

Contact: [REDACTED]
Direct Tel: [REDACTED]
Fax: [REDACTED]
email: [REDACTED]
Your ref: [REDACTED]
Our ref: RED/T&CS/14



Mr Andrew Tweddle LL.B.
HM Senior Coroner for County Durham and Darlington
H.M Coroner's Office
PO Box 282
Bishop Auckland
Co Durham
DL144FY

3 June 2014

Dear Sir

Re: Sopefoluwa Babtunde Peters, deceased

I refer to your letter dated the 8th of May 2014 enclosing your Regulation 28 report, following the conclusion of the inquest into the death of Mr Peters.

Careful consideration has been given to the matters of concern which you have raised in your report at paragraph 5 and the County Council's response is set out below.

With reference to your concern about the steepness of the steps and lack of handrail on Drury Lane; the lane has been inspected by the County Council's Rights of Way Officer and he is satisfied that the steps themselves are in a good state of repair. It is acknowledged that these steps are steep, requiring some care when descending them. However, these steps have been in existence for a considerable period of time and to our knowledge there has been only one previous report of a tripping or slipping accident, and that defect was rectified. It is in any event difficult to see how these steps could be modified as the path is too narrow to achieve any meaningful alleviation of this slope.

Turning to the provision of handrails; as mentioned in previous correspondence, due to the narrowness of the path it would be very difficult to install a handrail, because this would further reduce the width, which could be viewed as an obstacle by some footpath users. In any event the hand rails would need to be attached to the abutting walls, which are not within the County Council's ownership. The walls have been inspected and are considered to be unsuitable for attaching rails of this nature to because of their age, and in places the walls are in fairly fragile condition.

continued/...

Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham DH1 5UQ
Telephone: 03000 260000

Whilst lighting the location may assist, it would result in a lit area leading to unlit riverside paths, creating greater contrast between areas of light and dark. It is felt that lighting all the riverbank paths would be both impractical and inappropriate due to the detrimental effect on the setting of the World Heritage Site. On balance it is not considered helpful to light this location.

I can confirm that whilst no action is being proposed in respect of the above mentioned matters, the Council will be installing a timber barrier in the riverside footpath, adjacent to the wall opposite the exit from Drury Lane. The installation of a barrier should reduce any potential risk of someone falling or running down the steps and going over the wall into the river at this location. This barrier will be placed within the footpath itself, as the path is within the control of the County Council. It is anticipated that this barrier will be installed within the next two weeks.

The County Council will also be undertaking a risk assessment along sections of the river bank. This assessment will include representatives from the police who will identify locations, from their local knowledge of where there is a volume of evening and night time activity. If further risks are identified these will be assessed and action will be taken by the County Council to minimise such risks as is considered appropriate.

This was a tragic case which highlights how young adults, in particular can come to harm when they are travelling alone at night significantly under the influence of alcohol which is an intrinsically perilous state. Addressing the risks caused by alcohol is a priority of this council and its partner agencies and I attach links to the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy: the County Durham Safe partnership pages on alcohol reductions and links to work being carried out in the city centre.

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/pages/service.aspx?Serviceid=8108>

<http://www.countydurhampartnership.co.uk/Pages/SDP-AlcoholandDrugs.aspx>

<http://www.countydurhambestbamone.co.uk/pages/NightSafeInitiatives.aspx>

Yours sincerely



Head of Transport and Contract Services