

# Exceat Bridge FAQs March 2025

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## About the Exceat Bridge

Exceat Bridge carries the A259 across the River Cuckmere. It is located in the Seven Sisters Country Park within the South Downs National Park which attracts many thousands of visitors each year.

As part of our Major Road Network, the A259 is an important route for economic connectivity, linking communities from the east of the County along the coastal corridor including Eastbourne, Seaford, Newhaven, Peacehaven and Telscombe Cliffs through to Brighton. Long distance traffic and freight generally use the A27. Work was carried out by National Highways between 2020 and 2022 to make small scale improvements to the A27 at Polegate and the Berwick roundabout near Drusillas, as well as providing a shared footway/cycle route between Lewes and Polegate. This was to ensure long distance traffic continue to use this route rather than the A259 and local roads.

Exceat bridge was originally built around 1870 so that horses and carts could cross the River Cuckmere. It was extensively repaired in the 1970s but is now reaching the end of its life. It is a single-lane bridge with priority given to traffic travelling east which means that traffic backs up in both directions at peak times. As a short-term measure, we introduced temporary traffic lights on the bridge to manage traffic flow more effectively and increase the bridge's lifespan. The layout of the pavements mean that pedestrians need to cross the road twice to access the footway on the north side.

However, due to its age, the bridge is costly to maintain and will require replacement in the near future. Therefore, we are taking this opportunity to improve the design of the bridge for pedestrians, wheelers, cyclists and vehicles.

## Exceat Bridge Replacement Project

East Sussex County Council had originally planned to replace the existing bridge with a new, two lane bridge to the north of the current bridge with improved footways, viewing platforms and a shared space outside the Cuckmere Inn. This would have helped to:

- ease congestion,
- reduce journey times and
- improve accessibility for visitors to the area.

Unfortunately, the cost of building the two way bridge has increased so much that it is now unaffordable, and the council are reluctantly having to consider less expensive options. We have had to consider the amount of funding available as well as the fact that the bridge is nearing the end of its life and work needs to

happen relatively soon to keep it safe. The only feasible option is to replace the existing bridge with another single lane bridge in a similar style.

The council secured £7.9m funding from the Government's Levelling Up Fund in 2021 for a new two lane bridge as well as contributing funds from its own capital budgets. However, it has taken several more years than expected to meet the requirements of the South Downs National Park Authority and carry out land negotiations. The extra work and changes to design have increased costs significantly, and in parallel, there has been unexpectedly high inflation and a dramatic increase in construction costs as a result of Brexit, the impact from the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine. As a result, the amount needed to develop and deliver the proposed two way bridge has risen by nearly £10m. Other Councils have faced similar challenge with other capital transport schemes.

We are very aware of the issues with the current bridge layout and the benefits the two lane bridge would have brought. Whilst we have been doing everything we can to secure additional funding, unfortunately we have not been able to do so. The intense budget pressure on the county council means we are already having to sharply reduce our spending on long-term (capital) projects across the county and are facing [£57 million funding gap for 2025/26](#).

We have therefore reluctantly made the decision to replace Exceat bridge with a less expensive, one-lane bridge, similar to the bridge that is there currently. The proposed new design however includes the permanent introduction of traffic lights and pedestrian crossings to manage traffic flow and improve accessibility.

This proposal is subject to agreement from Cabinet, the planning authority (South Downs National Park Authority) and Department for Transport. If approved, the bridge would be built during 2025/26.

**More detailed information is provided on the next few pages.**

## About the changes

### Why is the project so much more expensive than you originally expected?

Estimates for the original project were based on a preliminary design and understanding of the project scope in 2021.

Project costs increased and the project was significantly delayed following design changes requested during our pre-planning engagement with the South Downs National Park Authority. With a further 30 attached planning conditions, this has meant that it has taken several more years than anticipated to achieve planning permission from the National Park. There were also unexpected difficulties in securing all third party land and rights required for the project.

This, alongside other factors, has led to an increased cost for providing the two-way bridge as well as more funding than anticipated being spent on the design process. These other factors include:

- Weak currency against the dollar
- Ongoing conflict in Ukraine
- Worsening labour and skill shortages
- Interest rate uncertainty
- Unprecedented inflation in the construction sector.
- Reduced steel production capacity
- Changes in government policy and fuel pricing

This has meant that the project cost has increased from around £10.76m in 2021 to £21.43m today, an increase of nearly £10m.

We have carried out a value engineering exercise to determine whether changes to the project could help reduce costs e.g. removing some elements of the design such as viewing platforms to bring it closer to the funding available. However, even if these changes were to be approved by the National Park Authority, it has not been possible to bring the costs down enough to get the project back in budget.

Taking extra time to seek planning approval for these changes would result in more expenditure on this part of the process and mean less is available for construction. It would also mean that we would lose the funding from the Government's Levelling Up Fund we secured for the scheme in 2021. Therefore, sadly this is not an option.

### **Are these new plans definitely going to go ahead?**

No. At the moment we are waiting for approval from the County Council's Cabinet, the South Downs National Park (to agree we can progress the replacement of the existing bridge under permitted development) and the Department for Transport. We hope that we will know in the next few months whether we will be able to go ahead.

### **Why can't you just leave the bridge as it is?**

Due to its age, the existing bridge is costly to maintain and will require replacement in the near future. Making use of the Government's Levelling Up funding to replace it, and to improve the design where possible at the same time, is the best and most cost-effective option currently open to us.

### **Will you build a two lane bridge in the future?**

Further improvements to the bridge would be subject to planning permission and securing external funding in the future. Improvements would also only take place if it was a priority compared to other projects around the county. Therefore, it is unlikely that we would be able to build a two lane bridge in the near future.

### **Why can't you wait until you can find enough money to build a better bridge?**

The bridge is considered to be 'life-expired', is expensive to maintain and will need replacement in the near future. If the bridge were to fail and had to be closed it would cause major disruption to traffic and communities who use the A259 as well as to visitors to the Seven Sisters Country Park and National Park.

There is no certainty of future funding, so the difficult decision has been made to make use of funding we have available now to ensure that the bridge can remain open for the near future.

The majority of funding for the project has come from the Levelling Up Fund. A condition of the Levelling Up funding we received from Government is that it must be spent by 2026. It is very unlikely that other funding will become available during that time and if we wait we would also lose the £7.9m we have been given from the Levelling Up Fund.

Therefore, on balance, we have made the difficult decision that it is better to use the funding on a simpler replacement that will ensure the bridge can remain open.

### **I would prefer you to spend money on a new two lane bridge than on other schemes in the county.**

Other major transport and highway improvement schemes are usually funded from external sources rather than council budgets. These external funders have specific goals in mind for the use of the funding and do not allow us to spend the money on other projects. All council projects are carefully assessed to ensure they are a top priority for the county and provide value for money. Therefore, we would not be able to use money from other projects where we have secured external funding to fund the Exceat Bridge project instead.

The intense budget pressures that the county council, alongside other councils, currently face means we are already having to sharply reduce our spending on long-term (capital) projects across the county.

### **When will the new bridge be open?**

The plans have not yet been finalised and the timings will depend on a number of factors including agreement from the cabinet of East Sussex County Council, the planning authority (South Downs National Park Authority) and Department for

Transport. However, we are hoping that construction will start during the second half of 2025 and finish in 2026.

## About the proposed designs

### What are you proposing instead?

The new bridge will be in the same location as the current bridge and will still have a single lane for traffic. We are in the process of considering a number of design options, but hope to include some improvements to the current design where planning and funding allow. For example, we are looking at whether it will be possible to include:

- permanent traffic lights at either end of the bridge (and at the entry/exit to the Cuckmere Inn)
- signalised pedestrian crossings with tactile paving and dropped kerbs,
- widening the pavement and moving it to the south side of the bridge for better connectivity,
- reducing the speed limit,
- putting back the bus stops either side of the bridge,
- low level walkway lighting on the pavement over bridge (compatible with National Park Dark Skies area)

### What will you be doing for pedestrians and cyclists?

The proposals for new pedestrian crossings, reduced speed limit and wider pavements will make it safer and more accessible for pedestrians in the area.

The bridge is not wide enough to include a cycleway and there is not sufficient funding to create cycleways leading to the bridge. However, installing permanent traffic lights at either end of the bridge would make it safer for cyclists to cross the bridge.

We have signed a memorandum of understanding with the South Downs National Park Authority to work with them on improving access for non-motorised users in this region, subject to resources as well as external funding being secured and available to do so in the future. The National Park has provisionally allocated funding to undertake a feasibility study to consider pedestrian crossing options between the Visitor Centre and Country Park on the southern side of the A259. This work will commence in 2025/26.

### **There used to be bus stops either side of the bridge, can these be put back?**

The bus stops were removed to accommodate the temporary traffic lights. However, we are looking into options that will allow us to put back the bus stops either side of the bridge.

### **How will it affect the environment and wildlife?**

We recognise the huge responsibility we have to protect the unique nature of the area and ensure that the work we do not only benefits those using the road, but also protect this ecologically sensitive location. We are working closely with the South Downs National Park, as the Planning Authority, and the Environment Agency to ensure the bridge does not have a negative impact on the local environment.

The footprint of the bridge would be almost identical to the current one which will minimise the impact on the river and existing wildlife. As part of our planning and design for replacing the existing bridge, surveys of protected species and habitats will take place.

We will consult with the Environment Agency and Marine Management Organisation to inform the design and to minimise impact on environment and wildlife during and after construction. Construction work is timed to ensure we don't disturb hibernating bats, nesting birds etc.

During construction we will be conscious of the impact of noise and light on the local area and will balance this with the need to minimise disruption to residents, visitors and people travelling through Exceat.

### **Will the proposed new traffic lights and streets lights have an impact on the dark skies?**

We are conscious that the region falls in the South Downs International Dark Sky Reserve. We will follow the South Downs National Park Authority's [Dark Skies Technical Advice Note](#) which provides guidance on street lighting in Dark Skies areas. For example, ensuring the light is angled downwards, is of a minimum brightness and colour to be effective, and glare is minimised. These will be an improvement on the lighting there at the moment.

## **Bridge closure and diversion route**

### **Information about the diversion route**

In order to replace the existing bridge with a new one in the same location as quickly and cost effectively as possible will require us to close the A259. The road closure could last for up to 22 weeks during construction.

We understand the impact this will have and we are looking at all possible ways to reduce the length of time the bridge will need to be closed during construction. This includes seeing if it will be possible to carry out some works concurrently to save time. We are also looking at whether we could install a temporary footbridge during construction so that walkers, wheelers and cyclists could continue to cross the bridge. However, this would be subject to planning permission.

### **What will you do to stop diverted traffic taking a short cut through the nearby villages?**

A clearly signed diversion route will be set up that is suitable for all traffic and therefore will not include the small lanes through local villages.

We are conscious that drivers may be tempted to take a shortcut and so we will be putting out extra signage warning that these routes are unsuitable. We would ask people to think about the residents of these small communities which are not equipped for through traffic. We will work closely with the communities of those villages to best manage the situation and will carry out publicity encouraging people to use the designated and signed diversion route.

### **Will the Country Park, the pub, other local businesses and car parks remain open while you are building the bridge?**

All local businesses and car parks will remain accessible for the majority of the construction period including The Cuckmere Inn car park. We will work closely with all local businesses to minimise disruption.

At the time of construction, you will need to check with the businesses in question if you have any questions about their plans.

### **How will buses be affected?**

Buses will have to follow the diversion too. However, we will work closely with the bus companies to look into options to minimise the impact on journey times and maintain access to bus services for residents and visitors.



## Timeline of activities to date

### **February-March 2025:**

We are seeking permission from ESCC Cabinet and the Government to change the design of the bridge.

**May 2024:** Negotiations with landowners and the Compulsory Purchase Order process for the required areas of land to deliver the scheme are ongoing.

Construction is expected to start in 2025 and take around 18 months to complete. Some environmental works will begin in late 2024.

The temporary traffic lights currently in place will remain until the new bridge is complete.

**October 2023:** Notices regarding Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs), a Side Roads Order and a Bridge Order will be posted from Friday 20 October. There will be a statutory six week objection period, which will run until Monday 4 December.

The notices have been sent to the land owners. Notices have also been placed on site around the Exceat Bridge and put in the local news press and London Gazette. The notices will be in the papers for two weeks and on site for six weeks. There will also be hard copies of the notices available at [County Hall](#) in Lewes, [Seaford Library](#) and [Eastbourne Library](#).

The orders allow for changes to the road layout as part of the construction of the new bridge including: realignment of the existing road, public right of way and local accesses; re-profiling the river and road embankments; addition of traffic calming measures and provision of a habitat area. You can see full details of the Plans and copies of the Orders at the links below.

The new bridge will be constructed next to the current bridge which will mean the road and pavements can stay open throughout almost all of the construction period. In all cases, alternative routes will be provided if there is a need to briefly close a road or footpath.

1. [East Sussex County Council \(Exceat Bridge Replacement - A259 Eastbourne Road\) \(Classified Road\) \(Side Roads\) Order 2023 dated 3 October 2023;](#)
2. [East Sussex County Council \(Exceat Bridge Replacement - A259 Eastbourne Road\) Compulsory Purchase Order 2023 \(including relevant plans\) dated 3 October 2023;](#)
3. [Statement of Reasons;](#)
4. [East Sussex County Council \(Exceat Bridge Replacement - A259 Eastbourne Road\) Bridge Scheme 2023 dated 3 October 2023](#)

Please see below for accessible copies:

1. [Exceat Bridge Replacement Side Roads Order Site Plan R1 - accessible version](#)
2. [Exceat Bridge Orders - accessible version](#)
3. [Exceat Bridge Replacement Bridge Order Plan - accessible version - Page 1](#)
4. [Exceat Bridge Replacement Bridge Order Plan - accessible version - Page 2](#)
5. [Exceat Bridge Replacement Bridge Order Plan - accessible version - Page 3](#)

**April 2023:** Detailed designs for the new bridge completed.

**December 2022:** Planning permission granted by the South Downs National Park Authority with conditions in place to protect the natural landscape.

**October 2021:** East Sussex County Council is pleased to have been awarded funding for the project from the Government's Levelling Up Fund. [You can read a copy of the application form here \(opens in a new tab\)](#). To find copies of the supporting information, technical data and appendices, simply visit the [East Sussex County Council Freedom of Information page \(opens in a new tab\)](#) and click on the East Sussex Disclosure Log link. Once in the Log enter the search term "Exceat Bridge".

**August 2020:** We carried out a public consultation in the summer of 2020. We received over 1000 responses on our proposals with 79% in favour of replacing the current bridge. We have used the feedback to further improve the designs. Further details can be found on [our consultation page \(opens in a new tab\)](#).

## Where can I find out more?

This website will be kept up to date and more information about plans will be published as soon as we have further details.