

## WYE VALLEY RAILWAY BRIDGES RESTORATION PROJECT

### *Purpose*

To update members on Lydbrook Black Bridge and inform of the situation with the other former railway bridges in the lower Wye Valley.

FOR INFORMATION

### *Key Issues*

- The condition of three former railway bridges over the River Wye, at Tintern (Wireworks), Redbrook and Lydbrook (Stowfield Viaduct), has been a cause for concern for a number of years.
- In December 2013 the AONB Unit had submitted an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the conservation and restoration of Redbrook railway bridge totalling £1.1million. This was unsuccessful.
- In March 2018 the AONB Manager assisted Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) in submitting a Heritage Grant application to HLF for the restoration of Lydbrook Black Bridge totalling £1.5million. The application was also unsuccessful.
- Over the summer GCC have undertaken essential safety work to Lydbrook Bridge and have managed to reopen the bridge by installing a temporary walkway on the bridge structure.
- It is anticipated that if all three bridge structures are not significantly refurbished in the next 10 years they may cease to be usable as footbridges.
- The AONB Unit is investigating a revised partnership approach for the conservation of all three former railway bridges over the River Wye in the AONB to ensure that the bridges remain viable as footbridges for the next 30-50 years.

### *Reasons*

The JAC has previously endorsed its support for projects to refurbish some of the former railway bridges across the Wye. This led to the AONB Unit leading on the Redbrook Bridge HLF application in 2013 and assisting Gloucestershire County Council's HLF application for the Lydbrook Bridge in 2018.

Lydbrook Bridge was closed from February 2016 until September 2018 when Gloucestershire County Council were able to install a temporary scaffold walkway on top of the stripped down railway bridge. For more information see <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/roads-parking-and-rights-of-way/major-projects/lydbrook-bridge/> Tintern Wireworks Bridge and Redbrook Bridge remain open although there are also issues with the condition of the respective walkways.

Gloucestershire County Council have management responsibility for Tintern (Wireworks), Redbrook and Lydbrook bridges, although all three bridges are cross-boundary and have shared ownership. Gloucestershire County Council carry out regular safety and condition assessments. However, only Wireworks is fully designated as a Public Right of Way although

Lydbrook and Redbrook bridges are strategic crossings for the Wye Valley Walk, a regionally promoted route and key recreational and environmental asset in the area. The Wye Valley Walk and the valley's Railway Heritage are recognised as Special Qualities in the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan.

### ***Implications***

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) declined the Lydbrook Bridge application. Having previously rejected the Redbrook Bridge application it appears that pursuing Lottery funding is not a viable solution for the Wye Valley bridges. Therefore a revised approach needs to be taken to conserve the former railway bridges over the River Wye in the AONB.

There are a number of organisations involved with these structures including Gloucestershire County Council (who part own and have management responsibility for Tintern Wireworks, Redbrook and Lydbrook bridges), Herefordshire Council (who part own Lydbrook bridge) and Monmouthshire County Council (who part own Redbrook & Tintern Wireworks bridges, and have an interest along with Sustrans in the Beaufort Bridge in Monmouth), the Environment Agency (as the Wye Navigation Authority upstream of Bigsweir, over which Redbrook and Lydbrook bridges pass) and Gloucester Harbour Trustees (as the Navigation Authority for the tidal Wye downstream from Bigsweir, over which Tintern Wireworks Bridge passes) and the Wye Valley Walk Partnership (which crosses Redbrook and Lydbrook bridges). Private sector interests are also likely from the tourism and walking businesses and the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Tourism Association. The respective local communities will also obviously have an interest.

The AONB Manager is convening the interested partners to investigate options to secure the necessary funds to ensure that the bridges remain viable as footbridges for the next 30-50 years. It is anticipated that if the structures are not significantly upgraded they will cease to be usable as footbridges in the next 10-15 years, with the consequent loss of amenity and access (and heritage) for everyone, and potential hazard to navigation.

### ***Background***

The Wye Valley Railway opened in 1876, linking the towns of Chepstow and Monmouth (then both in England). At Monmouth Troy station passengers could change for trains serving the towns of Pontypool, Ross-on-Wye and, from 1883, Coleford. Ultimately the line lost large sums of money and closed to passengers in 1959. The line was used for freight until 1964.

Three former railway bridges over the River Wye, at Tintern (Wireworks), Redbrook and Lydbrook (Stowfield Viaduct) are all now used as footbridges over the Wye. Redbrook and Lydbrook are strategic crossings for the Wye Valley Walk. The bridges are in excess of 130 years' old which exceeds the current required design life of 120 years for a new structure. The existing steel structure to all four bridges is generally in a poor condition, as is the paintwork. The remaining life of the structures as foot crossings is subjective and depends on any future maintenance and repair.

The AONB Unit commissioned a feasibility study in March 2011, undertaken by Atkins, which investigated the re-decking of the Lydbrook and Redbrook former railway bridges for use by walkers, cyclists and/or light private access. In July 2012 the JAC endorsed the investigation of a project to restore the three former railway bridges at Tintern (Wireworks), Lydbrook (Stowfield Viaduct) and Penallt / Redbrook.