

Reference: [REDACTED]

Paul Fermer  
Director of Environment &  
Highways  
Oxfordshire County Council  
New Road  
Oxford  
OX1 1ND

27<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Mr DM Salter  
Oxfordshire Coroner's Office  
The Oxford Register Office  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
1 Tidmarsh Lane  
Oxford  
OX1 1NS

Dear Mr Salter

**Re: Response to coroner report Thames towpath at Iffley Lock**

Thank you for your letter dated 4th November 2024 and the coroner's report relating to the death of Polly Friedhoff on the Thames Towpath at Iffley Lock on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2022. We note your request for a response on what action the county council will look to take and a timetable for this action in response to the inquest, else an explanation for why we would consider no action is appropriate.

In response to your letter, I can confirm that county council representatives have met on site with representatives from the Environment Agency (EA) who are landowners at Iffley lock to discuss potential actions and next steps. Both parties agree with the principle that a set of follow up actions is appropriate but that these need to be proportionate and effective. Following discussions and an assessment on site we propose to take the following action;

- (1) Improved understanding– Whilst both the county council and EA have a solid understanding of the area and user behaviour, we consider it beneficial to undertake some surveying of people cycling and pedestrian use in the Iffley lock area. This will enable us to better quantify the volumes / type of pedestrian and cycle users in the area as well as details on speed. As usage is affected by seasonality and wider events, we plan to carry out this monitoring spring/ summer 2025.

Early assessment of potential monitoring methods suggests there could be a number of different approaches used. This could include the use of cameras and / or detection tubes. Further engagement with user groups would be considered beneficial to informing further details on the type and duration of monitoring which would be necessary both before and after any intervention measures.

- (2) Vegetation clearance – Whilst it is noted that the fatality took place in December when typically, overgrown trees/ vegetation may be less of a factor, both organisations appreciate that especially during summer months vegetation growth can restrict user space and visibility increasing the likelihood of conflict. Both the county council and

EA will undertake volunteer clearance work around the Iffley lock site and plan to undertake this winter/ early 2025.

- (3) Signage and promotion – It is noted that there is already various signage in the vicinity of the site and along the towpath. This said, a review of signage will be undertaken to give consideration for whether additional signage would be beneficial including at key entrance points along the towpath. We aim to carry out an audit of signage in winter/ early 2025 with implementation of any appropriate measures expected for the summer 2025.

Additionally, we are proposing to organise with partners and user groups a series of promotional events spread throughout the year would highlight safe and responsible use of the towpath. As an example, there are several high-profile rowing events along the river in the spring / summer period resulting in increased usage. It is proposed that promotional activity at events like these could provide a meaningful impact with a potentially large catchment of users. Similar events focussing on the councils Vision Zero programme have been held in Oxford over recent years and have had positive feedback. We consider this measure would have a beneficial relevance and reach to the wider towpath route including the Iffley lock site. We plan to commence this from spring 2025.

The above committed action is subject to engagement with local councillors and key stakeholders in the development and implementation of the above measures in early 2025.

I trust that this note provides the reassurance required, however please do not hesitate to contact should you wish to discuss further. I am happy to provide you with an update of the planned action outlined by end August 2025 if desired.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted Name]

**Director Environment and Highways**

[Redacted Address]

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