

The owners of properties on Signal Hill:
(Signal Station Cottages, Signal Tower, nos.1 & 2 Signal Hill)
Battery Road
North Queensferry
Fife KY11 1JU

sent by email

FAO Ian Heigh (Project Manager)
Network Rail
South Queensferry

10th November 2014

Dear Sirs,

Forth Bridge – proposed new Visitor facility, North Queensferry

This letter is written on behalf of the residents of Signal Hill, which is located immediately adjacent to the proposed visitor facility in North Queensferry. This is written from the point of view of residents who are not opposed to the new facility, but rather who are concerned that the facility will be introduced without due genuine concern as to the impact on the life of people who live locally.

A recent note to residents from Cllr Mike Shirkie,

"...emphasised the importance of the community being given as much information as possible about the proposals for the village and that the agencies are made aware of residents' concerns and questions."

We understand that the project is currently in a period of consultation and development and are aware of other discussions and correspondences with the Community Council and other groups in the village. However, the recent Community Consultation event on 10th September didn't provide any update on the proposals from the previous meeting held in May. As such, the purpose of this letter is to highlight a number of concerns specific to our proximity to the new facility that we would like to be addressed.

Car Parking

The dramatic increase in proposed visitor numbers to North Queensferry means that this is an issue that will affect the whole village and will need to be carefully considered and managed. Critically, how is it proposed to manage (ie prevent) hundreds of vehicles from entering the already constricted historic village?

Naturally, the majority of visitors will attempt to get as close as possible to the new facility and some form of enticement will be required to divert them. Therefore, are the proposals considering adopting a system of:

1. satellite parking – as exists at New Lanark, or on Lindisfarne - with shuttle bus service,
2. or arrival by train or boat,

each with associated reduced ticket price for using this system?

How is it intended to prevent speculative visitors travelling by car, who haven't researched their visit and are not aware of a strategy for getting to the visitor facility, from driving through the village to get as close as they can?

We haven't seen any proposals for mitigating this key issue as none have been presented at the community consultations, despite this being the principle concern within the village. Also, we are not aware of any minutes having been issued from these meetings recording residents' concerns.

Our own specific concerns – given our location at the end of Battery Road, along which all the visitors are expected to arrive – is particularly acute as, in our experience, this road often has parking all along one side rendering it a single lane road with no designated passing places.

There is currently no parking restriction along this section of Battery Road, although the introduction of road marking would have a very limited affect given the anticipated increase in number of visitors. The junction at the bottom of Signal Hill is already regularly used as a turning circle, even occasionally for parking, so this particular junction will need to be carefully considered to facilitate the increase in traffic – even if this is only limited to staff, deliveries and visitor drop-off. What strategy, or strategies, are being proposed for this stretch of road?



The pavement along Battery Road is, in places, restrictive where the historic harbour wall undulates and pinches in upon the width of the pavement, with people passing each other often having to use the road to do so. What is the intention here? With considerably increased pedestrian footfall anticipated, is the pavement to be widened accordingly along this already narrow road? In which case, all parking may have to be removed along the length of this section of road to provide the additional width required.

We note from the Network Rail website that:

The proposals would see visitors arriving via a landscaped shore side walk at a unique visitor centre building created under the northern Fife Tower.

Does this imply that the pavement is to be widened and the parking removed along this stretch, or otherwise that a new walkway would have to be constructed on the other side of the harbour wall. Please advise.

Privacy

The issue of reduced privacy is a specific issue to the residents of Signal Hill, given the anticipation that there will be thousands of visitors on a weekly basis who will soon be able to stand on an elevated viewing platform and overlook the properties directly below.

Currently, workmen occasionally ascend and descend in the lift, and commuters pass by on trains, but there is a difference between people viewing something through glass in motion than there is with standing stationary in an open elevated position using binoculars.



This issue of being overlooked is likely to have a psychological affect on how we run our domestic lives: how we use our gardens; how we come and go from our houses; whether we keep our curtains open or closed. Is there any methods of mitigating the direct overlooking of the properties below from the viewing platform?

One consideration is whether the barrier to the platform can be kept back from the edge, thereby encouraging visitors to look out, rather than down. As the structure is formed using double girders either side, this could be simply achieved if the platform was introduced to span across the inner girders only, rather than full width across the outer girders.

This would also reduce the visual impact of the new viewing platform on the Rail Bridge when viewed from a distance, which we are aware some people have raised concerns about, particularly given its possible imminent World Heritage status. However, as we haven't seen any details of the proposals for the platform yet so are unaware whether this issue has already been considered.

Outcomes

The creation of a new visitor facility with viewing platforms has the potential to be a wonderful asset, both for Network Rail and visitors to the Forth Rail Bridge, but – unless it is very carefully considered and implemented – it will be to the detriment of the residents of Signal Hill and the local community. We don't believe this needs to be the case, however we are increasingly concerned that the project will be presented in due course as a fait accompli with no real opportunity for local residents to discuss the details of the proposals.

Could we therefore ask that the questions and issues raised in this letter are addressed and responded to. To facilitate this we would be very happy to meet Ian Heigh on site – or whoever is responsible with the details of the North Queensferry proposals – to have a look at the specific concerns of dealing with the access along Battery Road and the junction with the access road to Signal Hill, and the issue of potential overlooking from the bridge viewing platform.

We look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours faithfully

Euan Millar (Signal Tower)
Gillian Martin (Signal Station Cottages nos 1-6)
Mike & Jackie Chan (2 Signal Hill)
Charles Wilson (1 Signal Hill)

cc Christina McKenzie
North Queensferry Community Council
Counsellor Mike Shirkie
Counsellor Douglas Chapman