



Mr J P Ellery
Senior Coroner for Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Area
HM Coroners Service
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
SY2 6ND

Date: 20th July 2015
My ref: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr Ellery

**Mr Daniel Lee Hodgin
Coroner's Regulation 28 Report
Inquest 14th April 2015 at the Coroners Court, Shirehall, Shrewsbury**

Further to your letter of 20th April 2015 and the attached Regulation 28 Report sent for Shropshire Council's attention.

Firstly I apologise for the delay in this report. There have been a number of things to resolve in order to respond as fully as I can. There are still some matters that require further consideration.

During the course of the inquest into the death of Mr Daniel Lee Hodgin of 14th April 2015 at the Coroners Court, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, you found evidence that gave rise to concerns. Those concerns reproduced below for ease of reference:

The matters of concern are as follows:-

- (1) According to a Shropshire Council plan of the Dorset Street area the gate at Dorset Street leading to the towpath should have been closed and locked when the water level at the Welsh Bridge gauge reached 1.95 meters.
- (2) At between 5am and 6am on the 23rd November 2014 when the deceased most likely entered the water, the level at the Welsh Bridge gauge was recorded at between 2.00 and 1.99 meters.
- (3) Had the gate been closed and locked the deceased would have been unable to pass through.

- (4) No clear system was established whereby the Environment Agency notified, or was required to notify, Shropshire Council as to the water level or likelihood of the water level reaching 1.95 meters at the Welsh Bridge gauge. The Council's instruction to close and lock the gate at Dorset Street was bound to fail, there being no effective system in place to achieve the same.
- (5) River safety in Shrewsbury has been a matter of concern for some time. In 2010 I made what were then two Regulation 43 Reports to Shropshire Council in respect of alcohol related deaths.
- (6) The concerns raised here not only affect those adversely affected by alcohol but anyone who may be unfamiliar with the area when the river is in flood and is dangerously high covering the towpath. For completeness, and this does not directly concern the Environment Agency, there was a recent reported incident of a pram being blown into the River Severn where the towpath was unprotected by railings.

Following the issue of the Regulation 28 Report discussions have taken place with a number of parties who have an input into insuring river safety in Shrewsbury and with the Environment Agency with respect to the issues of concern and in particular item 4. Historically, the Environment Agency issues a "Flood Alert" when river levels at the Welsh Bridge monitoring gauge are forecast to exceed 2.7 meters. It is at this level and above that road closures need to start to be implemented. Warnings are not issued below 2.7 meters.

The Environment Agency have, however, been looking at the relationship between river levels at their Montford Bridge river level gauge and the Welsh Bridge gauge. We have asked that they work to levels of 1.6 meters at the Welsh Bridge gauge, to be on the cautious side. Their analysis indicates that when levels reach 2.78 meters at Montford Bridge, then the levels will exceed 1.6 meters at the Welsh Bridge within 4 to 8 hours. The Environment Agency is unable, at this time, to provide flood warnings for levels of 1.6 meters, but they do have regularly updated "river levels", shown on their website. Shropshire Council have engaged the services of local software company to assist in taking the information from the website and generating automatic "alerts" when levels reach 2.78 meters at the Montford Bridge gauge. At the time of this reply to the Regulation 28 Report this development work has not been completed. It is our intention to send a SMS (text) message to; the Central Highways Emergency Phone (operated 24 hours a day 365 days per year by a Highways Technician, who is familiar with all gate locations on the River Severn in Shrewsbury and the closure procedures), the Police Control Room, Shropshire Councils Emergency Planning Unit on call phone and the Shropshire Council Car Park Commissioner. It is believed that through this process the necessary people will get notification to ensure timely closure of the gates, before the towpath is likely to be submerged in flood waters.

The closure of the gates is only part of the issue surrounding river safety and through consideration of previous Regulation 43 Reports to Shropshire Council and our desire to continually improve safety, Shropshire Council continue to review river safety. In January this year, I visited the river in the evening with the Police Chief Inspector, Town Centre Inspector and the Town Clerk for Shrewsbury Town Council. It was felt that these are the parties which might work more effectively together to improve river safety. The Town Council provide the lighting along the towpath. At that time we had developed an embryonic "Team Shrewsbury" approach to protecting public realm, addressing issues such as; drugs misuse, antisocial behaviour, environmental crime and other criminal activity, by working more closely together. It was felt that river safety lent itself to this approach. A specific River Safety action plan was developed and is being implemented. The team meet weekly on an Operational basis, monthly as a Tactical Group and quarterly as a Strategic Group. The membership of each group varies in line with the outcomes sought. A Senior Officer from one of the three principal members attends the Operations Meeting, most attend Tactical meetings and all the Strategic ones. River safety is a standing agenda item. There is also a specific River Safety meeting following the Strategic meeting which is attended by the Town Centre Inspector, Town Clerk and myself. It is felt that this brings together the necessary people to share or call on resources to improve safety, for example I can involve Shropshire Councils Licencing team, if it was perceived there is a particularly problem premises, it also provides governance around river safety decisions.

From concern numbered 6 from your Regulation 28 Report it is understood that consideration be given to additional barriers along the towpath. The area of particular concern, to both yourself and myself, is the length from the English Bridge down to the Weir. My concerns are raised further with the development of a University in the town, particularly as properties in the Castlefields area lend themselves to student accommodation. To this end I have requested a structural report on the integrity of the towpath facing wall. We have had a collapse in another part of town and have to undertake regular maintenance on this section of most concern. With that information we can determine what is possible or what needs to be done to make it possible. In the meantime we have reviewed the existing provision and added or improved barriers as felt necessary.

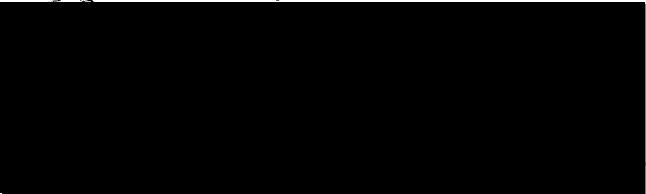
If we were to increase the provision of barriers we would need to consider the implications that we would have. This is an extremely well used level route, used by cyclists and pedestrians from a centre of population to the heart of the town. It avoids the hill up into the town and keeps people away from vehicle emissions. Whenever it is closed I am put under tremendous pressure from Councillors and the public alike to get it open before we have had a chance to clean silt and debris from the path. With barriers, removal of debris, particularly large trees, would take longer, extending any closures. Barriers would be vulnerable to damage from floating trees in times of flood, with maintenance again extending closures. However, with an informed engineering judgement we can balance all the conflicting requirements. I am afraid I will have to report further once I have the structural report.

In addition to the above we are looking to provide CCTV cameras, one looking up from the Railway Bridge to the English Bridge, one looking down the Weir. These will be high resolution cameras that feed into the CCTV Control Room and will be fitted with alerts that can be set to identify loitering on the towpath and hopefully will be provided with software that is capable of spotting potential bodies in the river and monitor river levels. This will happen in tandem with the work on the Environmental Agency monitoring gauges. We are in early discussions with the suppliers but they are confident they will be able to deliver this. The Town Council are halfway through a programme of upgrading the light and have increased the number of columns (there are now at 27 meters centres, rather than 50 meters) and will be fitted with LED lanterns, which will provide a white light rather than the yellow of the traditional SOx lamps, which will be easier to see at night with a better definition of the towpath edge because of the improved colour rendition.

The structural report is not yet completed, once I am in possession of that I will update you immediately. I hope the proposals for dealing with alarms, when levels are likely to cause flooding of the towpath, will mean that there is adequate notification to allow existing gates to be closed.

I trust the above is of assistance and helps to address the concerns raised in your Regulation 28 Report. If you wish to discuss this further or there is anything else I can do to assist, please do not hesitate to contact me directly in the number below.

Yours sincerely



Mr Tim Sneddon
Operations Manager
Environmental Maintenance Shropshire Council.

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