DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

NOTES OF MEETING – 28 July 2020

Agenda and notes (where appropriate) can be viewed at the Council's website at:

http://www.merton.gov.uk/living/designandconservation/designreviewpanel.htm

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Panel Members Present:

- Councillor Linda Kirby (Chair) *Not Present*
- Tony Edwards
- Alistair Huggett
- Gesine Junker
- Michael Whitwell

Council Officers Present:

- NA

Councillors Present

- NA

Members of the Public Present

- NA

Declarations of Interest

- NA

Availability of Documentation

This review was for a council application that is shortly to be in the public domain. The council has decided that the notes and the material presented to the Panel, will be put on the council's public Design Review Panel webpage.

The procedure for this e-mail review was that the Panel members were sent an email requesting comments individually, they were then distributed to all for further comments with prompts from the Panel administrator, and subsequent comments were added to the notes. They were then formatted into the notes below verbatim other than standardising the format.

No further discussion was had between individual panel members and the Panel administrator or the Chair. Draft notes were distributed to the panel members for comments and no comments were received.

Notes:

Item 1: Pre-Application, No number yet, **Bishopsford Road Bridge**, , Case Officer: ***Not allocated yet***. Ward: Ravensbury *Construction of replacement bridge crossing the River Wandle – Review of street level aspect of the bridge design.* A new bridge is requires due to flood damage to the existing bridge.

Respondent order is not the same as the alphabetical list of reviewers above.

Reviewer A

1. I think the charm of the old bridge was it's asymmetry and this new design while well-thought out does come across as a generic design with little response to it's local setting. My particular concern is that while it makes a great play on the openness for road-users and views into the open spaces it makes no assessment to the impact that this openness will have on either Ravensbury Park or Watermeads Nature Reserve. Potentially the demolition of the wall and the removal of a significant number of trees will greatly increase the noise and pollution to users of the park, quite apart from increased views of the traffic. What is currently a peaceful and intimate open space could potentially become considerably less so. At the very least I would like to see some proposals for replacement tree planting and ask whether any noise assessment has / will be carried out.

2. While the view of the new bridge from Watermeads Nature Reserve is an improvement over the former due to the removal of majority of services from view, is there any scope to either add texture or a profile to the concrete (shown clearly on image 13) as a plain concrete finish as shown rarely (if ever) weathers well?

3. The proposed stone sett hard verge is a very attractive detail however is would benefit further from the use of granite kerbs rather than the standard concrete as shown in the adjacent detail. As the scheme is in a conservation area I think this would be reasonable requirement. Furthermore much (if not all) the new cycling infrastructure currently being constructed in London seems to use granite.

4. I'm not convinced with the proposed 1.5m strip of "low level planting" on the SW approach. To be honest it looks tokenistic and I'm not convinced it would survive in such a situation. One solution would be to extend the sett detail mentioned above which would link the approach aesthetically with the bridge.

5. There is a proposed dropped kerb for cyclists to join the shared surface going south just after the Grove Mill access raised table. However I am unsure as to where the cyclists are expected to re-join the carriageway. One possibility would be where the hatched road-markings are shown just after the crossing (shown on the 1:250 detail) which could be designed to incorporate such a feature?

6. Finally a general comment. Cycle signage should be absolutely clear as often conflict arises with pedestrians when it is uncertain. In particular as it is part of the LCN 20 route it is important that this is clearly signed. Have Merton Cycling Campaign seen and commented on the scheme at all?

Additional Comments

1. Regarding my comment "generic design" I was referring to the brick pier / concrete slab combination with the parapet railings which could be anywhere (I was in Coulsdon today and the bridge looked the spitting image of those on the by-pass). The bridge has been designed to solve an engineering problem and with I believe little thought to the context. For instance the parapet railings are and "off the shelf" design whereas with those of option 1 there is a context unique to the area.

2. Regarding the verge design, I think the comment regarding the gap is a good one.

VERDICT = AMBER

Reviewer B

1. Being a cyclist the integration of the dedicated cycle lane to one side is obviously beneficial, and the opening up of the watermeads park frontage (removal of the brick wall) is good, however they seem to have had to remove a considerable number of trees in that area, which I don't think is illustrated in their visuals.

2. Aesthetically the design of the railings is the not particularly interesting and it's not clear from the visuals how they will integrate the mitcham parish marker into this. I understand why this option was chosen (views of the river, prevent climbing) but the option with a mix of brick and railings was, in my opinion a better option, although maybe with a more modern twist which incorporates some of the historic features? Did they consider having different styles on each side as previously (relating to the requirements on each side) as the two bridges close together on that side, with similar but different railings, could look a bit confused. There would be limited risk of climbing on the western side as there is no footpath, and views of the river would be obstructed by the wooden bridge.

3. I certainly don't think it warrants a red verdict but I have concerns about the western (downnstrean) side and it's relationship to the existing wooden footbridge.

Additional Comments

None

VERDICT = AMBER

Reviewer C

1. The new bridge is required to answer technical requirements which are more rigorous and precise than those which shaped the original bridge design. The original bridge appears to have failed to provide pedestrian convenience and safety in its original form, which required the subsequent addition of a supplemental timber pedestrian route.

2. The Wandle is not a navigable river, and the bridge location was even the location of ford as photographic records demonstrate. This shows the shallowness of the flow. There is no suggestion that any form of replica or pastiche would be appropriate or desirable in the bridge location.

3. A bridge provides an unusual experience for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicle drivers to be elevated above the ground. With adjoining vegetation bridge users may also come into closer contact with the canopy of adjoining trees which are growing up close to the bridge abutments which is another unusual experience. As seen in various publications, even in Winnie the Pooh and the Pooh sticks game, there is an attraction to stopping on a bridge and looking down from the unusually elevated position above the water.

4. For the above reasons Option 2 represents a more elegant and preferable solution for the new bridge design. This is particularly the case when there are additional views afforded through the metal railings which will replace the large brick wall. However, the technical response required has produced a relatively crude solution to the relationship of the parapet to the paved surface. This has also appeared to some respondents in the public consultation to permit litter to enter the Wandle River and in this characteristic may have suggested that Option 1 is a better solution.

5. If the bridge in the adjoining Morden Hall Park is considered, this bridge which is only for pedestrians has a more integrated conception of a river crossing which makes its structural design both evident and elegant. It would be good if Option 2 demonstrated a more elegant integration of deck and balustrade .

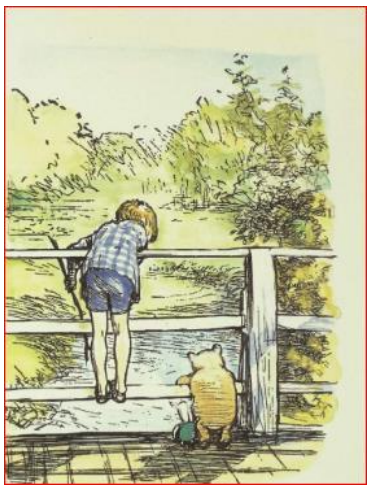
6. It would be preferable if the bottom rail of the balustrade in Option 2 was better integrated with the deck surface so that any litter was less able to blow underneath. It seems possible that the vertical members of the balustrade can also be thinner when viewed face on, as shown in Option 1, than the cruder and thicker balustrade members in Option 2 . The thinner balustrade could be integrated with a lower rail serving as skirting and reinforcing its strength in the case of vehicle impact.

7. There would seem to be a need for signage to show pedestrian / cyclist priority for the proposed unsegregated shared use footway/ cycleway, as it is not clear which user has the priority and this may place pedestrians at risk.

8. It is therefore my opinion that with its balustrade continuity and relationship with adjoining fencing replacing the high walling, Option 2 is the better solution. However, the design of the balustrade could be further refined to provide a more elegant balustrade solution to the approved scheme.

Additional Comments

- My reference to the value of being elevated over water. This reinforces my view of keeping a single low balustrade
- Morton Hall Park bridge showing a more elegant junction between the clearly expressed structure and balustrade.
- Millenium Bridge showing bridge deck and balustrade junction



1. I do not think the surfacing quality overcomes the balustrade failings.

2. I think a landscape scheme must form part of any planning application to mitigate the damage caused by the bridge construction and to integrate the new bridge into its surroundings.

3. I think Option 2 is AMBER as it avoids some of the poor design elements of Option1, and can be refined. I think Option 1 is RED

VERDICT = Option 1 = RED; option 2 = AMBER

Reviewer D

Cycleways and pedestrian routes.

1. A map of a wider analysis of the existing cycling and pedestrian network would have been welcome. This should have included: existing and proposed provision of walking and cycling infrastructure, existing desire-lines, use and any known conflict points.

2. Existing pedestrian and cycling movement from south to north (western side) appears to be provided in a fairly continuous manner via the existing foot/cycle bridge adjacent to the road

bridge. The bridge benefits from wide approach routes and easy transition point from carriageway to shared cycle footway for cyclist wishing to accessing the bridge from the south. On the northern side, the transition is less smooth. Currently, the route is obscured by a wall, making this route less attractive during dark hours. No dedicated cycling infrastructure exists beyond the Esso and Rawnsley Avenue

3. Existing pedestrian and cycling provision from north to south (eastern side). There is no dedicated cycling infrastructure. A footway with guard railing is provided.

4. The new proposal is widening the existing bridge by 1m to create additional space for walking and cycling, which is welcome. Furthermore, the removal of guard railing is also welcome.

5. The new proposal introduces a 1.5m cycle lane on the western edge and a 3m shared cycle/footway on the eastern edge. Both are on the low end of minimum width standards in accordance with the London Cycling Design Standards (LCDS) for low trafficked streets, however, in the absence of traffic counts, this could not be confirmed.

6. The new cycling facility as a shared foot/cycle way on the eastern side does not meet the LCDS criteria of directness, comfort and attractiveness, by requiring cyclist to undertake a fairly sharp manoeuvre onto the dropped kerb onto a shared environment, on a straight road where cycling speeds can become relatively high. This is either cumbersome and has a high risk of not being used by cyclists and / or pedestrian/cyclist conflicts on the shared section.

7. Under the circumstance of the widening of the bridge and removal of the concealing parapet of the eastern foot/cycle bridge, I would recommend the council to review the allocation of road space and cycle lane/track provision and consider:

8. The cycling lane north bound: Improving the off-street route via the eastern foot/cycle bridge, in terms of transition zones, overlooking and lighting; and reconsidering the provision of a north bound on-carriageway cycling track.

9. Use the space gained for a cycle lane or track on the western end to facilitate a segregated walking and cycling route across the bridge that meets LCDS design standards.

10. Consider a further widening of 0.5m to facilitate minimum cycle tracks either side and a single dedicated footway.

Design

11. The design has moved from a three arched bridge to a single span. The three arches have been articulated in the parapet via the 3 pillars on the western side, while no such articulation existed on the western side. The new railing appear to be an improvement on the western side over the existing structure, however the design makes no attempt to further articulate the landing of the bridge and its abutments. It simply merges with the simple greenery and fairly crude abutments. In the context of a conservation area, it appears to be a missed opportunity to articulate – and celebrate – the landing of the structure either side and it's integration with the landscape and start of parapets, in particular after the loss of the arches and pillars on the eastern side.

Additional Comments

Revised wording:

1. Under the circumstance of the widening of the bridge and removal of the concealing parapet of the ***western*** foot/cycle bridge, I would recommend the council to review the allocation of road space and cycle lane/track provision and consider:
2. The cycling and walking infrastructure north bound: Improving the off-street route via the ***western*** foot/cycle bridge, in terms of transition zones, overlooking and lighting. This would make this route the predominant route with less need of a dedicated cycle track on the northbound lane.
3. Use the space gained for a cycle lane or track to facilitate a segregated walking and cycling route southbound across the bridge that meets LCDS design standards. This would also reduce potential pedestrian / cycling conflicts of the shared surface.
4. Consider a further widening of 0.5m to facilitate minimum cycle tracks either side and a single dedicated footway.

VERDICT = AMBER

Conclusion is an **AMBER** Verdict