

Fownhope Parish Council

Submission to Herefordshire Council General Scrutiny Committee meeting

Monday 22nd March 2021

Fownhope Parish Council wrote to Herefordshire Council on 6th August 2020 requesting that the council's management of repairs to the B4224 be reviewed by the General Scrutiny Committee and that a public enquiry be established. On 11th December 2020 Fownhope PC wrote claiming compensation for the financial impact of the extended closure as a result of Herefordshire Council's failure to monitor and maintain the road network and to appropriately manage the repair programme. Fownhope PC are grateful for the opportunity to make this submission to the General Scrutiny Committee.

Herefordshire Council's Management of the Repair Programme

In our previous correspondence, we stated that the inconvenience and resulting financial hardship experienced by Fownhope residents and businesses as a result of the road closure had been exacerbated by Herefordshire Council's negligence in failing to apply appropriate oversight to the repair programme. This position seems to have been supported by the report submitted to the General Scrutiny Committee. Specifically:

- Ten weeks elapsed between the road closure on 16th February 2020 and Herefordshire Council giving BBLP the order to begin construction at Lechmere Ley on 30th April. We understand that surveys were required to understand the extent of work required, however, this seems an inordinately long time, particularly as detailed designs still needed to be prepared for Stone Cottage at this point.
- Having initiated the Lechmere Ley repairs on 18th May, work completed on schedule within the 3 month planned timeline. This should have enabled work to start at the Stone Cottage site on 17th August 2020. Despite having ordered a detailed design of work required at the Stone Cottage site on 30th April 2020, Herefordshire Council were not in a position to place the contract for this work with BBLP until 29th September 2020 ie – 6 weeks later than the work could have actually started.
- Having mobilised to the Stone Cottage site in October 2020, BBLP established a re-opening date on or around 23rd February 2021. This was subsequently postponed to late March following the realisation that the site was unable to accommodate the crane required to lift pre-cast parapet walls into place. This seems a remarkable oversight from a professional engineering company and one which might reasonably be expected to have been picked up had Herefordshire Council had appropriately qualified oversight in place.
- Herefordshire Council established early in the repair programme that utilities running beneath the road would need to be relocated in order to enable repairs to proceed. BT engineers were called to the Lechmere Ley site in early May to relocate the fibre optic cables at that site and subsequently had to be called back to the Stone Cottage site before work could begin in October. It is unclear why the BT engineers were not tasked with relocating the cables at both sites in May, thus potentially enabling a more rapid initiation at the Stone Cottage site. Again, appropriate oversight of the two repair programmes might have identified this as an opportunity to fast track the ultimate completion of the project.

- As part of Herefordshire Councils “Lesson Learnt” exercise, immediate changes to project management arrangements have apparently been made. It is disappointing to know that these lessons were learnt at the expense of the residents of Fownhope, Woolhope and surrounding villages.

Herefordshire Council’s Management of the Road Network

The B4224 skirts the Woolhope dome, a limestone escarpment which abuts porous sandstone between How Caple and Mordiford. This geology makes the area particularly susceptible to landslip, as witnessed at Lechmere Ley and Stone Cottage. A further failure at How Caple will require the closure of the road for 6 weeks to enable repairs in May, once the Fownhope section re-opens.

Herefordshire Council has admitted that they are managing the county wide road network on a “deteriorating asset” basis, however, we feel that responsibility lies with the county council to monitor the condition of the road structure and associated drainage systems and to schedule preventive maintenance in order to avoid catastrophic failure. Fownhope Parish Council stand by our position that Herefordshire Councils failure to conduct appropriate monitoring and preventative maintenance contributed to the failures seen recently.

B4224 Strategy Group – Fownhope Parish Council believe that the intrinsic instability resulting from the underlying geology along much of the B4224, combined with Herefordshire Councils “Deteriorating Asset” management policy, makes reducing the traffic burden on the B4224 an urgent priority. This will be increasingly important if climate change results in an increase in extreme wet weather events. Fownhope PC and neighbouring parishes have established a “B4224 Strategy Group” and are working with Herefordshire Council to put measures in place aimed at encouraging cross county through traffic to use the trunk road network as an alternative to the B4224. We look forward to continuing this collaborative effort to reduce the probability of future failures along the B4224.

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