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TWO YEARS TO BUILD PERMANENT NEW BRIDGES FOR WORKINGTON

News & Star exclusive By Julian Whittle

Last updated at 11:42, Wednesday, 09 December 2009

It is likely to be two years before permanent replacements for the Northside and Calva bridges in Workington are in place.

Related: Workington MP disappointed at six month wait for new road bridge

Cumbria County Council announced yesterday that it hopes to have a temporary road crossing over the River Derwent by next summer.

But officials – who smart at the suggestion they have been dragging their feet – say it will take much longer to build permanent replacements.

Marie Fallon, the council's environment director, said: "We have the design stage, tendering, letting contracts and then construction. We don't think two years is an unrealistic timescale."

Workington has been divided from Northside since floods last month destroyed Northside Bridge and a nearby footbridge, and left Calva Bridge on the brink of collapse. A temporary footbridge opened on Monday but vehicles have to make a 20-mile detour via Cockermouth.

Mrs Fallon said engineers have drawn up six options for permanent and temporary road crossings.

"We have to go through these with the Department for Transport," she said.

"We hope to make an announcement in the next couple of weeks about the route and the timescale."

The council aims to replace both the Northside and Calva bridges, although not necessarily on the same sites. Mrs Fallon said: "Rather than rush ahead and replace like for like, we have to take this opportunity to provide the best for Workington for the next 100 years plus."

Once a decision on the permanent crossings is taken, the council can decide where the temporary bridge will go.

It will have to be somewhere else so as not to interfere with construction works.

Hopes that the Army could throw up a makeshift road crossing in a matter of weeks have been ruled out by engineers on safety grounds. Council leader Jim Buchanan said: "We are moving as fast as we possibly can. There is no way that we could move more quickly than we are doing."

A dozen bridges across Cumbria remain closed after the floods. They include Gote Bridge in Cockermouth, Great Broughton Bridge and Ouse Bridge at Bassenthwaite.

Mrs Fallon said that high-water levels in the Derwent had hampered efforts to inspect them.

"We can't just put a camera down," she said. "We have to get divers down to do it."

Officials say that 2,064 homes and businesses were flooded last month. Every district in Cumbria was affected except Barrow.

They estimate the total bill for damage to be £100million.

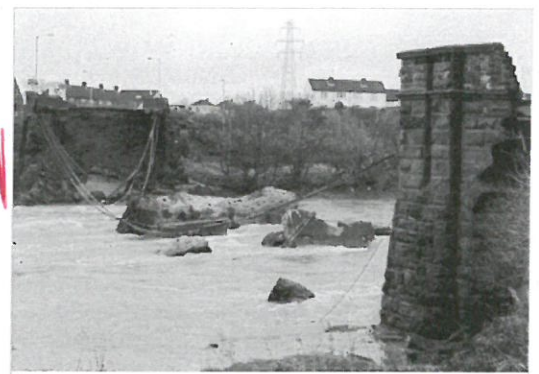
And despite assurances from the Prime Minister that the Government would meet local authorities' costs, Cumbria's council-tax payers will have to find at least £10million.

The county council expects to pay the first £1.1m of the immediate flood-recovery costs, then £3m a year for three years towards replacing bridges and damaged roads.

New bridges in Workington will cost several million each.

Mr Buchanan is concerned that, now the media spotlight has left Cumbria, the Government might go back on its promises of help.

He said: "We were given the same assurances in 2001 after foot and mouth and had to fight for every penny."



Collapsed Northside bridge

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Have your say

If all this had happened in London there would be new bridges by now, nevermind just under construction

Posted by Lynn on 30 December 2009 at 12:51

Ken Derrick is correct, if these floods had occurred in London the bridges would have already been under construction. Last week in the News and Star it was reported that it would take nine months to erect a new bridge and now its two years, the Romans could have built it quicker, its ludicrous. We pay our taxes so it is the government who should provide funding for this type of situation. The Army engineers have shown how quickly they can erect Mabey bridges so there should be no reason why we can't have temporary road bridges now.

Posted by a livsycy on 19 December 2009 at 16:11

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