

Agenda Item 6

For decision – Proposal for changing the access at Henley Way

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Summary

The access ramp at Henley Way will shortly be closed because the wood is coming to the end of its life. Replacing like for like has proved too costly. Having considered the accessibility of alternative access to the roundhouse for those with impaired mobility, and the improvements we can make there, the proposal is for a first phase of re-instating the previous step section with metal steps with a possible future possibility of installing ramp to the side if funds allow.

Figure 1 - Henley Way ramp as it is in early 2025



Background

The original ramp and stairs were installed about 10 years ago. They achieved a great step forward in opening up this side of the river with a route that was accessible for all, and this route is much used by many in the community. However, the site is a challenging one for a construction in wood as it is shady and damp, underneath trees and next to a river. The location combined with the type of wood used and the construction method (structural

supports being fixed directly in concrete) has meant that significant rot has occurred, and we are now coming to the end of the life of the structure. The steps were retired in 2024, and the ramp has had regular remedial maintenance to extend its life but will need to be retired in the first half of 2025.

Figure 2 - Examples of wood reaching the end of its life



We have explored replacing just the ramp like for like in both wood and metal. The challenge here is the volume of material. The height difference is 2m and to ensure a route that is access for all compliant the slope needs to be 1:20. This means that 40m of ramp are needed with all the structural supports and concrete underpinning of an elevated walkway that this entails. To meet accessibility criteria the ramp also needs level landing places for every 50cm of height gain which for safety also incorporate a turn in direction. This means there is a need for complex switch-back design. Both the wood and metal options have gone out to tender, and both have come back quoted at between £115-140k.

There are therefore 3 options:

1. Remove all access and return the route to being a dead-end as it was before the ramp/stairs were installed
2. Replace with a new ramp at a cost of £100k+
3. Replace with just steps but leaving space for a possible future project for a ramp if funds become available and ensure that the alternative route to the Otherside, via the Welshmill side of the river, is as access friendly as possible

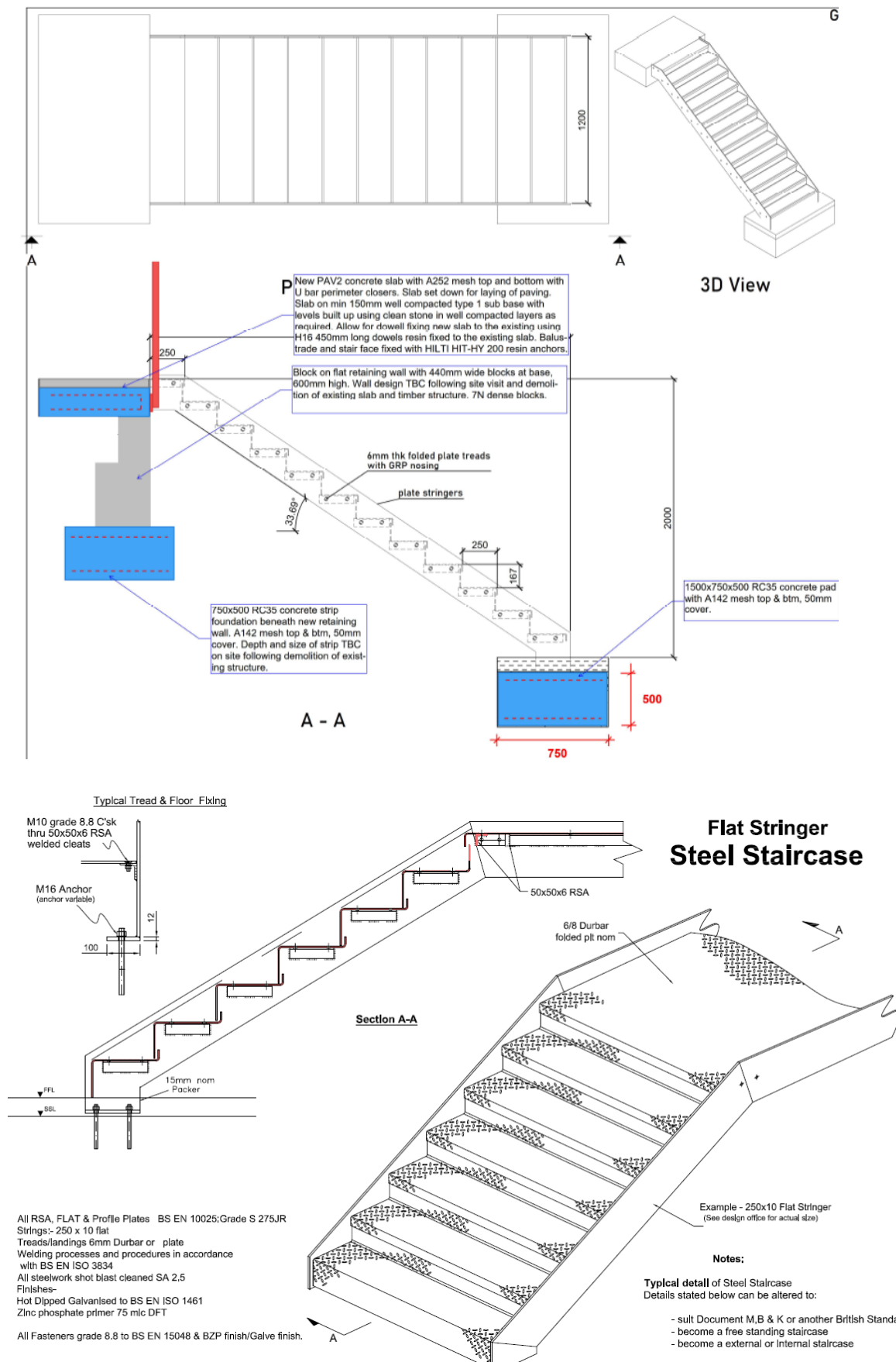
This paper is presenting option 3.

Option 3 - Replacement Steps and Welshmill Access Improvements

Having undertaken a comprehensive tender process involving the national contracting service Proactis and known local engineering companies for the ramp replacement we asked two of the companies to provide further quotes for the stairs.

Both provide for an access compliant set of steps that would be installed in the same location as the previous steps. The treads would be in thick anti-slip metal with the nose edging of each step painted with a high visibility contrasting colour (eg white). The vertical balustrade would be powder coated black and the handrail in a more tactile wood that can be maintained and replaced at little cost when it needs retiring.

Figure 3- Examples of steps design detail not including balustrade and handrail. Note: indicative draft only, not final design



The location of the steps would in the same position as the previous steps leaving the space used by the current ramp free for a future project should funds be found.

Figure 4 - Steps could be installed to the side of the existing ramp in the place where the previous steps were located



Access for all regulations

The Equality Act 2010 (which replaced the DDA) requires public authorities to comply with the public sector equality duty in having due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination.

The guidance states that all reasonable steps should be taken and if disadvantage is caused that a reasonable alternative is available.

The relevant clauses of the legislation are:

*7.51 A service provider must take **such steps as it is reasonable** to take to avoid putting disabled people at a substantial disadvantage caused by a physical feature.*

7.52 The Act states that avoiding a substantial disadvantage caused by a physical feature includes:

- removing the physical feature in question;*
- altering it; or*
- providing a reasonable means of avoiding it.*

*7.57 **Where the substantial disadvantage caused by a physical feature cannot be avoided,** service providers should consider whether there **is a reasonable alternative method** of making services available to disabled people. The Act requires that any alternative method of making services available must be a 'reasonable' one. Relevant considerations in this respect*

may include whether the provision of the service in this way significantly offends the dignity of disabled people and the extent to which it causes disabled people inconvenience.

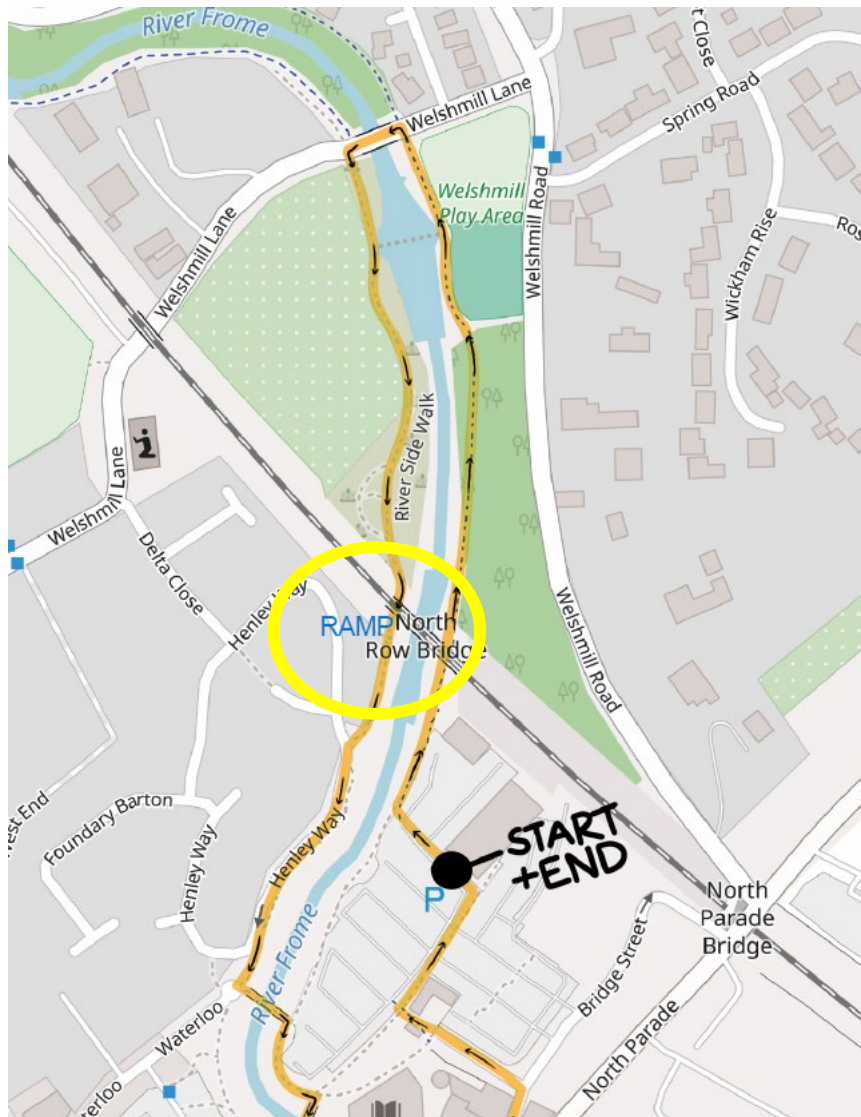
To review whether the alternative access to the Otherside via Welshmill is a reasonable alternative and assess what access improvements could be made we undertook an access audit

With thanks to Emily Oster for guidance on the legislation and organising the access audit

Access audit

Bristol based disability group WECIL conducted an access audit of Henley Way on 17 February 2025. This was an invaluable review of how the existing route works for those with mobility impairments. The route is on the Welshmill side is tarmacked and the path from Welshmill Lane to the Otherside is stone.

Figure 5 - The Route to the Otherside reviewed for accessibility



Access Improvements to the Welshmill route

The tarmac route was felt to offer a viable surface although the stoned surface is better for those in a wheelchair. There were some very helpful suggestions for improving accessibility:

- Information –ensure details of the access route, and any special considerations to take account of, is easily available for planning trips beforehand
- Signage – the current route from the Cheese and Grain car park is very hard to find – indeed the route from tarmac to railway bridge looks to be inaccessible at first glance – introduce better signage for the route, the sensory trail, and the facilities (toilets in the Cheese and Crain and Market Yard car park).
- Comfort stops – some of the benches are currently difficult to approach in a wheelchair and have no wheelchair seating options – adapt or change
- Benches that have no backs or arm rests are less accessible – introduce benches with both
- Surfacing – the semi-bound surface on The Otherside was found preferable to the tarmac on the Welshmill side
- Steps –important suggestions to improve accessibility of new steps including handrail extensions, handrail material, tactile strips at the approaches, good quality surfacing to the base of the steps, appropriate colour contrasts on the steps and step edge, and a spec for a solid box design

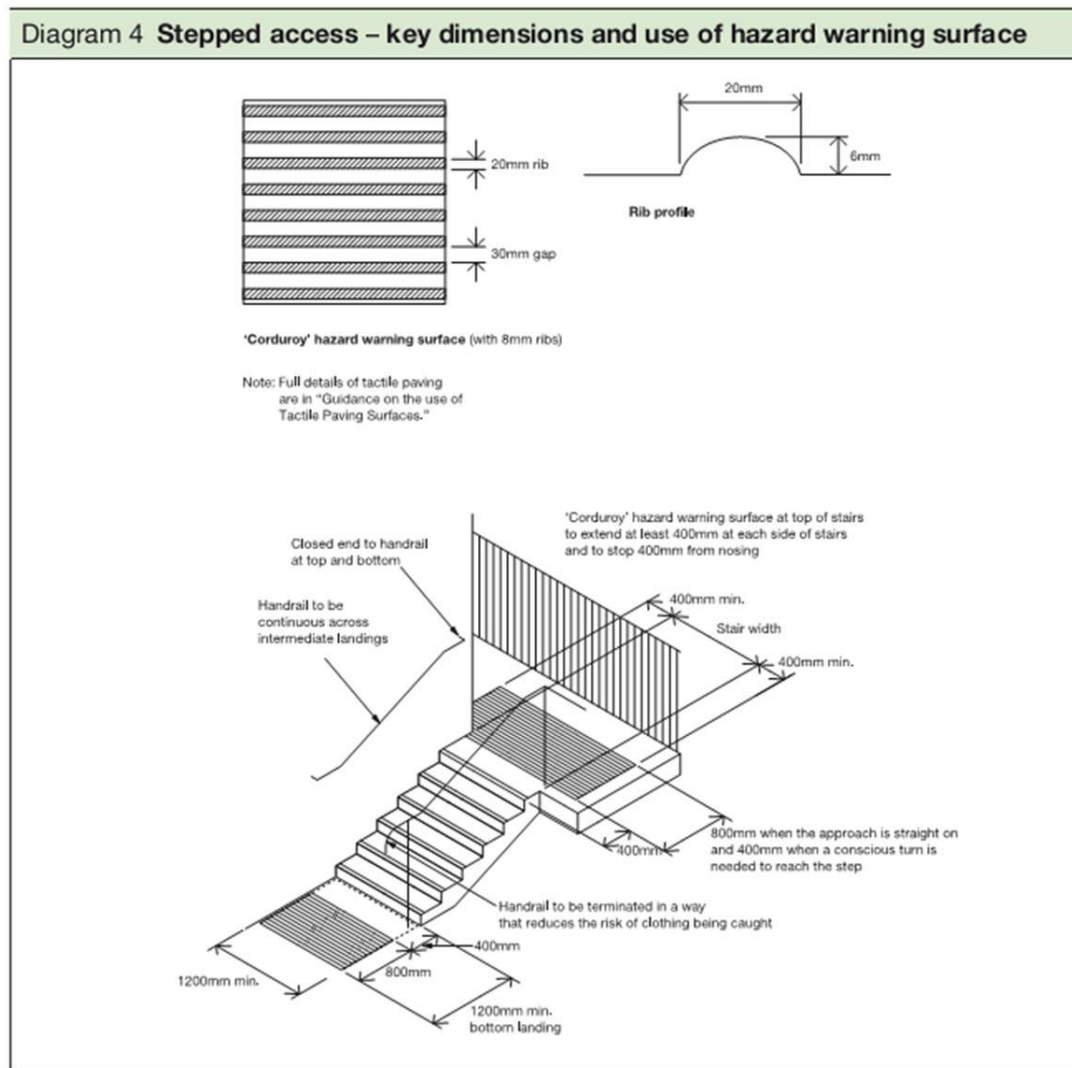
Figure 6 - Example of tactile signage



Figure 7 - Existing bench with back or armrest



Figure 8 - Guidance on hazard warning specification



These improvements would make a marked difference to the accessibility of the Welshmill route. Although steps is clearly not the desired outcome from an accessibility perspective, if these improvements were made this would ensure there was an accessible option for visiting the Otherside and this route would comply with the legislation requirement of being a reasonable alternative method.

[The full WECIL report is included at Appendix 6.1 which can be viewed on the website here.](#)

Funding

If this proposal is approved the design would benefit from some final changes so final prices will alter slightly but both quotes have come in at very similar cost and, including the concrete footings can be installed for under £25k.

A surfaced path would need to be created leading from the bottom of the nest steps to the start point of the existing ramp. This could be installed in-house for under £3k.

The existing ramp would need to be dismantled and removed. Again this could be undertaken in-house with contractor costs for waste disposal.

The steps could be installed for a maximum cost of £30k.

Accessibility improvements to the Otherside route would be under £10k

This total of under £40k would therefore be covered by the existing budget provision for Henley Way access improvements of £40k in the 25/26 work plan in the Open Spaces Maintenance budget.

Recommendations

1. Approve the change in access at Henley Way from ramp and steps to just steps with the option of installing a ramp in the future if funds allow
2. Approve the spending of £40k on the project from budget code 700-7938 as set out in the council approved 25/26 work programme