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12 January 2017

PRESS RELEASE

IMT Statement on proposed Upper Orwell Crossings

Ipswich Maritime Trust has previously submitted representations on the published Business Plan for these proposals, both to the Department of Transport and to the Suffolk County Council. It has now carefully considered the proposals, in so far as they have been detailed to date, and wishes to make further representations before bridge designs are further advanced.

The Trust believes that the proposals, as currently made, could have a major adverse effect on the tourist economy of the Town and its Waterfront caused by the major restraint and navigational hazards imposed on tall vessels generally and the iconic Thames Barges in particular, all of which currently have safe and unimpeded entry into and out of the historic Wet Dock at all times.

The Trust is concerned that these adverse effects on Waterfront tourism activity, which now plays an increasingly vital role in the promotion of the town and its future economic prosperity appears not to have been recognised in the development of these proposals, other than in the form of statements of intent not borne out by the facts.

The attached report, also reproduced in the Trust's January Newsletter and available to be read on its website www.ipswichmaritimetrust.org sets out its current concerns in detail.

The Trust will be seeking a meeting with Suffolk County Council in order to pursue its concerns.

Geoffrey Dyball
(Chairman Ipswich Maritime Trust)

Upper Orwell Crossings

Many of you will be aware of the proposed Upper Orwell Crossings project which has received provisional funding from the government and is going through a public consultation process, and for which there is also a design competition under way. The proposed crossings have generated considerable debate over the benefits or otherwise to be achieved, and the Ipswich Maritime Trust is taking a keen interest due to their potential impact on maritime activities.

The three proposed crossings are:

Crossing A

A new road crossing to the south of the Wet Dock, which would connect the east and west banks of the Orwell between Landseer Road/Cliff Lane and Wherstead Road/Rapier Street. This crossing would be for all road users, including cyclists and pedestrians.



Crossing B

A new road crossing of the New Cut, which would connect Felaw Street to the Island site. This crossing would be for all road users, including cyclists and pedestrians.

Crossing C

An improved crossing over the Prince Philip Lock, which would connect the east bank to the Wet Dock Island. This crossing would be for cyclists and pedestrians only.

Comments

Crossing A – Cliff lane to West Bank

This is proposed to be a bridge providing clearance for the majority of the pleasure vessels to proceed unhindered, with a movable/lifting section for taller yachts and other vessels.

Our main concern is the potential effect this crossing has on Thames sailing barge operations from the Wet Dock, and the impact on visiting tall ships, both of which are a major part of our maritime heritage and contribute to the tourist attraction of the town.

The crossing will have an impact in three ways:

- the operation of the moveable section of the bridge. The Business Case assumes that the bridge opening would be restricted to outside peak hours and be relatively infrequent. The Thames barges which run public and charter trips from the Wet Dock depart as required to meet their customers' needs. If the opening of the bridge were to be limited to perhaps two or three times per day at fixed times, this would have a serious impact on the viability of the operation of the barges, and could see the end of regular Thames barge trips from the Wet Dock.
- Linking of lock operation and bridge opening. The location of the proposed bridge will apparently leave a gap of at worst about 100m between it and the lock. The Business Case assumes that vessels that require the bridge to be opened will be able to wait in this space. This may well be the case for modern yachts, but Thames barges and tall ships do not have

this manoeuvrability, and with the cross-flow of water from the New Cut and unfavourable wind direction it would be impossible to 'wait' in this space.

- The width of the opening section of the bridge. The design competition for this bridge is underway but there does not appear to have been any consultation as to the width of the opening section. At first glance it might be considered that the width of the opening only needs to be the same as that of the lock, since tall ships can 'swing' their yards if needed. The real problem is being able to align a vessel to proceed through the bridge opening and then, once through the bridge, realign to enter the lock (or *vice-versa*). Currents and adverse wind direction could make this impossible in the short distance between the lock and the bridge.

It appears the requirements of our historic vessels have been overlooked in the proposal for this bridge, nor has the adverse effect on the local economy in general and the Waterfront in particular from the loss of the daily use of these historic vessels been taken into account.

Crossing B – Island Site to New Cut West

The proposal to have a fixed bridge across the New Cut will mean that it will never again be possible to have medium or large historic vessels in St Peters Dock, the area between Stoke Bridge and Dance East. This uniquely historic area is the first part of the Waterfront visitors see when approaching from St Peters Street and the Town Centre. With the future development of the area as the major tourist attraction of Ipswich, our concern is that its potential is being restricted.

If this proposed crossing were to be made openable on an occasional basis, similar to the way that bridges across the canals in Holland and Belgium operate, then the development and tourist potential of this area would not be limited.

Crossing C – Lock crossing

No details of this crossing have been published other than it will be for pedestrians and cyclist only. At this stage we do not know if this will be an improved crossing across the existing lock gates, or a separate opening bridge. Either way there is likely to be an impact on the free passage of vessels, in particular during 'free-flow' periods of operation when both the lock gates can be open to allow free passage of vessels for up to two hours before high water. The impact on the vessels will depend on the design of this crossing and its speed of operation, neither of which is known.

In summary:

One of the five main stated objectives of the Upper Orwell Crossings is to:

'Ensure the continued success of the Waterfront, Marina and Port'

and the Business case puts emphasis on the importance of tourism to Ipswich and the benefits to the local economy of increased tourism gained through the Upper Orwell Crossings. It appears that an important part of the attraction of the Waterfront and our heritage has been ignored in the proposal for these crossings, which could ultimately cause their demise.

What we are doing:

The IMT is working with the Association of Bargemen and other historic vessel organisations to gather facts on the precise impact of the Crossings as proposed, and this will form the basis of our future representations and/or objections to the various promoting bodies, including Suffolk County Council.