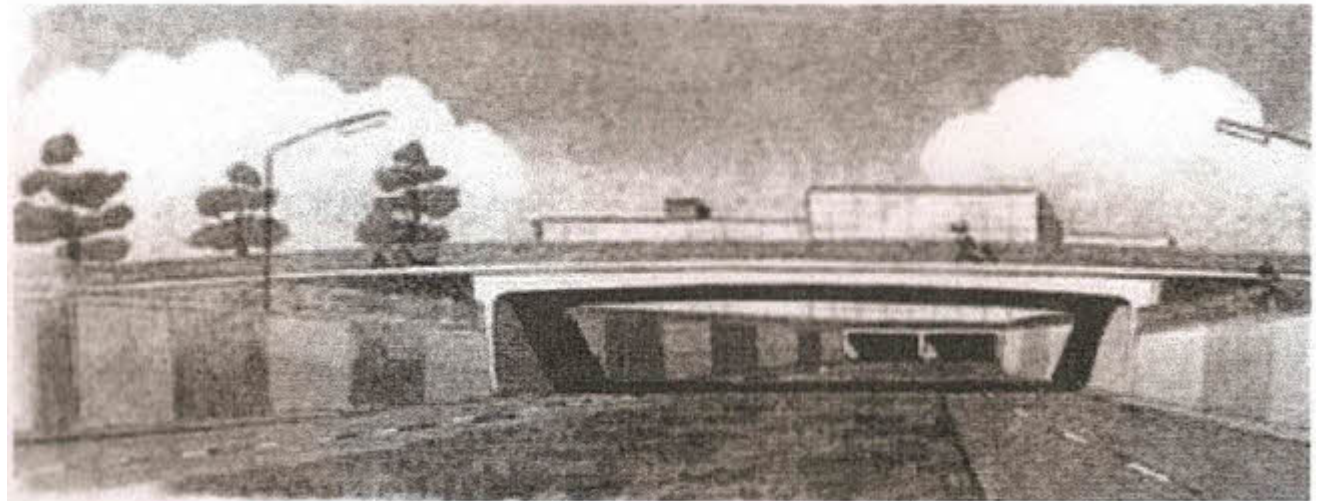


The Bridge - Gateway to Little Woodhouse
Design Workshop Summary 12th March 2011

Contents

- Location..... 3
- Aims of the Workshop..... 4
- The Questionnaire..... 5
- The Brief..... 6
- Space Appraisal..... 7
- Ideas..... 8
- Next steps..... 11
- Acknowledgements..... 12



Original design for the bridge c.1960

Location

The cycle and footbridge over the inner ring road that connects Great George Street and Woodhouse Square has no widely recognised name. The original plans refer to it as the Clarendon Road Footbridge and it is officially recorded as bridge no L2212. Strictly speaking it is not a bridge at all, but the end of the tunnel through which the inner ring road passes on its way under Leeds General Infirmary. Its lack of a widely known and understood name is symptomatic of the lack of attention it gets as a public space. On many official maps it does not exist at all.

Yet the bridge is the major link for pedestrians and cyclists between Little Woodhouse and the city centre and effectively the gateway into Little Woodhouse. It was constructed in the 1960s when the inner ring road severed what was then the continuation of Clarendon Road connecting to Great George Street.

The route includes a slope down from Woodhouse Square in the west, sloping steeply back up over the bridge and back down even more steeply to St George's Church. As well as being a pedestrian and cycle route, part also provides vehicular access to car parking areas on both sides of the bridge.



Aerial image from Google Maps

Aims of the Workshop

The difficulties and potential of the bridge were highlighted in the recently adopted Little Woodhouse Neighbourhood Design Statement.

Various preliminary suggestions have been made in that document, with a view to examining the problems of the bridge in more detail following publication.



Excerpt from Little Woodhouse Neighbourhood Design Statement

The workshop was designed to continue this process by eliciting both practical and visionary ideas from the local community and other users of the bridge with the ultimate aim of improving the experience of those crossing it.

Invitations were sent out to all members of Little Woodhouse Community Association (which organised the event) and to local businesses, and flyers were handed out on the bridge. The workshop was facilitated by architect and planning consultant Peter Baker: members of QPS (the Quality Places and Spaces sub-group of the Leeds Property Forum) assisted with that process. The workshop was funded by a Grass Roots grant through the Community Foundation, and held at and with the kind permission of, Swarthmore Education Centre in Woodhouse Square.

The workshop was attended by eighteen people, most from the local community and others who use the bridge for walking or cycling.



The Questionnaire

Prior to the workshop, questionnaires were distributed to users of the bridge, asking the following questions:

- Approximately how often do you cross The Bridge
- Can you give examples of things you like about The Bridge
- Can you give examples of things you don't like about The Bridge
- Do you feel you should have a say in how the space between Clarendon Road and Great George Street is laid out and maintained?
- Where are you usually going to and from when you use The Bridge (e.g. home, car park, shops, work, hospital, gym)
- Do you generally cross the Bridge on **FOOT/BYCYCLE/OTHER.....**

When asked about the quality of the area and what improvements were needed, the main issues raised were:

- Perceptions of safety
- Appearance and untidiness
- Conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists
- Steepness of the slope, particularly in winter
- Potential for creating a distinctive gateway and usable space.

Naming the Bridge

There were also a number of suggestions for naming the bridge:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Dirty Bridge | • Josephs Crossing |
| • Leeds Gateway | • Dame Judy Dench Bridge |
| • Bridge with no name | • Clarendon Bridge |
| • Fairbairn Bridge | • Ralph Thoresby Bridge |
| • Beggars Bridge | • The Woodhouse Way Bridge |
| • The Foundling Bridge | • Little Woodhouse Gateway |
| • St George's Community Bridge | • Swarthmore Bridge |
| • St George's Footbridge | • Swarthmore Hill |

Respondents were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, tended to agree, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the following statements about the bridge and the land on each side of it between Great George Street and Clarendon Road:

MAINTENANCE

This place is clean

This space is well looked after

ENVIRONMENT

There is shelter from the weather here

This space has seating

The air is clean here

Noise is not a problem here

I feel safe here

This space is just the right shape & size

DESIGN & APPEARANCE

This space improves the look of the area

This space has been well made

There is a good mix of trees and shrubs here

This space is inspiring

This space is beautiful

COMMUNITY

This is an important space to the local community

Everyone feels welcome here

People mix well here

People who live around here are proud of this space

This space is good for local shops and businesses

YOU

This space makes me feel good

I can have fun here

I can relax here

I enjoy being in this space

I come here to escape

The Brief

In the workshop, the first task for participants was to visit the bridge, describe their feelings about it, and decide what their aims would be for its future.

The thoughts that emerged from discussions can be summarised as follows:

Make the route a more pleasant place to be and use by:

- Improving the surface treatment
- Dealing with pedestrian/traffic/cycle interaction
- Improving the greenspace
- Making the route more child-friendly

Make the area a destination as well as a route by:

- Improving the appearance
- Encouraging people to relax in the space
- Making the most of the views
- Celebrating the history

Make the route safer by:

- Improving the experience at night
- Improving the visibility across the bridge
- Preventing suicides
- Integrating cycle and pedestrian use



Workshop participants investigate the site



Space Appraisal

The groups spent a short time walking around the area. This appraisal gathered facts about the space and noted its problems and potential:

- The edges of the space are not well-defined
- There is a vista to the statue of Sir Peter Fairbairn, Mayor of Leeds 1857-8 in Woodhouse Square
- There are glimpses of the Town Hall tower from along the bridge
- St Georges Church spire and the turret of Centaur House form a gateway feature
- Before the ring road was built in the late 1960s, Clarendon Road continued along the route of what is now the bridge to connect with Great George Street and was lined with buildings. This was the original route Queen Victoria took when opening the Town Hall in 1858
- The road access at either end only serves car parks
- The space to be considered should include the length of Great George Street from Park Street to the bridge, the bridge itself, and Clarendon Road from the bridge to Woodhouse Square
- The grass and tree area on the west side of bridge has potential to be made a positive space: a meeting place or a destination for events
- Slopes to the bridge are steeper than they should be, and it can be difficult for the elderly, disabled and those with pushchairs to use. However, it does have the benefit of being a straight route, rather than a convoluted ramp.
- There is little scope for reducing the slope at the east end
- The slope at the west end could be reduced: at present it slopes down before sloping up again
- The grassed area over the ring road has potential as accessible green space
- The brick wall on the south side of the bridge approaches leaves the surface in shadow - more likely to ice up in winter
- Items of street furniture are prone to vandalism - finger post signs all point the wrong way.
- Cycle/pedestrian segregation on the bridge is not adhered to in practice
- There might be development potential on or over some car park sites and/or at the end of the terrace on the south side of Woodhouse Square where there was once a house



Ideas

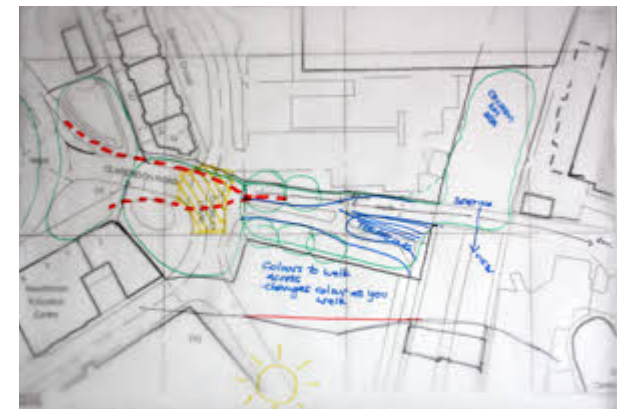
A number of suggestions came out of the visit and discussions:

- Open up the greenspace over the ring road by the hospital by removing the brick wall. This could be used for a sitting/relaxing area and/or designed as a place for children's play.
- Remove the brick wall on the south-west side of the bridge and introduce grass or stone terracing on the slope to connect it to the greenspace between there and the Joseph's Well car park
- Re-arrange this space to maximise its function as a distinctive "place": a meeting and/or creative space, a safe and relaxing space. Re-design the surfacing, move bins etc to the edge, improve the planting screening it from the Joseph's Well car park
- Introduce seating in these spaces and overlooking the ring road
- Reduce the steepness of the slope at the east end by extending the length by a metre
- Reduce the steepness of the slope at the west end by bridging over the "valley" with a lightweight structure which could allow access to underground services etc
- Include public art to commemorate Queen Victoria's visit and the route she took
- Remove the brick wall on the south-east side of the bridge and replace with lightweight barriers to allow sunlight onto the paving.
- Alter the balustrade over the ring road itself to prevent jumping off
- Introduce lighting into the balustrade to improve safety at night.
- Include mirrored surfaces, perhaps as a public art installation, to provide sightlines over the bridge hump
- Introduce elements for child activity as they cross the bridge - different colours in the paving - lights which change colour as you pass them - hopscotch patterns in the paving
- Remove the pedestrian/cycle segregation from the bridge so that each user respects other users' passage.
- Alter paving on the roads at either end of the bridge to provide shared space arrangements allowing all users to mix with priority given to pedestrians.
- Guerrilla gardening to improve the space (localism?)
- Re-build the end of the "Swarthmore" terrace with proceeds from the sale contributing to improvement works.
- Look in further detail at other development/funding options



This group proposed an improved greenspace making use of the area over the ring road and creating a clear route from the bridge to Clarendon Road, smoothing out the slope ,

An informal route through the greenspace was suggested by this group with pedestrian priority at the junction with the car park entrances.,



Ideas

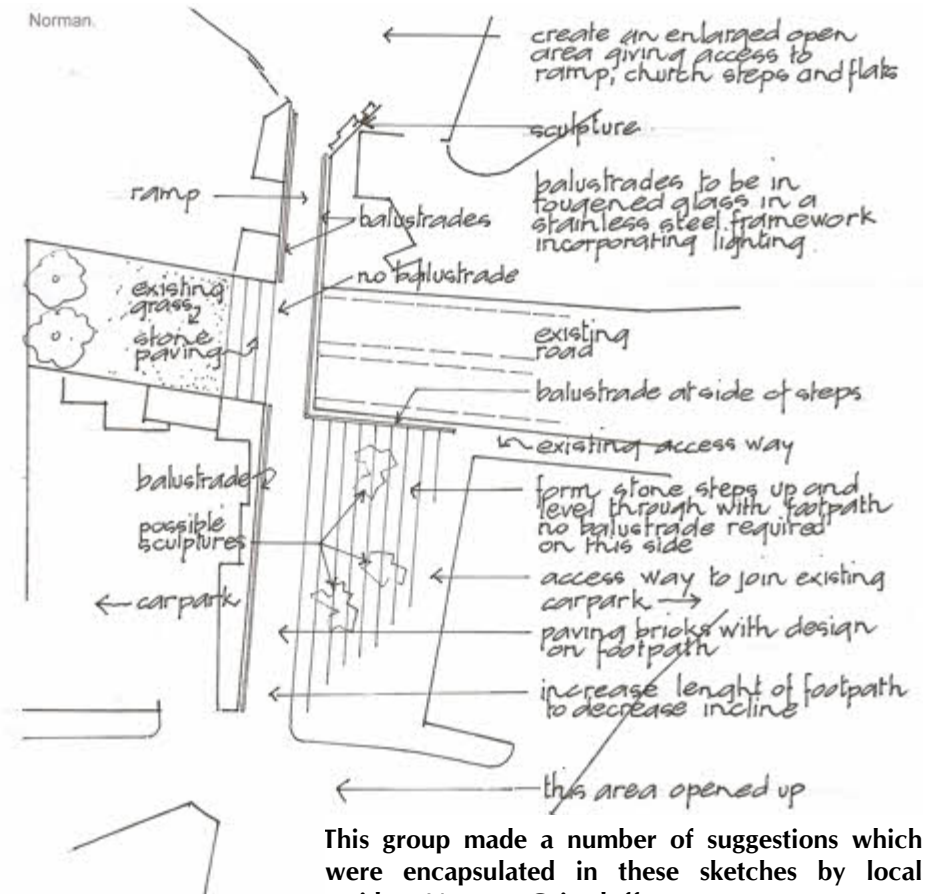
There were an number of common threads in the ideas which came out of the discussions in the groups. Whilst there were differences of emphasis: some favouring a greenspace and some a paved piazza type space, for example, all felt it was important to make the space more welcoming, more attractive, more usable and more distinctive.

Although contributors were not constrained in their thinking, most took a pragmatic approach, accepting that concepts such as re-building or widening the bridge would not be achievable in the present economic climate. Funding was considered with suggestions for re-building at the end of the terrace on the south side of Woodhouse Square or building over the hospital and Joseph's Well car parks.

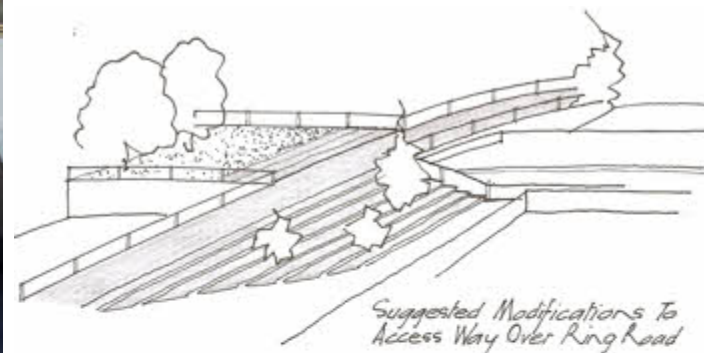
The overriding conclusion was that the bridge and its environs could be made into a distinctive "place" - somewhere enjoyable to be in as well as move through; a place which could give the local community a sense of ownership and pride.



The workshop in action



This group made a number of suggestions which were encapsulated in these sketches by local resident Norman Cairnduff

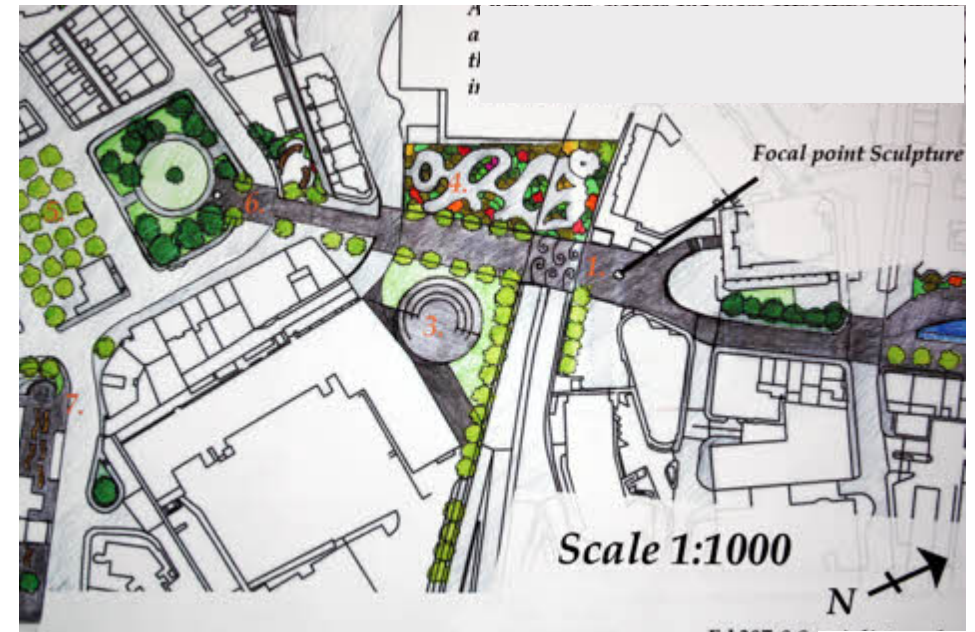


Ideas

In 2010, students from the Leeds Met Landscape course used Little Woodhouse and the bridge for a design project. These ideas illustrate how the space could be radically transformed when there are fewer constraints on cost.



Liam Clark



Larni Shaw

Richard Kidger



Next steps

The workshop has encapsulated ideas and suggestions for improvement that are generally achievable, given the will to do it and relatively modest funding.

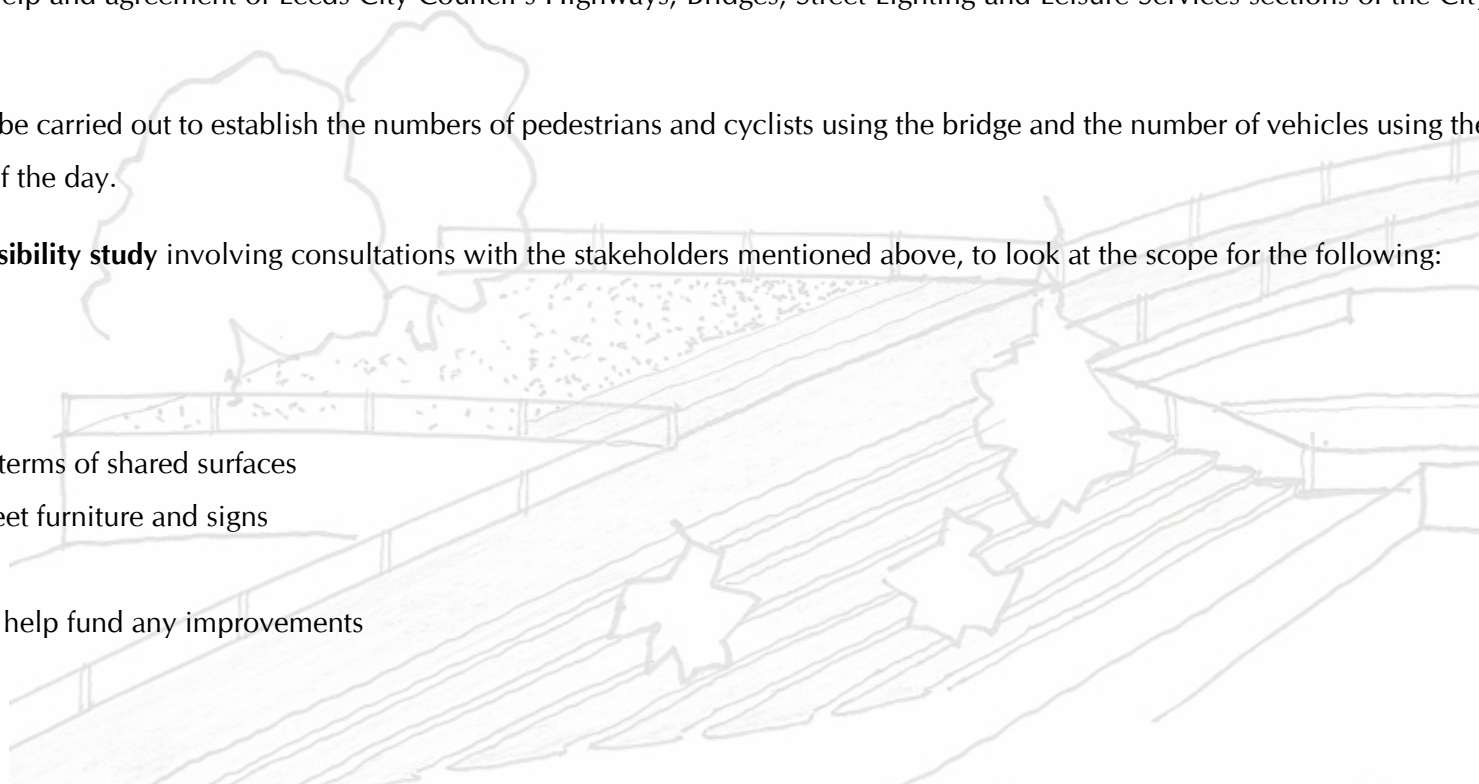
Some of this can only be achieved with the help and agreement of relevant landowners: Leeds City Council, Joseph's Well, the Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust and Centaur House.

Some proposals would also require the help and agreement of Leeds City Council's Highways, Bridges, Street Lighting and Leisure Services sections of the City Development Directorate.

Initially a **footfall/traffic survey** needs to be carried out to establish the numbers of pedestrians and cyclists using the bridge and the number of vehicles using the access to the car parks, at various times of the day.

The next step would be to carry out a **feasibility study** involving consultations with the stakeholders mentioned above, to look at the scope for the following:

- alterations to the balustrading
- alterations to the degree of slope
- alterations to the road approaches in terms of shared surfaces
- removal and/or re-arrangement of street furniture and signs
- improvements to the green spaces
- additional development which could help fund any improvements
- other funding streams



The aim of the feasibility study would be to produce a plan of realistic and achievable outcomes to enable funding applications to be made.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to all those who made this workshop happen:

- Little Woodhouse Community Association for arranging it all, particularly Garance Rawinsky
- Swarthmore Education Centre for providing the accommodation
- Peter Baker of Peter Baker Associates for facilitating the workshop
- Mark Burgess and Alan Simson representing the Quality Places and Spaces sub-group of the Property Forum for their support and expertise in helping to facilitate the group work

Local residents and business representatives who attended the workshop:

- Maggie Butterworth
- Norman Cairnduff
- Cllr Penny Ewans
- Freda Matthews
- David Hall
- Patrick Hall
- Steve Hill
- Chris Minshill
- Barbara Mitchell
- Mark Pullan
- Laurence Pusey
- Alison Ravetz
- Garance Rawinsky
- Mai Thomas
- Sue Thomas

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