



# Finchingfield Bridge

## Public benefits for Installation of a Temporary Vehicle Crossing

November 2021

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page Number</b>
Background	3
More Recently	4 - 7
Conclusion	8
References	9
Appendices	10 - 11

## Background

Public debate about the benefits and disadvantages of the introduction of a temporary vehicle bridge over the pond in Finchingfield whilst essential structural works takes place on the existing bridge, have been going on for years.

In November 2015 Essex Highways officers, along with a Fire Brigade Officer, attended a public meeting in Finchingfield Parish Church, led by then Cabinet Member for Highway Maintenance, Eddie Johnson (now Chairman of ECC), who attempted to persuade people that a temporary bridge was not a feasible option. Several hundred local people attended and in a charged meeting most made it very clear that introduction of a temporary structure to allow continued traffic flow, was essential for continued village survival.

This view was re-iterated at a public exhibition of proposals that was held in February 2016 – indeed a public petition was started that was presented to ECC at Full Council in February 2016, with 3000 signatures. The issue also made it to televised media and drew in the local MP, James Cleverley. The then Chairman of the local Parish Council, also offered to personally contribute a six-figure sum towards the inclusion of a temporary bridge.

The Saffron Walden Reporter stated: *that the petition, prepared by the Friends of Finchingfield group, read: “Having seen the result of five days of closure and ensuing problems both within the village and around the country lanes, adversely affecting businesses and residents, this cannot be allowed to happen again.” Alexandra Cox was quoted as having said: “More than 820 local residents have signed this petition, this constitutes well over half of the electorate along with a number of residents from outside the village. This village faces its worst peril in generations, the demolition of its very heart.”*<sup>1</sup>

The East Anglian Daily Times reported that the official diversion will be 15 miles in length prompting villagers and MP James Cleverly, who all accept the work does need to be done, to call for a temporary bridge – ruled out by County Hall as not viable.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequent to that period, Essex Highways withdrew the proposals made at the time and continued to look at options. A subsequent Cabinet Member then decided that ECC should indeed consider seriously an option that did include the use of a temporary bridge. This de-escalated the strength of feeling. A subsequent local election also brought new Parish Councillors into the debating arena.



## More recently

The village of Finchingfield, via the Parish Council, held a community-wide vote in December 2020, to formally confirm their preference for a temporary crossing, whilst Finchingfield Bridge is replaced.

The vote returned a positive majority and from the 37% turnout, 93% have voted in favour of the temporary bridge being installed.

The benefits for inclusion of a temporary bridge are presented below:

### 1. Economic Impact

As a result of previous, short-term road closures and initial consultations, it has become evident that some businesses within the community consider that they will likely cease trading, without a temporary crossing. The owners of the village Post Office have previously expressed publicly that their business will close without the installation of a temporary crossing, as trading will be significantly impacted, with a reduced number of vehicles travelling through the village. Alex Robinson, co-owner of the Post Office is reported to have said *"We have had the bridge shut before. Every time it happens we know effectively all our passing trade disappears and half of the local trade because they are over the other side of the bridge."*

*"We can survive a week because it's a fairly successful business but what we cannot survive is if they shut the bridge for months as they are proposing to do."*

*"I can't underestimate how important it (the bridge) is. It is the only crossing point over the river. It is why Finchingfield exists. That is what brings everybody here."<sup>2</sup>*

Some villagers, including those with mobility limitations will be unable to access the Post Office or indeed anything on the 'wrong' side of the pond, although it is worth noting that a pedestrian crossing would remain available, over the weir at the other end of the pond from the bridge.

Previously the Post Office have petitioned to ensure the temporary bridge is provided as part of the project, receiving significant support within the village.

Several businesses within the community have recently been significantly impacted because of the Covid-19 pandemic. During a public event held on 1 October 2020, a landlady from a public house in the village explained that without the temporary crossing, their business would "die" due to a lack of road users traveling through the village. The landlady explained that a fair proportion of their business is generated by passers-by or tourists visiting the village, it is extremely unlikely that tourists or commuters will travel through the village, if the temporary crossing is not permitted.

The Saffron Walden Reporter has previously quoted, Jacqui Braithwaite, owner of The Finchingfield Lion pub as saying: *"For a week, we will put up with it. They have been*



*saying the closure will last five months or nine months. It is what will be left after that worries me. Once a village has lost a pub it won't come back."*<sup>2</sup>

A garage selling fuel in the village has also previously indicated that it would face economic adversity with an absence of through-traffic.

In the 2016 round of discussions, one or two local farmers also expressed concern that they may suffer economic adversity, should their large farm vehicles, or HGVs that take away farm produce, be required to take possibly long diversion routes.

## 2. Social Impact

At a public information event in October 2020, the community were presented with the most recent project proposals, now including the proposed temporary crossing. Several attendees voiced concerns regarding how their livelihoods would change without the installation of a temporary crossing.

Without the temporary crossing, the village will become split in to two parts, creating a physical divide within the community. As a result of previous short-term road closures, the village doctor's surgery has raised concerns regarding how their services would be impacted, despite only a short-term closure being implemented. Therefore, if a road closure and a diversion route are enforced for a period of approximately six months, this is likely to have a significant impact on the vital services that the surgery provide to the community.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018, the surgery's Manager advised that *"robust plans will need to be in place to ensure allow patients to access the health centre services at all times, that community nursing teams can complete their rounds and that emergency response vehicles and doctors on visits will have suitable routes available to them"*. We believe that the installation of the temporary crossing will ensure their services can continue to operate, with minimal impact experienced whilst the community nursing team can continue to access their patients in the quickest time possible, without following the fifteen-mile diversion route, which would significantly reduce the number of patients they are able to care for per day.

Without the installation of the temporary crossing, emergency services will be required to follow the formal, signed diversion route. The temporary crossing will minimise journey times.

The East Anglian Daily Times reported that Freshwell Medical Centre has written to the council expressing concern for the welfare of its 7,000 patients<sup>5</sup>

Previously, when short-term road closures have been implemented, the emergency services have voiced concerns regarding the impact upon the services they provided and what the consequences of the diversion, instead of the temporary crossing could be.

If a temporary crossing is not installed, alternative bus arrangements will need to be arranged throughout the duration of the road closure. For short term closures previously, two replacement shuttle buses services have been introduced, which required members to complete a connecting walk. This walk could be extremely difficult for those members of



public who are disabled or have limited mobility. If shuttle buses are required, this will have an adverse impact on the environment, as additional pollution will be generated. The Passenger Transport team within ECC have also voiced concerns regarding the viability of the previous arrangements on a long-term basis. Please refer to appendix one, for a detailed account regarding the consequences and challenges of no temporary bridge being provided and it is a potential reality that the south side of Finchingfield and Great Bardfield may not be able to be served during a full bridge closure, if tendering for the shuttle arrangements proved difficult – which could leave those without alternative means of transport, isolated for the duration.

As ECC, we have strategic objectives to promote sustainable transport modes and this will not facilitate a return to using public transport. In addition, the commuting time for school pupils will increase, due to waiting for connecting services, to safely complete their journey.

Should the temporary crossing not be permitted, then the safety of the public could be compromised. During previous temporary closures, several road traffic collisions have taken place because of narrow local “rat runs” being subject to increased traffic. Road users have been known in the past, to find their own diversions when the road is closed and not follow the formal, signed diversion route, this has previously resulted in head-on road traffic collisions, causing significant damage and inconvenience.

Following the bridge closure, the Saffron Walden reported concerns from Martin du Preez, owner of Falcon Tree Specialists who said his vehicle was hit by a van going at 40mph *“There have been three collisions in one day. What is that number going to be over five months and when is that going to turn into fatalities?”*<sup>2</sup>

The installation of a temporary crossing can prevent the likelihood of these accidents taking place, as road users will not be required to follow a diversion route.

The existing arrangements within the community see the local primary school provided with their refreshments via transport from another school. The meals are ferried to the school over the bridge. If the temporary bridge is not installed, the vehicle will be required to follow the diversion route to successfully deliver the meals. This will result in unnecessary delays and potentially the students at the school will be without refreshments at the appropriate time. The introduction of the temporary crossing whilst the existing bridge is replaced will ensure that any possible delays to the delivery of the meals is minimised, as much as possible.

██████████ head teacher of Finchingfield Academy provided the following statement in November 2021 when asked for the school’s view:

*“Our daily school meals are provided by Great Bardfield Primary School. A member of staff has to collect the hot school meals, every day, and then transport them to school. We therefore travel via the bridge to collect and transport back to the school. Many of our pupils and some staff travel over the bridge daily as part of their commute however no school buses/taxis would come via that route.*”



*Previously [when the bridge has been closed] it has led to reduced attendance. School lunches have had to be cancelled previously as unable to collect the hot school meals due to any other routes having unsafe road conditions.*

*There would be general disruption to our everyday running. Staff and parents would need to find alternative routes, both for general day to day and especially school meals, if a temporary crossing was not provided. The staff collecting and transporting school meals would need to work additional hours, as it would take longer for them to undertake the duty.*

*Based on previous experience of the bridge being closed, even if only for an accident or flooding – it is absolutely clear that a temporary bridge is fundamental in ensuring the school continues to function at full capacity and potentially, pupils could go without education or the option of a daily hot meal, if the crossing is not provided.”*

Being a rural village, Finchingfield experiences agricultural and delivery vehicles etc travelling through the village, to maintain important services.

Without a temporary crossing, the vehicles will be forced to follow the diversion route, which will have a significant impact to their operations, causing significant delays to their services and supply chain. Whilst we encourage road users to follow the formal diversion route, we are aware that due to the length of the formal diversion route, inappropriate alternative routes will be frequently used generating additional and uncontrollable risk.

### 3. Environmental Impact

Without a temporary crossing, villagers and local businesses will be required to follow an official diversion route over fifteen miles. This lengthy official diversion was often the focus of lurid anti-ECC headlines. As a result, vehicles will generate additional pollution creating harm to the environment. In comparison, the installation of the temporary crossing will maintain the existing distance of travel, without increasing pollution levels. The less distance road users travel, will minimise the pollution that is produced, reducing harm on the environment.

On the diversion and other alternate routes, are other listed buildings which will be subject to increased levels of traffic compared to the current situation. The increased traffic, such as heavy goods vehicles, could potentially damage the properties, which are not exposed to such vehicles on a frequent basis. By installing the temporary crossing, the number of properties who experience a change to the existing arrangements will be minimised, resulting in any impact being localised. We previously explored and considered the possibility the various mitigation measures on the diversion routes, one of which was the introduction of one-way systems to prevent the likelihood of any head-on collisions, although this was met with negativity by the local residents due to the restrictions on their normal movements and general inconvenience, whilst the one-way systems will result in increased speed of traffic and the systems cannot be policed effectively.



## Conclusion

We believe a temporary crossing should be permitted, as it is clear that it will provide a number of public benefits, to a wide range of the community which we believe outweigh other risks that have been identified. The parish of Finchingfield have also voted in favour for the temporary crossing, with a considerable majority.

Without the installation of the temporary crossing, children could be without education and if they are able to attend school, they will be without school meals. Businesses in the village are likely to cease trading without the temporary crossing, which would be catastrophic for the community, where traders have tried desperately to bounce back successfully from the Covid-19 pandemic. A reduction in business trade, so soon after the pandemic, could be disastrous for local businesses.

Members of the community will continue to access medical services in the village and the impact upon emergency services will be minimal should the temporary crossing be installed. If the temporary crossing is not installed, members of the community face the reality of being cut off, without being able to access public transport.

It should also be considered that whilst our findings are focused solely on the village of Finchingfield, the impact of a road closure without a temporary crossing will be widespread and will severely impact other local communities. Road users are likely to avoid the area, due to the closure and therefore, there is likely to be a reduction in through traffic on classified routes, in adjacent communities, resulting in a potential unquantified loss of passing trade. In addition to the potential loss of passing trade, road users who typically travel through the village of Finchingfield are likely to be adversely affected. We have not approached nearby communities in relation to the temporary crossing in recent times, however the expectation is that they will support the proposal, in order to maintain a smooth passing through the village of Finchingfield, without compromising their travel time or safety.



## Reference Links:

(Saffron Walden Reporter, Katherine Helsop, 28 February 2019

<https://www.saffronwaldenreporter.co.uk/news/finchingfield-bridge-villagers-fight-back-with-petition-to-get-temporary-5411780>)<sup>1</sup>

(Saffron Walden Reporter, Katherine Helsop, Published 21 February 2019/Updated 1 November 2020: <https://www.saffronwaldenreporter.co.uk/news/finchingfield-bridge-closure-causes-chaos-for-villagers-5411810>)<sup>2</sup>

(Halstead Gazette, Charley Goff, Published 22 February 2019 <https://www.gazette-news.co.uk/news/local/halstead/17450334.crashes-spark-fears-finchingfield-bridge-closure-diversions/>)<sup>3</sup>

(Essex Live, Brad Gray, 28 January 2021 <https://www.essexlive.news/news/essex-news/essex-traffic-travel-essex-village-4940052>)<sup>4</sup>

(East Anglian Daily Times, 21 August 2015/Updated 11 October 2020 <https://www.eadt.co.uk/news/fire-chief-finchingfield-bridge-closure-would-put-lives-at-risk-2217566>)<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2016-04-12/a-bridge-too-far-for-villagers-fighting-to-save-historic-landmark>)<sup>6</sup>

## Appendix One

**From:** ██████████ - Senior Policy advisor Place Commissioning  
██████████@essex.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** 22 October 2021 16:50  
**To:** ██████████@essexhighways.org>  
**Subject:** RE: 0026 Finchingfield - Closure Consequences

Hi ██████████, thanks for the email.

It is safe to say that we managed to deal with the closure before, however it was clearly at the inconvenience of a lot of passengers, many of whom were elderly and/or infirm. As such the walk from the Fox bus stop, across the path by the pond to the bus stop on the eastern green was quite onerous for some. It should be noted that particular concern at the time was raised by persons from the south side of Finchingfield and Great Bardfield seeking to access the doctor's surgery on the east side, near to Kempe Road. This will of course have a more direct impact on many more residents of Finchingfield and Great Bardfield, if we are denied access for 6 months.

If I recall correctly the last closure was for only a week however I suspect that this much longer closure would be likely to result in much greater inconvenience for a far larger number of passengers. I believe I am correct in saying that some passengers 'stocked up' in advance to enable them to not have to undertake the walk across the pond – whilst this may be feasible for a short period, it is less easy to afford and store perishable items (eg bread and milk) for longer periods – and certainly not for 6 months! So the impacts of a longer closure are likely to be more widely felt and would I am sure not be received well by our passengers.

As the last closure was during a school holiday period, we were able to use drivers and vehicles that would otherwise have been utilised on school services – a longer closure predominantly in school term times therefore will be more difficult and expensive to resource. Allied to this, there are schools services operating through the village, thus with the lack of reasonable alternative roads in the near vicinity, these will need to be rescheduled, incurring longer journeys to school for many students. It is possible that these too may need some form of shuttle arrangement, which will incur an additional resource need.

In practical terms, for this period of time, it is likely that bus operators will need to acquire additional vehicles and drivers to undertake the shuttle bus arrangement – it would not easily be accommodated within existing resources, for such a long period. As you will have seen in the news, professional drivers (both HGV and PCV) are in short supply at present, with many operators struggling to provide their existing commitments and certainly unable to commit to anything further. Indeed for a 2-day shuttle arrangement last weekend, drivers had to be brought in from Leicester. Whilst the situation could improve by the time of your works – there is a potential reality that the south side of Finchingfield and Great Bardfield may not be able to be served during a full bridge closure, if tendering for the shuttle



arrangements proved difficult – which could leave those without alternative means of transport, isolated for the duration.

For the 1 week closure, it was not necessary to incur too much in the way of additional paperwork beyond reasonably advertising the arrangements to passengers through our regular channels. For 6 months however all services operating through Finchingfield will have to be reregistered with the Traffic Commissioner – that process needs to commence at least 70 days ahead of the implementation date. In addition, for the shuttle buses, we would need to commence the tendering process around 3 months prior to the required lead in period for the Traffic Commissioner.

I don't wish to be overly negative – but we need to face the reality that whilst it could all go smoothly, there are very real potential downsides to such a lengthy closure.

I hope that the above information will be helpful in planning the way forward – the old plan worked, but was not without consequential negative impacts on some passengers and was of course much shorter. As you know we will work to support you whichever way you decide to go, however a lengthy bridge closure will not I suspect be welcomed by many!

Kind regards

██████████ | Highways & Planning Manager

Integrated Passenger Transport Unit

