

Held via Microsoft Teams on 13 December 2021

Attendees: Ian Macfarlane – Council, Director
Assets & Operations (Chair)
Daniel Djikic – Council, Manager Project
Services

Emily Harrison – Council, Manager
Communications & Events

Ken Robinson (Barragga Bay)
Ken Murtagh (Barragga Bay)
Christine Bimson (left at 5.30pm)
(Barragga Bay)
Jenifer Lowe (Bermagui)
Paul Payten (Bermagui)
Geoffrey Steel (Bermagui)

Georgina McIntyre – Council, Executive
Assistant, Assets & Operations (Minutes)

1. Apologies

An apology was received from Gary Louie (Council).

Barbara Wilkinson and Rebecca Hamilton were not present

2. Confirmation of minutes

Mr Macfarlane thanked the group for their comments and feedback on the previous minutes. The minutes of the meeting held on 1.11.21 were accepted with minor amendments.

3. Actions from previous meeting

3.1 Public identification of members

The group was previously asked for feedback as to whether they were comfortable being identified publicly. It was agreed that a name and location were appropriate. Where identifying someone's expertise is relevant to the context this will be included in the draft minutes for the individual to approve prior to publication.

3.2 Publishing of minutes

Minutes from the previous meeting were not published due the Council being in caretaker mode for the election. It was agreed by the group that minutes from each meeting (including the previous meeting held on 1.11.21) will be reviewed and published on the Council website.

3.3 Review of guidelines

It was noted that Council has still been unable to find a member of the Biamanga National Park Management to join the group.

3.4 Review of documents

All group members present were able to access the distributed documents. It was noted that the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) was focused on the proposed 2-lane concrete bridge. It didn't contemplate the replacement of the bridge in Timber or its restoration and retention. This is because this was what Council were seeking funding for at the time. By and large the environmental factors will remain valid regardless of the way the project moves forward. As part of the REF (section 5.4), a Due Diligence assessment for Aboriginal heritage sites was undertaken by a qualified archaeologist and is summarised in Appendix I to the REF.

4. New Business

4.1 Clarifying roles and responsibilities of group

The group's primary role is to identify and articulate the specific heritage aspects of the current structure that are important to the group. Further to this the group is to suggest ways in which the identified key aspects can be preserved or referenced in any future structure to ensure the 'feel' of the location is retained where possible.

It was reiterated that the function of the group was not to lobby for the preservation of the current structure and that at this point, in accordance with the terms of reference, the views of the group would be reported to Council for consideration before decisions on the next steps of the project are made.

The newly elected Council will have the opportunity to review all aspects of the project including the function and role of the group in the following Council term.

4.2 Clarifying the reporting process

It is anticipated that a report will go to the Council meeting on March 16, 2022 presenting the consolidated group's views on the heritage aspects of the bridge that should in the group opinion be retained or referenced where possible. A draft of the report will be made available to members of the group for final comment before being presented to Council

Mr Macfarlane will seek direction from the new Council on the existing terms of reference (as previously discussed) to include continued input and consideration of possible futures design(s). This would require a new resolution of Council.

4.3 Discussion on the heritage value of the bridge.

The current Heritage report was undertaken by an accredited heritage advisor and based against NSW Heritage criterion and definitions. The report was commissioned on the basis of capturing the existing heritage characteristics of the bridge and if it were to be replaced what are the bridge significant features that could/should be considered.

Geoff Steel requested a glossary of bridge terms, eg sub structure, superstructure etc, to ensure common understanding within the group. (This will be prepared and circulated outside these minutes)

Murrah bridge was discussed as an example of another bridge in the area that has concrete sub-structure and kept its' timber superstructure - meaning it is a hybrid. Some members of the group described the work on Murrah bridge as 'ugly' and not reflective of the bridge's heritage. Due to the additional work over the years, it was acknowledged that Cuttagee is essentially also a hybrid with a combination of concrete, steel and timber substructural components. The differences between Cuttagee and Murrah were discussed.

The durability of different materials was discussed with queries about the comparative lifespan and maintenance costs of each material. In respect to Cuttagee Bridge, it is the impact of the salt water within the tidal zone that is the main factor that causes issues with durability of all components.

A question was posed asking if a recycled plastic timber 'look alike' material could be used? There is no simple answer to this, and it depends entirely upon the application and all materials have their own pros and cons and need to be assessed with regard to its application.

Each member present discussed what makes the bridge heritage to them, this was (in no order of preference):

- Timber structure: Pylons (piers), kerb, deck, rails (including diamond top rail)
- Single lane
- The need to slow down
- Aesthetics and beauty
- Acoustics- The sound of vehicles driving across the timber. People swim and walk under the bridge so they can listen to it

(post meeting comment from Jenifer Lowe) The bridge should be considered in the context as part of a series of bridges in the area. It represents a period in our colonial history.

It was discussed that Cuttagee bridge was a significant election issue across the region (not just Bermagui & Tathra), with some candidates declaring they will rescind the resolution to replace the bridge. It was noted however, that it is not possible to rescind the resolution (it's too late), and instead a new resolution would need be made by Council.

Mr Macfarlane noted to the group that this may be a unique opportunity to build a landmark structure. The community at large have very different expectations of how the bridge should function into the future than when the bridge was built over a century ago.

(post meeting comment from Paul Payten) Sensitive signage advising of heritage, as well as the need to slow down and give way should be considered

4.4 Structural assessment

Council sought an independent review and commissioned a Tier 2 structural assessment of the bridge. The primary purpose was to answer the questions: What is its current structural state i.e.: Is the bridge safe; can it take the loads it was designed for and currently being subject to?

Ken Robinson stated that the public assumption over recent years is that Council is seeking to replace the bridge rather than retain and maintain it. Mr Macfarlane responded noting that although Council has been advocating for its replacement due to structural degradation, and it was included the last Council Infrastructure Prospectus, routine maintenance activities have continued. What has not occurred are major structural works that are now required to keep the bridge fully operational for all vehicle types.

Following the release of the report, Council was advised to immediately reduce the load limit and speed limit on the bridge due to the structural issues identified, which was done on 6 December 2021.

Almost all of the structural members were classified as either condition 3 or 4 and were deemed to require replacement. In particular, 2 of the timber girders have been identified as unsound and require replacement and sections of the substructure have rotted. The emergency work that needs to be carried out may require the bridge to be closed for periods of time to enable crews to attend to the works.

A load limit and speed limit will remain even after the repairs have been completed. The report notes that the foundations were not inspected as they were under water at the time

It is likely that the repairs won't happen until at least late January 2022, due to the availability of the Council's bridge crew and materials. It is difficult to estimate how long the repairs will take as it is highly likely that further issues will be discovered as work is undertaken.

The importance of keeping the public as informed as possible in regard to the closure of the bridge was discussed and noted. A number of members asked if it would be possible to avoid closing the bridge during the peak tourist seasons of summer and Easter. Mr Macfarlane responded that the repairs would be undertaken as soon as possible due to safety concerns and there was no way of predicting how long they would take.

(Post meeting comment) Ken Murtagh (specialist engineering consultant) suggested that there may be a way to undertake emergency repairs without the need to close the bridge and this should be investigated and considered.

(Post meeting comment) Geoff Steel asked that the accessibility of alternate routes during the proposed closure of the bridge be confirmed.

5. Closure & Next meeting

The next meeting will be held Tuesday February 1, in Bermagui at a location to be confirmed. An onsite meeting prior to the next official meeting was also discussed, as a way to provide context for the works needed as part of the upcoming repairs

Post meeting: - Mr Macfarlane met with Ken Robinson, Ken Murtagh and Geoff Steele on site and inspected the accessible bridge components and discussed repair options.