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55p THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2014

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Brothers in oils on show

A YEAR-long Royal visit to Beningbrough Hall starts this weekend, and staff are busy preparing the house for their famous visitors.

Volunteer Natasha Sinton admires a painting of Princes William and Harry in uniforms of the Household Cavalry, by Nicky Philipps, which is among the work on display. The princes' mother, Diana, also features in the show with iconic photographs taken by Mario Testino just months before her death; as does Prince William's son George, whose christening portrait will be on public display for the first time. Royals Then And Now, a collection of Royal portraits from the National Portrait Gallery, opens at the hall on Saturday and runs until November.

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Lendal Bridge - the secret files

by NEIL JOHNSTON AND MARK STEAD

newsdesk@thepress.co.uk

SECRET emails between some of

the most senior figures at City of York Council have revealed months of apparent confusion and concern over the controversial Lendal Bridge restrictions.

Exchanges obtained by The Press

under Freedom of Information laws show officials and councillors voicing concerns over signs, costs, public opinion and the effectiveness the trial ban would have on private traffic.

Dave Merrett, cabinet member for transport, said in one email that signs were confusing but officials said the stance must be that the signs were adequate.

In another exchange, deputy coun-

cil leader Tracey Simpson-Laing urged colleagues to "shut down" an exchange - in case it had to be released under Freedom of Information laws.

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Emails show months of wrangling over crossing scheme

Revealing email messages

REVELATIONS found in the secret emails included:

- Council official Simon Parrett told Coun Merrett in December: "On the air quality side, it is an unfortunate truth that even removing quite large volumes of traffic would have little impact on overall air quality."
- Council leader James Alexander, in an email exchange with Darren Richardson, said it was "disappointing" that a first-week fines amnesty had been made public as it could "undermine the integrity of the trial".
- Officials admitted feedback from a survey on the trial, collated in December and showing 75 per cent believed it had "a negative or very negative impact" on York, was "very disappointing", and also suggested expected improvements to bus times were not being seen. They claimed views may have been swayed by respondents being fined or through media coverage and anti-trial campaigns.
- Last September, Coun Merrett said one of the signs notifying drivers of the trial, on Station Rise, "feels very confusing". He said he

had been "disappointed at the initial high level" of fines.

- During the trial's early stages, transport official Richard Wood told city leaders more AA signs could be installed "but the challenge of getting them read remains". He said many people were following sat nav systems which directed them over the bridge "as expected".
- Coun Alexander suggested Coun Merrett should not do a TV interview about the scheme and another cabinet member should step in, saying: "I would try and share it out - we can't have the scheme look attached to myself or Dave personally".
- Responding to criticism from Coun Merrett about his party's stance on the trial, then-Conservative leader Coun Ian Gillies said in November that he had not criticised it when it started but he had come to believe York's reputation was being harmed. Coun Gillies said he accepted "we cannot stand still" and "perhaps the eventual solution will be more drastic than closing just one bridge".



CLOSURE TIMES: A Lendal Bridge closure sign at the junction of Leeman Road and Station Road

Picture: David Harrison

EXCLUSIVE
by NEIL JOHNSTON
and MARK STEAD

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SECRET emails have revealed months of wrangling and apparent confusion between senior council figures over York's controversial Lendal Bridge trial.

The exchanges, obtained by The Press, also reveal previously unseen survey findings showing three-quarters of the 1,200 people polled believed the restrictions had harmed York.

The emails show:

- Transport boss Dave Merrett said in October the signs were confusing and should be improved, and complained in January about the time taken to install new signs.
- Despite this, council officials told colleagues they must maintain the signs had been adequate, and that to say otherwise would jeopardise their ability to fight appeals.
- The independent report into the trial will say people now believe York is harder to access than before
- Three-quarters of people surveyed think the trial has damaged York
- One official said "the unfortunate truth" of the trial is that cutting city-centre traffic will do little to reduce air pollution, a key reason given for the restrictions
- Council bosses were unhappy that an amnesty from fines during the first week of the trial became public knowledge
- A "yellow card" warning scheme was considered but rejected due to DVLA advice that turned out to be wrong

Secret files of Lendal Bridge

• The council was warned last July the scheme was likely to go over-budget, but an official suggested the precise amount of Government funding should be blurred.

In one exchange, deputy council leader Tracey Simpson-Laing told colleagues to "shut down" an email discussion detailing concerns over the trial, in case it had to be later released under freedom of information laws. The six-month experiment banning private traffic between 10.30am and 5pm every day, officially ends today, but the restrictions will remain pending a long-term decision by the council cabinet.

The emails, released to The Press under the Freedom of Information Act, show using rising bollards to prevent unauthorised traffic accessing the bridge was ruled out because of cost, concerns about their effectiveness and potential delays to buses if they failed.

The council also discussed amending the restrictions to cater for minibuses but Darren Richardson, director of city and environmental services, said that would mean restarting the trial, which would be "a disaster".

Coun Dave Merrett, cabinet member for transport, also claimed he was given "incorrect advice" from officials over whether warning letters could be sent to drivers who breached the bridge rules.

The "yellow card, red card" approach - advocated by Visit York - was ruled out before the trial began, after the council was advised by the DVLA that its database could not be used to issue warning letters. The DVLA later said these letters could be sent, but by then fines had already started being handed out.

Coun Merrett said it was "unhelpful" that he only discovered this in a general communications update

and asked: "Did we actually robustly test the legal position with them [the DVLA] in the first place", querying whether a warning scheme could be brought in despite the possibility for "further embarrassment and confusion".

On January 23, Coun Merrett emailed officials about "enhanced" signs and told them they needed to "get these signs in ASAP" in order to "avoid being seen to be undertaking wasteful expenditure" or face accusations of being "too late".

About 30 per cent of the scheme's funding has come from the Government's Better Bus Area Fund, believed to be about £50,000. When budget concerns were raised last July, Ruth Stephenson, the council's head of sustainable transport service, emailed colleagues saying: "I would prefer not to specifically mention the amount again and say the trial is being supported by Government funding."

"But in fact what this shows is a healthy debate within the Labour Group, proving that we are completely undecided as a group until the full facts have been presented, despite what some might think and this is always what I have said".

'Internal debate can be taken out of context'

COUNCILLOR Tracey Simpson-Laing, pictured, said last night: "My comments relate to the fact that internal debate can be taken out of context when simply reading emails - as has this - as emails are not the best place for debate.



Trial 'not to generate revenue'

A CITY of York Council spokeswoman said: "Officers need to be able to correspond with each other; using their collective experience to debate decisions and provide advice on schemes like Lendal Bridge, prior to final decisions being made.

"Throughout the trial the council has continued to promote that York is open for business, but some media coverage has not helped this by portraying York's accessibility in a negative light.

"However, in reality the latest half-term footfall figures are the highest on record demonstrating that York has been both accessible and well utilised during this period. York is a fantastic city with much to offer and the aim of the Lendal Bridge six-month trial was not to generate revenue, but to reduce traffic going over the bridge and through the city centre, as part of a long-term vision to create an even more attractive and thriving city centre for everyone."

She said the council had deliberated about publicising the amnesty, over fear of causing confusion, and had repeatedly said the signs met Department for Transport standards.



THE PRESS

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ALL THE LATEST JOB VACANCIES INSIDE

BRIDGE FINES REACH £1.3M

by **GAVIN AITCHISON**
and **NEIL JOHNSTON**

newsdesk@thepress.co.uk

YORK'S controversial Lendal Bridge restrictions have generated £1.3m in fines, but many are being waived because officials lack the resources to fight appeals.

Almost a quarter of fines have been challenged and 64 per cent of appeals have been successful, new statistics obtained by The

Press reveal The figures show 10,330 of the 42,800 penalty charge notices (PCNs) have been contested, including 6,564 successfully. Total fines income has now hit £1.3 million.

A City of York Council spokeswoman said: "This is due to us using our discretion when drivers have received multiple PCNs, and not contesting appeals when staff resources are limited."

The statistics also reveal two thirds of all fines have been issued to motorists heading

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FREDDIE Wilson, seven, and Phillipa Cranmer, six, pupils at Headlands Primary School, Haxby, after their mock wedding at St Mary's Church, Haxby.

• Full story and more pictures: Page 3
• Picture: Frank Dwyer

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Concern over bridge fines for visitors

• From Page 1

south-west on the bridge, towards the station, prompting renewed criticism of the signs around Bootham Bar, Museum Street and St Leonard's Place.

The council spokeswoman said it had installed more signs in response to public feedback and said signage could be reviewed again if the trial is made permanent.

The current six-month trial runs until February 27, but it will continue while the council assesses its success or failure.

Kate McMullen, head of tourism organisation Visit York, said the organisation remained "deeply concerned" about the impact of fines being issued to visitors inadvertently using the bridge.

Statistics have shown 80 per cent of fines issued have been to non-York residents.

She said: "It's crucial all visitors to York have an enjoyable stay without their visit being marred by a follow-up fine and York's reputation as a welcoming friendly city is important to protect.

"Reducing the number of fines being issued is our greatest concern and we'd like to see measures put in place to address this."

The new figures are the first to show the breakdown based on direction of travel.



RESTRICTED ACCESS: People walking across a car-free Lendal Bridge in October

By the end of December, 13,740 fines had been issued to traffic heading towards the Minster, but 27,314 had had been issued to traffic going the other way.

Gail Jordan, who works at Evie Brown's Tea Room at the foot of Bootham, said: "The signs they've

got are just horrendous. It's just a yellow AA sign. It's not very clear at all."

She said she was not surprised most fines were for traffic heading from Bootham Bar, and said: "I see so many cars going round that corner, and once they are round that

corner, there are no more signs for them."

Of the 36,236 fines paid, 27,937 were at the £30 rate, for paying within two weeks, and 8,298 people paid £60 for slower payment or are facing additional action to force payment, possibly at an increased £90 rate.

Between Lendal Bridge and Coppergate, where new restrictions are also in place, 273 cases have been referred to the national Traffic Penalty Tribunal.

York Liberal Democrat councillor Ann Reid, who raised questions at December's council meeting about appeal levels, said last night: "This is the first time the council have admitted they have netted over £1.3m in fines. This is a huge amount, but is it enough to offset the damage done to the city's reputation nationally?"

She said the variance in the direction of fined drivers was striking and showed the signage was not right.

Coun Reid said: "It would appear that winning your appeal is a matter of luck. It is difficult to understand how 'staff resources are limited' when the council outsources the administration of the scheme to a company in Northampton.

"At the very least the administration of the scheme must be transparent and fair."

Darren Richardson, the council's director of city and environmental services, said the restriction was not to generate money but to reduce traffic to enhance the city-centre.

He said the trial would help the council decide whether the restrictions should be abandoned, extended or made permanent.

Mr Richardson said the signage was comprehensive and compliant with Department for Transport guidance, and informed drivers of the restriction timings and the use of camera enforcement.

There are more than 65 signs, including AA advisory signs on the inner ring road and key routes into the city centre.

Mr Richardson said: "Following feedback from the public consultation the council has installed more signage directly in the Lendal Bridge area.

"Also, following further feedback from visitors, the council has installed 'Lendal Bridge' signs adjacent to the bridge itself so we all know where the bridge is."

The council also launched an online journey planner at itravel.york.info and published a map of existing signs at york.gov.uk/citycentreimprovements

The restrictions ban private traffic on the bridge between 10.30am and 5pm daily.

Personal announcements

To place an announcement phone **01904 676767**

Deaths

BENSON

Susan
(nee Hydes)

February 5th, in York Hospital, aged 67 years.

Cherished Wife of Martin, Mum of Kate and Oliver, Grandma of William and Sister to Pat and Linda.

Funeral service at St. John the Baptist Church, Kirk Hammerton, on Tuesday, February 18th, at 2.00pm.

Family flowers only, donations if desired for MND The Yorkshire Dales Branch and Nuzzlets.

Enquiries to H.C. Townsend & Son Ltd. Tel. 01423 871110.

HAIGH Betty

Passed peacefully in Birchlands Care Home, with her family around her, Betty, aged 87 years. Beloved wife of the late John Roger, mum of Lynne, Christine, Richard and the late Christopher and Nick. A dear mother-in-law, grandma and great-grandma. Funeral service to be held at St Mary's Church, Haxby, on Friday February 14th at 10.30am, followed by interment in Haxby and Wigginton Cemetery. Family flowers only please, donations in lieu if desired to The British Heart Foundation. All enquiries to J G Fielder & Son Funeral Directors. Tel. 01904 654460.

HOPWOOD Richard Thomas

It is with very great sadness that we announce the death of Richard, dearly beloved husband of Peggy and much loved dad of Lynne. Dear elder brother of the late Dougie and Pat, brother-in-law of Beryl and Hilary and uncle of Karen, Anne and Natalie. Valued friend of Carolyn. Private cremation followed by a Service of Thanksgiving at 11.30am on Wednesday February 19th at St Paul's Church, Heslington. No flowers please, donations for Cancer Research UK. All enquiries to J G Fielder & Son Funeral Directors. Tel. 01904 654460.

LIG George William

Formerly of Goole, died at home in York, on January 30th, 2014. Dearly loved husband of Barbara and proud dad of Stephen and Dean, loving and doting grandpa of Oliver and Jack, caring father-in-law of Cheryl and Julia, a very dear brother-in-law and uncle. Service was held at York Crematorium on Monday, February 10th. Special thanks to Macmillan and Marie Curie Nurses and also the carers, doctors and nurses of Ward 31, York Hospital. Thank you to family, friends and neighbours for cards and messages of condolence.

SAVILL Marjorie

Peacefully in Westwood Care Home on February 7th aged 96 years. Beloved wife of the late Albert, dearly loved mum of Pam, Tony and Steve, also a much loved grandma and great-grandma. Funeral Service will take place on Tuesday February 18th at 1.40pm at York Crematorium. Family flowers only please, but donations in lieu if so desired to Westwood Care Home on the plate provided at the service.

SPINK

Barbara Eileen
(nee Hudson)

Passed away peacefully at home, on Friday, February 7th, aged 86 years.

Loving wife of Tony, loved mum of Beverley, Stephen and Lesley, mother-in-law of Graham and Lynn, gran to Karen, Danielle, Laura, Leanne, Nicola and Julia, great-gran to Sebbie, Natalie and Gabriel.

Funeral service to be held at York Crematorium, on Monday, February 17th, at 2.20pm.

Family flowers only please.

Donations in lieu for St Johns Church and My Health, Stamford Bridge.

At Barbara's request, please wear bright clothes.

WATSON Ivy

Late of Linton on Ouse, passed away peacefully, on February 1st, at Boroughbridge Lodge, aged 100 years. Loving wife of the late Maurice (Mot) and dear mother of Brian, Doreen, Dorothy and Keith. Funeral service to be held at Newton on Ouse Church, followed by interment on Wednesday February 19th, at 2.00pm. Family flowers only please. Enquiries please to Chapman Medd. Tel. 01347 821370.

WILSON Carl

On February 3rd, 2014, unexpectedly but peacefully at home aged 58 years. Much loved brother to Stephen, Kevin and Dawn, brother-in-law to Alison, Janet and Stephen also uncle to Stacey and Emily. Funeral service to take place at York Crematorium on Tuesday, February 18th, 2014, at 3.00pm. Family flowers only please, donations in lieu to St. Monica's Hospital, a plate will be provided at the service. All enquiries to J. Rymer Funeral Directors, Tel. 01904 624320.

Acknowledgements

WESTMORELAND Evelyn

Stanley and family would like to thank relatives and friends for their cards, kindness and support following the death of Evelyn. We thank Rev. Norma Davey for the special and personal service and to G M Agar for the efficient funeral arrangements. Generous donations of over £500.00 will go to Kirkby Moorside Brass Band and The Methodist Chapel.

In Memoriam

DONNELLY Joan

My lips cannot speak how I love you, My heart cannot tell what to say, But God only knows how I miss you, in our home that is lonely today.

Your loving husband Patrick, daughter Maureen and granddaughter Joanna.

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FEASBY Elsie Irene (Rene) (nee Harton)
Formerly of Fulford, in the loving care of Birchlands Nursing Home, Rene passed away peacefully on February 10th. Funeral service at St. Oswald's, Fulford, at 11.00 a.m., on Tuesday, February 18th, followed by a burial at Fulford Cemetery. A plate will be provided for donations to Diabetes UK.

Always Remembered

Rest In Peace

Never Forgotten

Never Forgotten

Never Forgotten

Never Forgotten

Never Forgotten

Never Forgotten

Never Forgotten