

## **FAVERSHAM CREEK BRIDGE – UPDATE # 3 – October 2019**

Apologies in the delay in producing a “Faversham Creek Bridge” update. I am pleased to report that I believe we are making good progress and continue to build momentum. Many will have heard that I am standing down as the Leader of Kent County Council (KCC) after 14 years on 17<sup>th</sup> October. However, this should enable me to devote more time to this project to see it through to fruition.

From various meetings and conversations held in the last few weeks (upon which I shall expand) it is clear that if we are to achieve our objective of seeing vessels navigating the creek and mooring in the basin, there are many more obstacles to overcome than just providing a bridge that opens and closes. These include:

- A bridge that opens and closes
- Functional sluice gates
- Dredging of the creek and the basin
- Agreement with surrounding landowners to facilitate regeneration projects
- Legal and contractual obligations
- Raising the necessary funding
- Restoration of the existing bridge or a new bridge?

### **The sluice gates and the bridge**

KCC’s Highways Technical Team has been working on the best long-term solution to both the sluice gates and the bridge. There is quite appropriately a debate going on as to whether restoration of the existing lift and swing bridge or a new bridge is the best way forward. We are progressing work on both options. In relation to a new bridge, I am pleased to report that we now have soil analysis information available to us and will start the design and supplier engagement phases.

On investigating the viability of restoring an existing bridge, our plan is to carry out a detailed inspection in the next six to eight weeks which will involve a weekend road closure to enable the existing bridge to be lifted off. The inspection will involve investigation of the bridge deck, supporting structures and moving parts. When this information is to hand, we will be able to assess whether restoration is the best option or commissioning a new bridge. It is being suggested that one of the advantages of a bridge restoration is that this may avoid the necessity for a range of public agency consents which could extend the timeframes.

I have had several meetings and conversations with Helen Whately, MP for Faversham and Mid Kent who has been most helpful and is carrying out further investigations alongside us to work towards a resolution of the complex arrangements around ownership, legal liabilities and responsibilities including maintenance and operational issues. Various meetings and conversations have taken place with stakeholders and partners involved.

## **Project costs**

Significant work has been carried out on costing the whole project – bridge, the sluice gates and the dredging etc. Current estimates show a total approximate project cost of between £2.5 and £3 million. Noting the wharf side regeneration will be delivered by others, subject to satisfying all necessary planning requirements.

The current funding pledges are as follows:

- KCC £850,000
  - Swale Borough Council £200,000 (confirmed at a recent meeting, see below for a further update)
  - Faversham Town Council £170,000
  - The Faversham Creek Trust through the community £125,000
  - Philanthropic donation £200,000
- Total: £1.54 million


This leaves a shortfall of around £1 million and we continue to explore a range of options including understanding legal responsibilities and additional funding avenues.

Finally, I met last week with the new Leader of Swale Borough Council, Roger Truelove accompanied by officers of both local authorities. This meeting went very well and I am pleased to report their ongoing commitment to this project. Negotiations are progressing with adjoining landowners concerning various planning considerations and Swale Borough Council's Local Plan encompasses Faversham Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan (that relates to the future of the Faversham Creek and Basin).

I hope you find this update helpful and would agree that we are now starting to make good progress. We will issue a further update as soon as we have the outcome of the detailed inspection of the existing bridge, scheduled to be carried out in the next six to eight weeks. I very much intend to be there on the day to witness the event.

Best wishes,

**Paul Carter CBE**



**Leader, Kent County Council**