

Tuckton Bridge Toll-Free from December 1st

PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS TO BENEFIT Bournemouth Council's Decision

Echo, Nov. 13, 1942

BOURNEMOUTH Town Council's decision (reported in yesterday's "Echo") to abolish the tolls for pedestrians and cyclists using Tuckton Bridge as from December 1st, was only reached after a determined stand by the proposer of the motion, Ald. H. A. Benwell.

Before the motion was put, the Mayor, Ald. F. B. Summerbee, J.P., asked for a statement on the position by the Town Clerk, Mr. A. R. Eaton, who said he had been in communication with the Ministry of War Transport for the last few months on this subject, and had now received the following letter from the Ministry:—

"I have ascertained that a difficult question of principle is involved, which is under active consideration. It is hoped to arrive at a decision in the near future."

The Mayor remarked that the motion by Alderman Benwell was very similar to one which that alderman had moved within the last five months, but he did not propose to rule it actually out of order.

Alderman J. H. Collingbourne questioned whether, if the motion were carried, they would be able to put it into operation.

The Mayor: Personally, I should consider it very inadvisable to press the motion at the present moment.

"KUDOS" COMPLAINT"

Alderman Benwell complained that no report had come from the Finance Committee since last April, and nothing had been done. "It seems to me that you are not going to allow any private member to try to free Tuckton Bridge and let him have the kudos," he declared.

Last April (he added) he had suggested that it would take a year or two to get this through, and nine months had already gone.

The Mayor pointed out that the letter from the Ministry arose from letters which had been sent in August and September.

Continuing, the Mayor said they were bound by two or three authorities, the county of Hampshire on the one side, since the centre of the river was the physical boundary, and the bridge went to the other side to territory which was under the Hampshire County authority. Whatever they did would have to have the consent of the Ministry of War Transport. That would affect the question of a grant when they had to re-build the bridge, and possibly of a grant with regard to the approach roads.

Councillor J. W. Moore thought it was trifling to be discussing a matter of this kind when the Ministry had far more important matters, and any sacrifice of tolls at the present would affect the amount of compensation that would ultimately be paid.

Alderman J. J. Empson suggested that, in view of the Ministry's letter, Alderman Benwell should withdraw his motion and let the Town Clerk further press the Ministry.

COMPASSION FOR SOUTHBOURNE

Councillor T. Peaty appealed for sympathy and compassion for the Southbourne residents from other parts of the borough.

When the Mayor said the motion was very much on the borderline, Alderman Benwell protested that it was in order, and Councillor H. P. Mears said the public in the gallery would be asking "What is behind this?"

Alderman Benwell, on the Council approving that the motion should be received, said he would not take up much time because everyone had made up their minds and there was a dead end every time. He declared, however, that the Ministry of War Transport were not concerned with this bridge, and he pointed to the fact that the borough engineer had already given permission for certain vehicles to pass over it without toll. He deprecated the attitude being taken by a number of councillors, and he hoped Boscombe and Southbourne people would note how they voted.

FOURTEEN YEARS

Alderman J. Richards seconded, saying that the matter had been before the Council for at least the fourteen years he had been a member. When it was up in July they were told that in a month, or at least two months, it would be definitely settled by the Ministry. He referred to the imposition on residents in the neighbourhood who had to pay to go on a public highway for the benefit of the rates and other parts of the town. Relief of rates had already amounted to about £20,000. He also contended that it had nothing to do with the Ministry, as the Council itself had already freed the bridge for pedestrians and cyclists after 9 p.m., and they could give permission for these during the rest of the day.

Councillor G. Haigh asked whether the town clerk had applied for removal of tolls for pedestrians and cyclists.

The town clerk said that originally the application was in respect of all tolls, but during the past four months it had been for pedestrians and cyclists alone.

"VICTIMISED BY COUNCIL"

Councillor Haigh said the feeling in Southbourne was that they were being victimised by the Council. The Ratepayers' Association had only asked for the bridge to be freed for pedestrians and cyclists, and he believed the Council had power to do that.

Councillor S. Bell said the Council should take its courage in its own hands and decide something. He asked if it would affect the future if this were done.

The Town Clerk: I should not personally have thought that it would have mattered, but the Ministry of War Transport say an important principle is involved, and therefore I should have thought it is only right to wait until we know what that principle is. I should have thought that without that there is no reason why we should not free the bridge for pedestrians and cyclists.

Alderman Sir Charles Cartwright: Does it mean that if you can free the bridge for one section of the public only you must free it entirely?

The Town Clerk said the question of freeing the bridge from all tolls brought in that of the possible necessity of strengthening the bridge. The point put by the Ministry was the obvious one, that the freeing of the bridge for pedestrians and cyclists was not going to result in a very large increase in traffic over the bridge, but only in more vehicular traffic.

"MUST BE CAREFUL."

Obviously they must be careful because they were hoping that after the war they would be able to free the bridge entirely and reconstruct it, and they would want some help from the Government. He suggested, therefore, that it was very unwise to antagonise the Ministry of War Transport at the present moment. Again pressed on the point, the Town Clerk said it was possible to release the bridge for one set of passengers and not another.

Councillor Dr. Lyster said there always appeared to be tremendous difficulties, but only a few individuals seemed to know what they were. The only new element now introduced was that they were hindering the war effort by even considering this matter. He could take personal responsibility that nothing would happen if they made this concession, for which a large number of people had been waiting for many years. After a little further discussion Alderman Benwell's motion was carried unanimously.