

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 4 March 2025

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Exceat Bridge replacement options

Purpose: To seek approval to change the scope of the Exceat Bridge Replacement Project.

RECOMMENDATIONS. Cabinet is recommended to

- (1) Consider the affordability and options for replacing Exceat Bridge;**
- (2) Agree to discontinue the proposals for an offline two lane replacement bridge ('Option A') and to instead proceed with the replacement of Exceat bridge in the location of the existing bridge ('Option B'), subject to confirmation from the South Downs National Park Authority that this falls within permitted development, in accordance with the details set out in Appendix 1 of this report; and**
- (3) Delegate Authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to:**
 - a) agree the withdrawal of:**
 - i. the East Sussex County Council (Exceat Bridge Replacement- A259 Eastbourne Road) Compulsory Purchase Order 2023 (the CPO);**
 - ii. the East Sussex County Council (Exceat Bridge Replacement- A259 Eastbourne Road) (Classified Road) (Side Roads) Order 2023 (the Side Roads Order); and / or**
 - iii. the East Sussex County Council (Exceat Bridge Replacement- A259 Eastbourne Road) Bridge Scheme 2023 (the Bridge Scheme);**
 - b) notify the Department for Transport accordingly; and**
 - c) take any other actions necessary to give effect to the withdrawal of the above Orders.**

1. Background

1.1 Exceat Bridge spans the Cuckmere River on the A259 and is part of the Major Road Network. It is a key corridor between Eastbourne and Brighton, with an average annual daily traffic count of 11,500 vehicles with morning and evening peaks of nearly 1,000 vehicles per hour. The bridge has historically been a pinch point between Seaford and Eastbourne and given its strategic importance as a transport corridor and its overall condition, it was considered for a Levelling Up Fund bid. In 2021, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) was awarded £7.957m of Levelling Up Funding (LUF) towards the then estimated total cost of £10,590,517 for the replacement of Exceat Bridge.

Cost increases and delays

1.2 Since 2021, project costs have increased considerably and the project was significantly delayed following design changes requested during pre-planning engagement with the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA). The process to achieve planning permission from the SDNPA (as the local planning authority) took considerably longer than initially anticipated. In addition, increased construction costs and inflation, as well as unexpected difficulties in securing third party land and rights required for the project (resulting in the need to seek a Compulsory Purchase Order) have all contributed to the anticipated costs of the project rising considerably.

1.3 Each of these factors have impacted the affordability of the Exceat Bridge replacement project. Whilst the Council's preferred option remains an offline two-lane replacement bridge ('Option A'), this is now considered unaffordable as it will not be possible to meet the estimated funding gap of £10.667m in the capital programme. Consequently, a value engineering exercise has recently been undertaken with expert support from the Department for Transport (DfT) consultants (the Delivery Associates Network commissioned by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) to see if costs could be reduced.

1.4 The Council's highways contractor, Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) have considered potential areas of savings that were identified and the outcome of these has provided a high-level estimated construction cost of £13,504,558. This is based on shortening the programme by closing the road to undertake the works, retaining the existing bridge for pedestrians and removing viewing platforms from the new bridge to make the structure narrower. To achieve all of these would require re-engaging with SDNPA as it would be a change from the design on which the planning approval is based, and this would cost more money and time. The reduced cost estimate does not include costs to date and the ongoing land negotiations and unfortunately this does not bring the overall cost for Option A down enough to be within the budget.

1.5 Additional funding sources considered have included borrowing; the introduction of toll charges; and use of potential future Lane Rental income. However, none of these are viable.

1.6 Concurrently with the value engineering exercise, the Council has explored alternate options with BBLP. As a result of this work, a proposal to replace the existing bridge within its current position under permitted development rights (subject to discussion and confirmation by SDNPA) ('Option B') has been developed.

1.7 The change in scope to the project is also dependent on approval from the Government. A Project Amendment Request (PAR), based on proceeding with Option B, was submitted to Government on 11 February 2025. Additional information about engagement with relevant stakeholders in regard to the change is set out in Appendix 2, which includes 'frequently asked questions' relating to the bridge replacement project.

Spend so far

1.8 £4,613,891 has been spent on the project to the end of quarter three 2024/25, and (subject to any costs incurred to date in quarter 4) there is £6,187,626 remaining of the budget summarised below:

Source	Total allocation	Spend to date	Remaining
Levelling Up Fund (LUF) funding	£7,957,517	£2,900,619	£5,056,898
LUF Capacity and capability funding	£211,000	£0	£211,000
National Productivity Investment Funding (NPIF)	£2,133,000	£1,213,272	£919,728
East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Capital Funding (borrowing)	£500,000	£500,000	£0
Total	£10,761,148	£4,613,891	£6,187,626

The table below breaks down total spend to date by year:

	Pre-2021/22 (pre LUF)	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 to Q3	Total to Q3 2024/25
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Preliminary Design and Planning	1,713,272	303,703	441,341	6,317	15,448	2,480,080
Detailed Design	-	155,402	1,075,291	416,046	133,255	1,779,994
Legal Fees	-	6	28,570	65,501	30,222	124,299
Land Acquisition and Compensation costs	-	-	20,865	122,680	36,117	179,661
Project Management					3,555	3,555
Enabling works	-	-	-	17,690	24,825	42,515
Monitoring and evaluation	-	-	-	3,786	-	3,786
Spend Total	1,713,272	459,111	1,566,067	632,020	243,421	4,613,891

1.9 ESCC has received £4,542,567.14 of LUF funding to date, as well as £211,000 Capacity and Capability funding. This would almost certainly need to be paid back if the Government do not agree to the change in project scope. Of this £2,900,619 has been spent so far on the project. The NPIF funding would not need to be paid back.

1.10 The current deadline for spend of the LUF is March 2025 and therefore an extension to March 2026 will need to be sought. However, it is not guaranteed that Government will agree the PAR. The project cannot progress until the PAR process has been completed.

1.11 The risk of costs overrunning the above for any option will sit with the Council. However, a robust quantified risk assessment has been carried out (for Option B) to mitigate this.

Compulsory Purchase Order

1.12 In order to secure the land assembly due to issues in acquiring the land by agreement, Cabinet agreed on 18 July 2023 for the Council to make a Compulsory Purchase Order, a Side Roads Order and a Bridge Scheme. Consequently, on 3 October 2023, the Council in accordance with its statutory powers under the Highways Act 1980 made the East Sussex County Council (Exceat Bridge Replacement- A259 Eastbourne Road) Compulsory Purchase Order 2023 (the CPO). At the same time, ESCC made two separate orders under the Highways Act 1980, namely the East Sussex County Council (Exceat Bridge Replacement- A259 Eastbourne Road) (Classified Road) (Side Roads) Order 2023 (the Side Roads Order) and the East Sussex County Council (Exceat Bridge Replacement- A259 Eastbourne Road) Bridge Scheme 2023 (the Bridge Scheme).

1.13 Although the CPO, the Side Roads Order and the Bridge Scheme (together the Orders) have been made by the Council, they do not become effective unless and until they are confirmed by the Secretary of State. In view of the objections submitted with the DfT against the Orders, the DfT has

arranged a public inquiry to commence on 13 May 2025, which will run for several days, following which a decision on the Orders will be reached.

1.14 If, due to changing financial circumstances, Cabinet agree not to proceed with the original scheme (Option A) and to pursue Option B instead, this will remove the justification for the Orders in the Council's Statement of Case. Accordingly, Cabinet is recommended to delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to agree to the withdrawal of any or all the Orders, to notify the DfT accordingly, and to take any other actions necessary to give effect to the withdrawal of the Orders.

1.15 If any or all of the Orders are withdrawn, the Council cannot rule out the possibility of the landowners affected by the CPO making a financial claim for any loss or costs they have incurred. However, the Council will be able to manage and minimise those costs if the decision to withdraw is actioned imminently.

2. Supporting information

2.1 The Project Team have kept LUF representatives from the DfT informed and they are understanding of the issues the project has faced. As set out above, a PAR has been submitted to the Government based on Option B. However, their decision has not yet been received.

2.2 To take the project forward, there are 3 potential options:

Option A: Continue with current proposed new bridge with planning approval;

Option B: Replace the existing bridge like for like in the same location (under permitted development rights which are subject to confirmation from SDNPA);

Option C: Refurbish the existing bridge (at ESCC cost).

2.3 Details of each option are set out in the table below, including risks and benefits. Further information on the proposal for Option B is set out in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Options						
Option	Cost	Road closure	Timeline (inc Pre-Election Period and impact on tourism)	Risks (financial and practical)	Benefits	Disbenefits
<p>A. Continue with current proposed new bridge with planning approval</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 lane bridge on a safer alignment, - New footway and crossing points, - Viewing platforms, - Street lighting, - Bus stop improvements - Shared meeting space 	<p>£21.4m including spend to date (subject to value engineering outcome)</p> <p>Further costs in relation to the CPO process may need to be factored in. This may include funding the full costs of a public inquiry on the CPO, assuming those landowners who have objected to the CPO continue to refuse to negotiate reasonable terms for the necessary rights.</p>	A few days	Completion date March 2027	<p>Unaffordable with current budget.</p> <p>May not be possible to complete within timescales for LUF funding (would spend LUF upfront).</p> <p>Planning stipulations.</p> <p>This Option is conditional upon the Council being successful in the CPO to acquire the necessary rights to construct the new bridge and (as the bridge crosses a navigable waterway), confirmation by the Secretary of State of a Bridge Scheme.</p>	<p>New 2-lane bridge (100 year plus lifespan)</p> <p>Significant improvements in journey times/reliability and subsequent outcomes such as better connectivity between coastal towns.</p> <p>Easier for buses and Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) to turn onto the bridge.</p> <p>Significant improvements for non-motorised users' accessibility as a result of new footway.</p> <p>Meets stakeholder and public expectations.</p>	
<p>B. Replace the existing bridge like for like in the same location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single lane bridge - Permanent traffic lights 	<p>£9.7m (including £4.6m spend to date and £5.1m to complete)</p> <p>NB. This does not include land and potential compensation and legal costs as an</p>	Estimated 22 weeks	Completion date March 2026	<p>Significant road closure and impact on stakeholders and A259 strategic road network</p> <p>Reputational risk to communicating change of original plan. See</p>	<p>New bridge (100 year plus lifespan).</p> <p>Some minor improvements to congestion, journey time reliability and pedestrian safety/accessibility.</p>	<p>Major disruption to journeys as a result of the road closure. See further details below.</p> <p>* No improvements for buses and HGVs</p>

<p>- Street lighting - Puffin crossing</p>	<p>assessment of what further rights and orders are required will be undertaken following decision on option. Costs of ending the open CPO process to be confirmed and included as well.</p> <p>*This is based on a northside footway as is the current situation, but options to move this to the southside and enhance sustainable travel improvements will be explored.</p>			<p>FAQs and website updates at Appendix 2.</p> <p>Risk of cost overrun will sit with ESCC.</p> <p>Additional time and costs for permissions for any piling in third party land that sits outside of permitted development.</p> <p>As assessment will need to be made on whether this can be constructed wholly within the boundary of the highway and/or land owned by the Council (permitted development confirmation needed from SDNPA) or if any third party rights are required. Based on the legal analysis carried out so far, it is likely that the Council will still need a Bridge Scheme to construct over the river which would need to be confirmed by the Secretary of State.</p> <p>If SDNPA do not accept, Permitted Development Rights apply and then a full planning application will need to be made.</p>	<p>Does not require planning permission as it can be carried out within permitted development (subject to confirmation).</p>	<p>which find it difficult to make the sharp turn onto the bridge.</p> <p>If the footway remains on the northside, pedestrians will still have to cross the road twice.</p>
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<p>C. Refurbishment of existing bridge</p> <p>- Make temporary traffic lights permanent</p>	<p>Estimated £2.5m (high level at this stage)</p> <p>Costs of ending the open CPO process to be confirmed and included as well.</p>	<p>Estimated 10 weeks</p>	<p>10 weeks duration</p>	<p>Unlikely to be funded by the Government and would require ESCC to pay back LUF allocated to date.</p> <p>Reputational risk to communicating change of original plan.</p>	<p>May extend the life of the bridge by a few years.</p> <p>Traffic lights have brought some improvements to journey times/reliability.</p> <p>Does not require planning permission.</p> <p>Is unlikely to require any third party rights nor a Bridge Scheme.</p>	<p>Current bridge not compliant with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) or Local Transport Note LTN1/20 Cycle infrastructure design.</p> <p>Bridge will still need replacement in the near future, and it is not known whether any external funding will be available. This will also require more road closures.</p> <p>No improvement for road users on current situation.</p>
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Impact of road closures

2.4 Cabinet should note that Options B and C will require extensive road closures for up to 22 weeks, which will cause major disruption to the A259 coast road. The shortest alternative route is through the villages of Litlington, Lullington and Alfriston. These narrow lanes are not suitable for an official diversion which would be via the A27. However, a diversion route can only be advisory and drivers are likely to take shortcuts through the villages causing unacceptable levels of traffic.

2.5 From Seaford (Sheep Pen Lane) to Eastbourne (Upperton Road) via Exceat Bridge is 7.6 miles, which takes approximately 14 to 26 minutes at rush hour on a weekday. The diversion route via the A27 would be 21.3 miles, which takes approximately 35 to 75 minutes during rush hour. (Source: Google Maps).

Figure 1: Route via Exceat Bridge

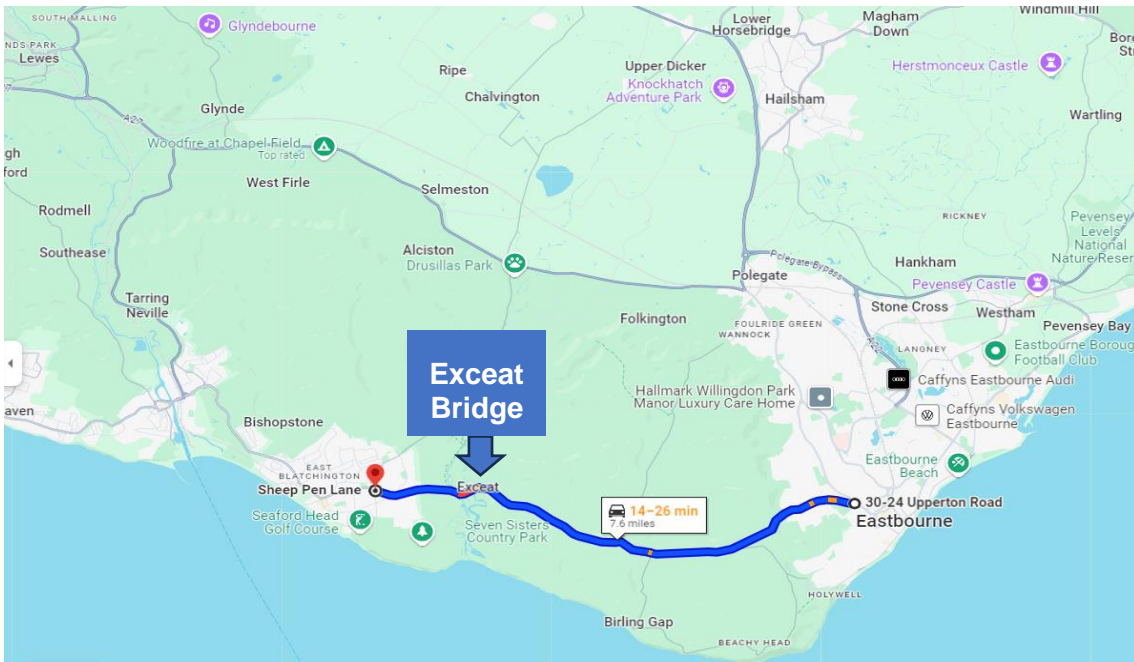
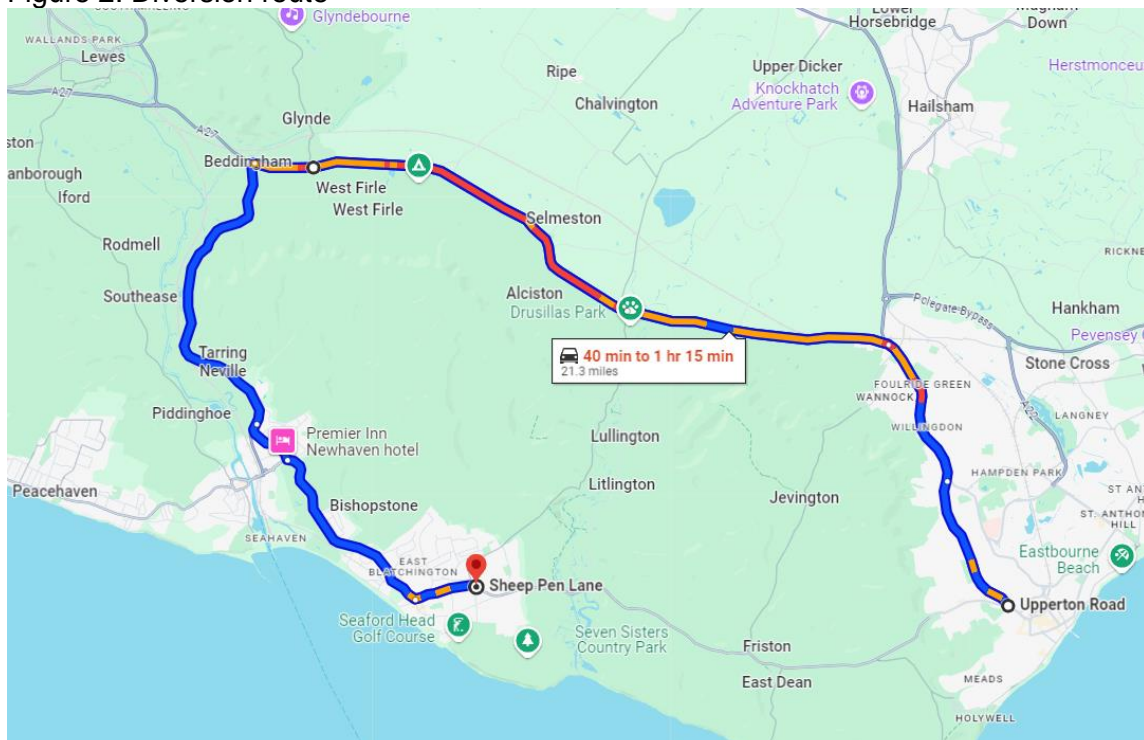


Figure 2: Diversion route



Traffic on the A259

2.6 The A259 is part of the major road network averaging an annual daily traffic count of 11,500 vehicles with morning and evening peaks of nearly 1,000 vehicles per hour. Around 1,000 people work in Eastbourne from Seaford, Newhaven and Peacehaven, with around 800 travelling to work by car. Additionally, around 1,300 people from Eastbourne work in Brighton. It is heavily used by HGVs travelling between Eastbourne, Newhaven and Seaford.

2.7 There are 9 bus routes across the bridge. Brighton and Hove buses run up to 6 buses per hour. This would have a significant impact on people commuting between Newhaven, Eastbourne, Seaford and coastal communities, children travelling to school and visitors to the National Park.

Potential Mitigations

2.8 It may be possible to install a temporary footbridge to the south of the bridge using existing bailey bridge footings. This would mean that foot traffic could continue to cross the river during the road closure. Although it appears this may be within scope of permitted development, this relies on being able to evidence the bridge is removable and will likely require approval from the SDNPA, which could mean additional time to the programme.

2.9 If it is possible to install a footbridge then buses may be able to operate either side of the bridge with passengers walking over the bridge to continue their journey. Although it may not be possible for buses to turn around.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 Regrettably, the original proposal to build a replacement bridge, Option A, is no longer viable under the current financial position of the Council. Option C is not a long-term solution given the age and condition of the bridge, the need to repay LUF funding already spent, and the need for further funding to replace it in the future.

3.2 Although the preference would always be to complete the original proposal for an offline two-lane replacement bridge, this is not now possible. Cabinet is therefore recommended to agree to discontinue Option A and to proceed with the alternative proposal of Option B, namely the replacement of the existing bridge with a single lane bridge and footway in the same location. In addition, Cabinet is recommended to delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to agree to the withdrawal of the Orders associated with Options A, notify the DfT accordingly and to take any other actions necessary to give effect to the withdrawal of the Orders.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillors Adeniji, Lambert, MacCleary, Stephen Shing, Denis, Bennett, Osborne, Collier, Robinson, Holt, Swansborough, Shuttleworth, Wright, Ungar, Belsey, di Cara, Tutt and Rodohan

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None