that would not involve the loss of a significant number of trees. Long term closure of the bridge is not an option permitted under highway legislation in order to preserve trees.

### **Further professional consultation is unnecessary**

A second independent assessment carried out by an Institute of Civil Engineers accredited conservation consultant would be extremely costly and a waste of council funding. The abutments have been proven to be failing based on current national loading standards and need to be replaced. The trees have to be removed to provide a safe working area for the contractor.

### **The trees are not 300 years old**

There is evidence that the trees were not in place when the bridge was constructed (circa 1865). This puts the best estimate of the planting of the trees at some time between 1865 and circa 1910. A detailed arboricultural report has also been prepared which also asserts that the trees were not in place when the bridge was first constructed. The report is available on the council website.

### **Previous repairs have not required the removal of the trees**

Previous repair work on the bridge was relatively minor, including the 1980's repairs to the abutments. None of the previous works required any significant working space. The current planned works are full replacement of the abutments and require the trees to be removed.