



Norfolk County Council

Infrastructure Department
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
NR1 2DH

Samantha Goward

Area Coroner for Norfolk
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
NR1 2DH

NCC contact number: [REDACTED]

Text relay no.: [REDACTED]

Your Ref:

Date: 04 September 2024

My Ref:

Tel No.: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Dear Madam

Thank you for your recent email and for the Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths following the recent Inquest relating to Mr Howard.

Please can I start with passing on my condolences onto the family of Mr Howard regarding this tragic accident.

I would also like to take this opportunity to provide more detail with regard to the weather conditions and the Council's response to the recent tragic events, as part of the response to the Regulation 28 Report.

Recently, the weather conditions in Norfolk have been extremely challenging – it having been a very wet autumn, winter and spring period, with abnormally high levels of rainfall. This has caused water levels across the county to remain high and the usual drop we experience in spring each year did not materialise. These conditions explain why the peak flows at Shotesham Ford have not reduced as they usually would each year, resulting in the road closure being extended.

As the local highway authority for Norfolk, the Council is responsible for 47 fords across 6,200 miles of highway network. Within days of the incident on 13 December 2023, all these fords had been inspected by the local Highways teams to ensure vehicle users would encounter safe conditions. This initial review identified other locations where roads were closed due to higher than usual water levels, and replacements for any missing and damaged warning signs were also arranged. As a result of these actions, two further fords on the Norfolk network (at West Acre and Caste Acre) were closed and remain closed to ensure public safety.

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Alongside this initial inspection work, more detailed safety reviews of all 47 fords in the Norfolk network were commissioned. The characteristics of each ford across the Norfolk highway network are different and therefore each ford requires a detailed, individual assessment. As part of this review, Engineers are considering the points you have raised in the Regulation 28 Report and are investigating other opportunities to further improve safety at each ford location.

A specific safety review has also been undertaken by the Council at Shotesham Ford. This has involved an initial scoping of options for addressing the specific issues identified at Shotesham, which has developed into a full feasibility assessment of alternative treatments at this location.

In terms of the Matters of Concern identified in the Regulation 28 report, please note the following responses which follow the original numbering used:

- i) As stated above, a detailed safety review of Shotesham Ford has been undertaken and a number of actions have already been completed, with further planned. In addition, regular inspections have been undertaken to assess the safety of reopening the ford on a weekly basis and the results of these, combined with the groundwater challenges explained above, have resulted in the ford remaining closed to traffic. Despite regular complaints from local residents and businesses, this remains the case. Given the longer than expected ongoing nature of this closure and evidence to suggest that the road closed warning signs and barriers were being ignored by motorists, the Council therefore recently improved the barriers, by way of installing immovable barriers, to ensure motorists could not continue ignoring the warning signs and barriers.
- ii) Your comments about lack of warning signs have been noted – please see the Actions Already Undertaken & Proposed Actions section below.
- iii) Your comments about lack of warning signs in advance of the ford have been noted – please see the Actions Already Undertaken & Proposed Actions section below.
- iv) Your comments about the slippery surface of the road have been noted – please see the Actions Already Undertaken & Proposed Actions section below.

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- v) The temporary road closed signs that have been used are the standard types of signs and barriers used across the country by highway authorities to implement closures such as these. They are usually effective. As explained above, water levels had been expected to return to their normal safe levels in spring. However, due to wider weather conditions, this has not been the case. Highway users have a statutory right to pass and repass on the highway and therefore a longer term closure requires consultation to ensure legitimate access to nearby properties and agricultural land is not impinged. Planning the measures that are currently in place, which included a localised consultation (given the complaints received that the ford was temporarily closed), was undertaken this spring and the measures installed on 9 July 2024. Regrettably, I report that since these more robust measures were installed in July 2024, the warning signs have been stolen on one side of the ford (identified on 1 August 2024) and the local Highway team have made safe with temporary signs and ordered replacement more permanent signs.
- vi) As outlined earlier in this response, there have been lessons learned from this tragic incident. Safety inspections of all fords in Norfolk were undertaken immediately after the event. Subsequently, more detailed site by site safety reviews have also been undertaken, with measures such as improved signage installed at a number of locations, and even some further road closures where water levels were observed to be high.

Actions Already Undertaken & Proposed Actions

In summary, given the concerns raised in the Regulation 28 Report, together with the fluctuating and higher than usual water levels at Shotesham, the Council deems it is not safe to reopen Shotesham Ford at the current time and the option of permanent closure to ensure public safety is being evaluated by the Council as part of the feasibility assessment of longer-term options at Shotesham. Until the completion of this feasibility work, which is expected later this year, the ford will remain closed.

In addition, every other ford location across the county has had an initial safety assessment, resulting in the temporary closure of a further two fords, and more detailed site-specific assessments are ongoing and, if deemed necessary, signing to improve road safety is being identified and delivered.

I hope this provides further context and reassurance around the actions that the Council has already undertaken and the further steps planned to be undertaken to help improve highway safety at not just the ford at Shotesham but also the other fords across the county.

Yours faithfully



Lead Director - Infrastructure