



The Hammersmith Society

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Yes Minister.....Full Ahead...

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**Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street SW1A 2AA**

Dear Prime Minister

As Mayor of London you are remembered fondly by the people of Hammersmith, and especially by members of the Hammersmith Society, for standing in the way of a dreadful property development beside our Town Hall, and we remember the comforting report announcing that “The Mayor is minded to refuse consent”.

With your admirable promotion to Prime Minister, you would be remembered still more fondly if you could lead your team to secure a speedy restoration of Hammersmith Bridge.

The Hammersmith Society is a dedicated, non-political amenity society, and over the years we have maintained a close involvement with Hammersmith Bridge. The Society represents over 3,000 members, drawn from individuals and affiliated societies in the borough, acting in the interests of local residents and workers to maintain and enhance all aspects of the Hammersmith environment.

We are extremely concerned at the lack of progress in the restoration of the Bridge. The Bridge was closed to traffic nearly two years ago, and last August the closure was extended to everyone: vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists and river traffic. It is two years since the Bridge was closed to traffic, yet there are no funds available beyond the current structural stabilisation stage - and the repairs are expected to take over six years.

This is an appalling and shameful position, which is causing quite unacceptable inconvenience and distress to both the people of Hammersmith, and to the people of Barnes and Richmond-on-Thames - who have even greater need of the Bridge. Before the Bridge was closed it was carrying every day in the order of 20,000 vehicles, 2,000 buses and 16,000 pedestrians and cyclists - users who now have to find a different way to cross the river: a journey of over 5 miles via Chiswick Bridge, instead of their previous journey of less than 300 yards over Hammersmith Bridge. More traffic, more pollution, more frustration, more insult.

Hammersmith Bridge was opened in 1887, in the very early days of the motor car, and whilst it is one of London's finest river crossings, it was not designed for the heavy demands of today's traffic loading: the ornate wrought and cast iron construction, the suspension system and the wooden road decking, have together developed dangerous structural faults, which require immediate and comprehensive reconstruction.

As a past Mayor you may recall that TfL normally pay for the maintenance and repair of the London bridges, and on this basis TfL should pay for the Hammersmith Bridge repair costs, drawing from the financial support provided by government to allow TfL to carry out its duties. To advance the Bridge repair process, in September last year the Secretary of State for Transport set up a 'Task Force', which is required 'to work towards safely re-opening the Bridge'.

Re-opening of the Bridge is still a very long way off. Since the Task Force inception in September, it has (i) authorised £4m for bridge investigation works, adding to the £21m already provided by TfL and LBHF over the last six years, and (ii) demanded that *our local authority should pay 50% of the £148M bridge repair cost*. We are mystified by this demand: this borough is not wealthy, its coffers are depleted by years of austerity, and its contingencies severely reduced by its remarkable response to the covid crisis. Since TfL normally pay for London bridge repairs, TfL should pay for the Hammersmith Bridge repairs, drawing from the TfL bail-out funds provided by the government.

Few bridges would cost as much as Hammersmith Bridge to repair. We understand that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea paid £2.6m towards the repair of Albert Bridge in 2013, but TfL contributed the bulk of the cost, paying £7.1m. TfL paid for the recent £9m repairs to Chiswick Bridge. Repairing the Hammersmith Bridge is critical to the operation of London-wide infrastructure. And besides restoring this essential link for the local people, reinstating the Bridge would spare the UK more of the international mockery we have already endured, including comparisons with the impeccably and proudly maintained Brooklyn Bridge in New York (built in 1883), and reference to the 1100 metre long San Giorgio Bridge in

Genoa, which collapsed in August 2018, and was rebuilt, and re- opened, *within two years*, in August 2020.

Faced with government intransigence over the financing of the Bridge repairs, the local authority has investigated the viability of raising funds from private sources, and has offered a means of not only funding the Bridge repairs, but also supporting the cost of future regular maintenance. An Outline Financial Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State on 19 February.

In response to the delay in the establishment of a temporary river crossing facility by the government and TfL, the local authority has sourced an ingenious temporary bridge proposal, which would provide access for traffic, pedestrian and construction access. This proposal was presented to the Task Force on 17 December.

Whilst your government may have shown a remarkable response to the challenges of the Covid crisis, it appears to be defeated by the straightforward task of repairing a Victorian Bridge, focussing more on obstructions to progress than solutions to problems.

Prime Minister, the communities on both sides of the river are unified in their anger, their disappointment and their despair at the failure of their government.

Please sort out our Hammersmith Bridge.

Yours sincerely
Richard Winterton
Chairman
The Hammersmith Society

HAMMERSMITH BRIDGE



ACTA EST FABULA