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Service Director
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07 FEB 2025

4th February, 2025

Sir

Highways Act 1980 and Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981
Public Path Extinguishment & Definitive Map & Statement Modification Order (No. 1) 2025
Public Footpath No. BCC/589

I wish to object to the proposed closure of the riverside footpath from Avonmeads (near M&S Foodhall) and Netham Weir (between Grid References 361191 172027 and 361231 172337).

Whilst I accept that there has been some natural erosion of the riverbank, the path has been 'temporarily' closed, deliberately allowed to deteriorate and become overgrown for at least five years. This wonton neglect is a direct result of Bristol City Council's abject failure to meet its maintenance and repair obligations over a prolonged period.

Why is the path important?
The River Avon forms a natural green wildlife corridor through this unattractive, densely populated and industrial area in the inner city. It should be embraced as an asset and an amenity for those who live and work here; through improved accessibility and awareness – perhaps in association with a local wildlife trust or conservation charity. Waterways are fundamental to regeneration – creating attractive, desirable urban environments through sensitive developments with provisions to encourage and support a sustainable wildlife habitat. Closing the path feels like an attempt to seal-off and forget this section of the waterway – surely a backward step?

With The Green Party dominating Bristol City Council, I am surprised this is not viewed as a unique opportunity to encourage people to get out of their cars, walk, and explore the nature and heritage on their doorstep

Brunel's bridge
The riverside path is really the only way to view Brunel's Grade 1 Listed Avon Bridge, which spans the river (and the path) approximately 300m downstream of Netham Weir. Unlike Brunel's other famous bridge in the city (Clifton Suspension Bridge), the original stone structure of Avon Bridge is obscured on either side by unattractive truss-girder bridges, which were added to facilitate widening of the Great Western Mainline; hence this nationally important, graceful gothic masterpiece is largely hidden from view and can only be properly seen and appreciated from the path (or the river) beneath.
Surely this is a structure that should be celebrated and made more accessible through better signage and promotion? A partnership with Network Rail could perhaps enable removal of the disused and decaying girder extension on the North-side of the bridge to expose the beautiful original façade?

Historic path and ancient right of way

The route forms part of the original riverside towing path, which enabled gangs of men (and horses) to pull barges and trows upstream towards Bath and beyond. This is the natural course of the tidal river, which would have been navigable, long before the construction of Telford's Floating Harbour, Feeder Canal and Netham Weir. As such, it will have been established as a right-of-way for centuries – perhaps dating back to the earliest Saxon settlements in Bristol.

Aside from its history, closure of this section will result in a missing-link in a path which would otherwise provide an attractive, natural, green, waterside pedestrian route between the city-centres of Bristol and Bath – surely an amenity we should be protecting and improving?

Monarch's Way

The threatened path forms part of The Monarch's Way – a 625 mile long-distance footpath which follows the route taken by Charles II in 1651, after his defeat at The Battle of Worcester. Does Bristol really want to send weary hikers along busy roads with inadequate pavements and through soul-less decaying industrial landscapes instead of the original riverside route? Those hardy trekkers will not be left with a very favourable image of this wonderful city.

Funding

An urban regeneration project, incorporating full restoration of the path is surely suitable for funding through Section 106 agreements with developers seeking to benefit/ profit from the potential attractions of a waterside environment. Wessex Water might also be approached and given an opportunity to clean-up a waterway that has suffered exponentially as a result of their illegal dumping of untreated sewage. Network Rail might be more inclined to restore Brunel's Bridge if its surroundings were tidied up.

In summary, there are many reasons why this path should be reopened. Pedestrian diversions along busy, polluted urban highways designed primarily for high-volumes of vehicle traffic are unsatisfactory, unfriendly, unhealthy and frankly unpleasant for walkers.
The area lends itself to imaginative and creative schemes with the River Avon at their heart – reinstating the path and opening-up the riverbank should be a catalyst to attract investment and renewed interest in a neglected and tired area.

Yours faithfully

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Cc
Ramblers Assoc'n
Monarch's Way Association
Long Distance Walkers Association
Rt. Hon Kerry McCarthy MP (Bristol East)