

Llannerch Bridge Newsletter



The purpose of this newsletter

This newsletter is published by the Highways and Environmental Services department of Denbighshire County Council. It's aim is to ensure that local residents, businesses and other interested parties are kept up-to-date on the progress with our project to replace Llannerch Bridge. Our intention is to publish a newsletter on a quarterly basis so that you know what we have done, what we are aiming to do next, and opportunities for you to get involved in the development of this project.

In this edition, in addition to an update on works completed to date, we will be answering your questions. These are questions we received as part of the public engagement we carried out in Autumn 2021 to understand the community's interest in whether the bridge should be replaced.

Project history: what's happened with Llannerch Bridge to date

Llannerch Bridge was a late 18th or early 19th century stone masonry bridge spanning the River Clwyd. The bridge connected the communities of Trefnant and Tremeirchion in Denbighshire. During flooding in January 2021 caused by Storm Christoph, a nearby oak tree collapsed into the flooded river and destroyed Llannerch Bridge as it was swept away.

Since January 2021, we have been in discussions with partner agencies including Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales and Cadw to understand the considerations required before consulting with the community to understand if the bridge was needed or wanted locally.

Considerations included:

- 1. The historical nature of the bridge:** The previous bridge was a Grade II listed structure. The Council will liaise with Welsh Government heritage body CADW to discuss future options for the site, as part of the planning process.
- 2. Environmental change:** The course of the River Clwyd has changed significantly since the bridge was built, due to ongoing flooding events. This is part of the reason that the bridge was swept away. Additionally, floods are predicted to increase in frequency and be more severe in outcome as the ongoing impact of global climate and ecological change continues to be felt. Natural Resources Wales will therefore form a very important part of the planning process and we will continue to discuss how any potential replacement for Llannerch bridge would need to be made resilient to future weather events.
- 3. Road safety:** Prior to the bridge being destroyed, the road was taking volumes of traffic which far exceeded the capacity the original road was built to cope with. We are aware that the route was frequently used by people wishing to access or exit the nearby A55 trunk road, especially during peak hours. The Council would like to consider whether a wider carriageway is needed on this road as part of the scheme replacement.

To understand how the views of the local community fit into these considerations, Denbighshire County Council undertook a period of public engagement during September and October of 2021. We asked local residents, businesses and visitors for their views on whether the bridge should be replaced at all, and if so, how the Council should look at

approaching the (sometimes conflicting) concerns around road safety, flood resilience, and local heritage.

750 people took part in the public engagement activity, with 94.57% of all respondents keen to see Llannerch Bridge replaced. Beyond this however, respondents were less able to agree on how the Council should best work with partner agencies to balance the needs of road safety, flood resilience, and local heritage.

Since the public engagement took place, Denbighshire County Council's Cabinet met on November 23, 2021, and resolved (based on overwhelming public agreement) to support in principle the replacement of Llannerch Bridge, subject to the securing of necessary funding.

Since then, we have been working on procuring ground surveys and other specialist work which will then enable the Council to build a business case and bid for external funding to design and construct a replacement bridge.

What are we doing next?

In recent months the council has appointed consultants to look at the initial design aspects of the new bridge and to consider options for how it would be positioned. This is crucial as we then need to undertake computer modelling of how the river would react in various scenarios so that any concerns about this aspect can be allayed. This is particularly important with such a volatile river. Ground investigation survey and analysis is also fundamental to getting a robust business case together. It is however an expensive undertaking so for the immediate time being we will wait until we have more certainty as to where the new foundations of the bridge may be positioned.

Your questions answered

Below are some of the questions we received during the course of our public engagement exercise in autumn last year, or via the local Councillors.

What has the Council done between 21st January 2021 and now?

In the immediate aftermath of the storm that washed away Llannerch Bridge, the Council was busy dealing with a number of emergencies across the county as the storm caused significant damage elsewhere in Denbighshire.

Following this, the Council assessed and made safe to the public the existing Llannerch Bridge site, before engaging in preliminary talks with Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales and Cadw. The aim of these discussions was to understand what funding criteria would need to be met to secure funding to replace the bridge, taking account of the bridge's Grade II Listed status, and the changed nature of the river bed and flood plain in the locality.

Following these discussions, it was important for us to engage with the local community. We had received messages and enquiries anecdotally, including representations from people who were keen to see the bridge replaced as soon as possible, and those questioning whether the site would benefit from being left without a bridge there.

Following overwhelming evidence that the public would support a project to replace the bridge, a proposal was taken to the Council's cabinet in November 2021 to seek initial funding to appoint consultants to carry out the necessary mapping and surveying work which would enable the council to build an appropriate business case to seek further Welsh Government funding to replace the bridge.

As stated, the Council is now at the stage where the consultants are in a position to carry out their surveying and mapping works.

Why couldn't the Army put in a temporary bridge?

The area immediately surrounding where Llannerch Bridge used to be is not really suitable for a temporary bridge. The topography (lay of the land) and the flood patterns of the river mean it would be difficult to site a temporary bridge that would not get swept away as the original Llannerch Bridge has done, should there be another flood. Additionally, we need to keep the existing abutments (supporting ramp structures) to the bridge, both because the remainder of the structure is required as a foundation for any potential new bridge and additionally because the remainder of the structure still has Grade II listed status. The

predicted costs to carry out works to make the site suitable for a temporary bridge are estimated to be significant and could impact on the Council's ability to secure funding for a permanent replacement bridge.

Additionally, to involve the armed forces in any project to temporarily replace Llannerch Bridge, the local authority would have to satisfy the Ministry of Defence that the incident constitutes an emergency where there is a need to protect human life, property and alleviate distress. The loss of Llannerch Bridge, does not meet these criteria. Over and above this, the Council would be expected to repay any costs to the MOD, and as explained above this would likely be prohibitive to securing funding for a permanent bridge at a later date.

What does the Council still need to do to secure funding to replace Llannerch Bridge?

We need to present a business case to Welsh Government. Unfortunately, the data required will take time to produce. Identifying a need within the local community was the first and most important step. The 750 people who responded to our public engagement activity in autumn last year have helped us to prove that there is a need for the bridge locally. We are now in the process of undertaking feasibility studies to determine the type(s) of bridge that can be considered to replace the old Llannerch Bridge, and estimate the likely costs for doing so.

What are the concerns of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Cadw that need to be addressed?

NRW have responsibility for ensuring that any structure affecting the flow of the river won't cause damage to the local ecology and won't negatively impact flooding both upstream and downstream of the replacement bridge. An important part of the design process will be to model the impacts of the new design on the river flow so that NRW are satisfied that the bridge won't cause any unforeseen problems. The bridge cannot be replaced like-for-like because the flow of the river has already changed since the bridge was built nearly 200 years ago, so the new design will need to account for this.

Cadw based their Grade II listing of Llannerch Bridge on the aesthetics/design of the bridge and therefore the new design will need to take account of this listing (although, as

stated, cannot be replaced like-for-like due to the changing nature of the flood plain in the area). The listed status of the old bridge will be an important consideration when the replacement bridge project reaches the planning application stage.

How will the Council balance the needs of road users with the concerns of local residents?

Prior to its collapse, Llannerch Bridge was taking a much greater volume of traffic than the bridge or the road leading to it was designed to cope with. Although keen to see a replacement bridge in place, during our public engagement in autumn 2021 a number of local Trefnant and Tremeirchion residents told us that they would have concerns about a like-for-like replacement on grounds of safety, with the road width, speed of traffic and design of the bridge all causes for concern locally.

It is currently the view of the Council that the replacement project should meet the needs of current and future use of the road, and therefore the Council are currently looking at design options which ensure the approach roads are not subject to flooding and that the new carriageway is sufficient width to ensure that road safety is not compromised.

Date of the next newsletter

The next newsletter will be published in the late summer/early autumn of 2022.

Could this newsletter have been an email?

If you would prefer to receive copies of the Llannerch Bridge newsletter electronically in future, please email public.engagement@denbighshire.gov.uk

Comments, queries and concerns:

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