

Abbey Steps and Bridge

Background

In the late 1990s North Wiltshire District Council received an English Heritage grant for economic development. Most of this money was spent on streetscene improvements such as heritage lamp columns, bollards, signposts, metal litter bins, railings and paving. One major project enhanced the path from Market Cross to Station Yard with railings alongside the Abbey and Abbey House garden, paving and handrails for the Millennium Steps (with sponsored brass plaques) together with railings on the Abbey Bridge. It had been intended to continue the railings on the northern side of the bridge but the funds ran out. As well as the grant both NWDC and Malmesbury Town Council contributed funds.

This is an important entrance to the town centre for pedestrians and its maintenance must have a high priority.

Present condition

The railings by the east end of the Abbey and those enclosing Abbey House garden are generally in good condition.

1. The Abbey railings



2. The Abbey House garden railings extend from the top of the steps to the bridge. The appearance would be improved by the removal of green algae.



3. The handrails for the steps are generally in good condition with the exception of the half-way resting place (put in by Malmesbury Town Council) which needs re-painting.



4. Some of the coping stones on the downstream side of the bridge are missing. Wiltshire Council placed temporary guarding here for some time as it is regarded as a safety hazard. The mesh ought to be straightened and the railings painted.

There are more significant problems in the area to the north of the bridge.



5. To the north side of the bridge there is an insecure chainlink fence which has been beaten down, allowing easier access to the river. This safety issue should be dealt with. There are a number of untidy trees along the river bank. Some of the trees have had their tops removed but are now covered with ivy.

6. There are several large tree trunks growing out of the river bank one of which has fallen. Should these others fall it is likely the leverage arising from their weight would cause considerable damage to the roadway.



Recommendations

1. To remove the danger of the road being damaged, improve safety by making access to the river more difficult and enhance this major access way to the town centre, work is necessary. As the Highway Authority, Wiltshire Council is the riparian owner and should lead the project.
2. This project should contain the following elements:
 - a. The felling of the two trees growing out of the riverbank shown in photograph 6 together with the removal of the fallen tree and work to reduce the other trees as recommended by a tree surgeon.
 - b. The installation of metal railings (of the same pattern as shown in photographs 1 and 2) on the north side of the bridge to the bank behind the signboards. This would deliver an enhancement set out in the Malmesbury Conservation Area Management Plan (page 27) and Neighbourhood Plan.
 - c. Replacement of the missing coping stones on the bridge with repainting of the metalwork.
3. Malmesbury Civic Trust would be prepared to part fund this project.
4. Malmesbury Town Council is requested to urgently raise this matter with Wiltshire Council and also offer funding for it. The Town Council should also arrange to repaint the resting place (photograph 3).

Malmesbury & District Conservation Group
January 2018