

CHEPSTOW

Town Council

Historic Chepstow: *The Way to Wales and the Wye Valley*
See The Chepstow Web Site at www.chepstow.co.uk
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My Ref: SB/23092015TRS1

Edwina Hart MBE CStJ AC AM
Minister for Economy, Science and Transport
Welsh Government
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

29th October 2015

Dear Minister,

A Review and Explanation of the 50mph speed limit on the A48 Bridge at Chepstow

Thank you for your letter of 13 October 2015, which was discussed at Council last night..

A thorough explanation

You said that you had *provided a thorough explanation of the reasoning behind the decision' (to retain the 50 mph speed limit)*. We have looked carefully through all the correspondence over the past 2 years and no explanation of any kind has been given.

The Town Council has received comments only on the '*process*' of making the decision and on some of the '*organisations*' consulted and on some of the '*factors*' that were to be considered but no information at all about the data, its evaluation, or what the other organisations have said, and the arguments for and against the options, and the reasoning behind the decision itself.

We have sent a large amount of detail on the safety issues as well as photographs showing the dangerous situation on the bridge but we have never received, at any stage, any response to any of the points we have raised in the past 2 years nor comments saying that our interpretation of the law or of safety issues on the A48 bridge, is wrong. No evidence, data or opinions, from any qualified traffic engineer has been put forward in 2 years.

We asked for an explanation of the reasons behind the decision to retain 50mph for our Council meeting in September following the Government's speed limit review, and for an official to attend to explain the situation, but no information or official was forthcoming.

The Gatehouse, High Street, Chepstow NP16 5LH
Tel 01291 626370 Town Clerk Sandra Bushell

You said that *'my officials have met with you to discuss the issue in detail'* but this is not the case. An official came to Chepstow in April 2014 to look at the situation on the bridge but the official did not discuss the situation with us nor explain Government thinking.

The Welsh Assembly Government's Petitions Committee wrote several times to you asking for an explanation and they too received only comments about the *'process'* and not an explanation of why 50 mph was so important here and why it was safe to retain it.

In your letter of 16 September 2015 you said that the review was in line with the Welsh Government's Guidance on Speed Limits. We looked at that Guidance and we have demonstrated (attached to our previous letter) that the speed limit on the bridge does *not* conform at all with Government Guidance. You have not commented on this nor explained how the A48 bridge at Chepstow conforms with the Guidance.

You said that the Gwent Police have been consulted, but you have not said what their comments were and why the views they put forward carry more weight than those of the Town Council or the Petitioners. We still do not know what their comments were.

We have received no clear explanation as to why the simple action of starting the 50mph zone 320 metres further north on the A48, just after the end of the bridge, cannot be taken.

We would still like to know the Government's response to the points made by the Petitioners and the Council and the reasoning as to why 50mph is so necessary on this short stretch of road, and why it is acceptable to the Government and the Police.

We would like to see the speed limit review report on the A48 bridge which, using the factors you have mentioned, concluded that there should be no change from 50mph to 30mph, and we would still like to see the comments of the Gwent Police. It would be helpful to see the Government's risk assessments for the bridge and to have some transparency on this matter so that we can understand the Government's thinking.

Danger of a high speed head- on collision on the A48 bridge at Chepstow

The A48 bridge is in an urban area. It has street lights at 30 metre intervals, well within the 180 metre interval required by UK and Welsh law for a 30mph zone. The pavement is well used by pedestrians and by vulnerable users as it is a main route to school.

For vehicles and pedestrians the A48 bridge is a **narrow 'trench' between two concrete walls - only 10 metres apart and 320 metres long from which there is no escape. Within this 10 metre width there are two carriageways with no central crash barrier between them and a pavement less than 2 metres wide often full of pedestrians and school children and no side crash barrier. Vehicles up to 2.5m wide approach each other at closing speeds of 100mph and pass within 1 metre of each other and within 1 metre of pedestrians at those speeds. 40 ton lorries, tankers, and 50 seater coaches approach each other at closing speeds of 80mph - with nowhere to go to avoid a collision.**

A momentary slip by any driver or a swerve to avoid a cyclist or a slipped load could result in a disastrous head on collision and vehicles ricocheting off the concrete side walls and crossing the pavement in under 1 second. It is not safe for traffic to travel at these speeds on the A48 bridge at Chepstow even without pedestrians being present. A new and open review is needed of traffic and pedestrian safety on this bridge.

Railings

On railings there is still much to discuss. Railings are not crash barriers and need to be installed *along with* central and side crash barriers and a 30mph speed limit. Railings will not be enough if two 40 ton lorries strike each other at a closing speed of 80mph in this narrow 'concrete trench'.

The A48 bridge at Newport has crash barriers, railings, and other safety measures.

The A48 bridge at Chepstow has none of these.

Also, the height of railings is not straight forward. It is not clear whether bicycles will be on the road on the outside of railings (where they could be a hazard for vehicles, and be unable to seek any refuge on the pavement if a lorry passes too closely) or whether they would have to share the narrow pavement inside the railings, and, if so, the railings would need to be raised from 1.04m to 1.4m. Furthermore, school children frequently have bags overhanging the carriageway and could be hit and dragged along by the wing mirrors of passing vehicle unless the guard rails were higher still. We would welcome some discussion on the proposals and also sight of the risk assessment used for the installation of guard rails.

Need for a new and open review of safety on the A48 bridge at Chepstow

In view of the recent awful collision in France, it is right for us to strengthen our call for a further review of the safety of this bridge and for a 30mph speed limit on this bridge, and for crash barriers as well as railings to be installed.

The A48 bridge at Chepstow is the narrowest point on the A48 between Gloucester and Cardiff. It cannot be appropriate or safe to permit vehicles to approach each other, and pass each other, at closing speeds of 80mph to 100mph on such a narrow unprotected bridge let alone have pedestrians within a metre of them.

We want a more detailed explanation of the arguments against 30mph and sight of the reports and risk assessments on the bridge. Let us not wait for an accident to provide the appropriate collision statistics. We need to do something now to prevent a serious accident. A new and open review of both traffic safety as well as pedestrian safety is urgently needed and we should to be consulted as part of it.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Dale Rooke
Town Mayor



Sandra Bushell
Town Clerk