

15 October 2025**REPORT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PLACE****RUFFORD FORD – CONSULTATION RESPONSE AND FUTURE OPTIONS****Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform the Cabinet Member of the responses received to the public consultation undertaken in 2024 on a proposed closure to Rufford Ford and propose a potential solution for reopening the ford, subject to further public consultation.

Information

2. Rufford Ford is located on Rufford Lane where Rainworth Water crosses to the west of Rufford Country Park. It is adjacent to the historic Rufford Mill and Park and it is a well-known landmark in Nottinghamshire.
3. In 2020, a local student began posting videos on social media of vehicles traversing the ford focussing on occasions when they damaged their vehicles or became stranded. These videos quickly went viral, attracting millions of views and drawing other ‘digital creators’ from across the country to film at the ford. There are now many thousands of videos and clips on various social media channels with many millions of views of incidents at the ford. As typical with social media content, the higher number of views correlate with the spectacle provided and consequently this resulted in a dangerous escalation of exhibitionist behaviour. Deliberately unsafe acts such as reversing through at high speed and driving up the water course towards the lake are all available to view on social media channels.
4. The creation of attractive content on social media can be a lucrative career for participants. The potential for monetisation on platforms such as YouTube then incentivises creators to pursue increasingly dramatic content.
5. By 2022, the numbers of those both filming and performing for the cameras had increased significantly. The general behaviour had deteriorated further with vehicles driving repeatedly through the ford actively being filmed by digital creators. Filmmakers regularly stood in the carriageway to capture footage, jeopardising road safety for all users. The Police attended regularly to attempt to bring order to the situation, but this was also filmed, uploaded, and viewed thousands of times.
6. Residents complained that large groups of people were gathering around the ford with cameras set up to film large 4x4 vehicles ‘performing’ repeatedly with increasing risk. The residents reported being threatened by the filmmakers and told to keep away from the area. The sluice gate from Rufford lake was also tampered with presumably to raise the water levels at the ford although thankfully the sill on the lake prevented a potentially catastrophic local flood.

7. On 22nd October 2022 a motorcyclist drove at high speed into the ford, and the impact propelled him at speed over the handlebars. This was also filmed and uploaded to YouTube and can still be viewed. Following this incident, the Police instructed that the crossing had become a significant danger, and they requested that the County Council used its powers to implement Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders to close the highway on the grounds of public safety.
8. On 2nd December 2022, using a public notice, Rufford Lane was closed to vehicular traffic by the County Council under S14(1b) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act because of the likelihood of danger to the public.
9. The ford was physically closed using concrete barriers and the signs on all approaches have been amended to redirect traffic using the A614 and A616. Despite this significant physical barrier, during Storm Babet in October 2023, a tractor drove through the closed ford, and this again was filmed by a local content maker.
10. Further to the temporary closure the County Council commissioned a detailed feasibility study to consider the viability of several long-term options for the ford. The outcome of this study was reported to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment on 4th December 2023. In brief, it examined the following options.
 - Traffic signals
 - Measures to reduce water flow
 - Restricted access
 - Traffic calming
 - A bridge
 - Permanent closure to motor vehicles
11. The report concluded that the only options that would guarantee an absolute end to the anti-social behaviour would be either a full closure to motor vehicles or the construction of a bridge. The latter was discounted on cost grounds, so the decision made was to consider the views of the public on a proposed closure of the ford to motor vehicles. It would though stay open for all non-motorised vehicles.
12. Consequently, the County Council duly advertised a proposal to introduce a full closure to motor vehicles. This consultation took place between 20th December 2023 and 4 March 2024. The consultation received attention both from mainstream and social media.
13. In total for both stages of consultation, 219 responses were received of which 194 are objections and 25 are in support. The details are as follows.

	Total replies	Objections	Support
External (Police/Fire/NSDC/Parish)	4	0	4
Local residents (within 2 miles)	70	58	12
Wider area	145	136	9
Totals	219	194	25

14. The Police supported the closure proposals, noting that when open, the ford posed significant risks to the local community and vulnerable road users.

15. Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue similarly supported the proposed closure noting that they had not experienced any operational issues with the road being temporarily closed and as they had attended four incidents at the ford in the two years prior to closure, there was now a reduced risk to crews.
16. Rufford Parish Council at its meeting on 16th January 2024 considered the proposed permanent closure and voted to formally support the proposals.
17. Newark and Sherwood District Council on behalf of their local District Councillors also expressed their support for the proposed closure.
18. Supporting comments were received from several residents who described in detail the difficulties they had experienced prior to the temporary closure. Responses referenced dangerous driving, intimidatory behaviour, regular conflict with residents and damage to property.
19. Objections were received from a wider geographical area away from Rufford Lane and were typically concerned with the impact on them because of the additional driving time or the impact as residents of Ollerton who felt that traffic levels had increased on some residential roads because of the closure.
20. Several objectors were members of the Rufford Golf Club who felt that the closure was impacting upon their travel times to and from the course. Some respondents misunderstood the reasoning for the proposed closure and assumed that the main issue was around the ford flooding and vehicles getting trapped whilst attempting to cross.
21. A number of objectors offered alternative solutions as part of their response, some of which had been considered previously within the options report. These are summarised below with the number of responses.

Alternative proposal	Respondents
Traffic calming	56
Dredging/river management	28
Bridge (inc. culverts/Irish bridge)	13
Other (signs, cameras, enforcement, gates)	21
Total	118

22. Many of the objectors raised the alternative solution to the closure being better management of Rainworth Water either side of the ford. This was mentioned by most responding as golf club members and likely stems from some dredging work undertaken by the course owners in 2016. To consider this objection fully, the County Council commissioned an external hydrological study of the site looking specifically at the implications of de-silting on the watercourse.
23. The study confirmed that this would only provide a temporary benefit, would quickly reverse due to natural sedimentation, and may create legal and environmental risks. Extracts from the study are as follows.
 - *The removal of silt from a watercourse would be expected to increase hydraulic capacity. However, the relationship between de-silting and channel capacity is not always a linear one and hydraulic investigation would be required. There are several key controls which need to be considered, including the channel slope/gradient, historic modifications (such as embankments along the channel edges), vegetation cover and*

flood frequency. The movement of silt down river is a natural process, and its removal would only bring a temporary benefit which would need to be established through hydraulic modelling. In addition, the land downstream of the ford is not within the council's ownership and so any works would require agreement from all landowners. Any agreement must also be compliant with the responsibilities of riparian ownership.

- *Riparian owners must not increase flood risk or erosion to others. Riparian owners should not disturb certain species, including the watercourse bed and banks.*
- *Due to the low gradient nature of the watercourse, any dredging activity is likely to be quickly reversed as new material is deposited in the channel.*
- *Potential impacts of dredging downstream will need considering as impacts may include increased erosion and loss of land as the watercourse responds to the dredging influence. Bank instability along the regraded reach is also likely to amplify as the depth of dredging increases.*
- *In addition, the lowering of channel bed levels downstream of the ford could lead to increased erosion at the ford.*

24. In addition to the conclusions above, the dangerous driving activities at the ford evidenced on social media were not generally predicated on water levels. There is an argument that to create a spectacle likely to generate views, vehicle speeds of 'participating' drivers will increase with lower water levels to ensure a greater splash.

25. The study therefore concluded that whilst some de-silting locally could increase the speed of flow and reduce the depth, this could only be achieved through the disturbance of the riverbed on land which is not under the County Council's control. Any improvement gained on hydraulic capacity would only be temporary as the silt would re-deposit quickly due to the low downstream gradient of the watercourse.

26. Several objectors also raised as an alternative the construction of a bridge. Different options such as an 'Irish' Bridge were mooted. The option to construct a bridge was rejected in the options report of December 2023 on cost grounds but in order to ensure that the objections were duly considered as independently as possible, Aecom consulting were asked to undertake a 'sense check' on Via's initial study and this concluded that the principles were sound and the engineering necessary to construct an Irish bridge or similar would be equally cost prohibitive.

27. Of the 194 objections received, 56 specifically suggested re-opening the ford with some form of traffic calming. Whilst traffic calming was considered as part of the initial feasibility study, due to the responses received and the potential to incorporate traffic calming with other measures, a detailed study was commissioned to look at what features could be installed in combination that could collectively reduce vehicle speeds to a minimum and enable the ford to be reopened. If this can be achieved, then the negative impacts of the closure on those using Rufford lane as a regular route as well as those living in Ollerton impacted by apparent displaced traffic could be removed. It is though imperative that the design of any scheme does not allow for a return of the dangerous behaviour that led to the original closure.

28. The commissioned study includes designs for traffic calming incorporating kerb buildouts and speed cushions close to the ford. Modelling indicates that this combination of features could reduce typical vehicle speeds to around 25 mph. To achieve this, the features would need to be located within the area around the ford that floods to prevent the risk of vehicles striking

the buildouts under water. Consequently, in combination with the buildouts and cushions, the inclusion of robust flood gates is also considered essential. These would be closed when the water levels reach a pre-determined level and apart from preventing vehicles hitting the features, they would also ensure that the ford is closed when water levels are higher which in turn reduces the attractiveness of the site for digital creators and removes the risk of vehicles and their occupants getting stranded in deep water. Electronic Variable Message Signs would also be considered on the A614, A616 and Rufford Lane to inform drivers when the ford is closed.

29. Furthermore, to ensure that water levels and the location are constantly monitored permanent CCTV cameras should be considered as part of an overall solution.

NEXT STEPS

30. The ford is adjacent to the historic Rufford Mill so any proposed alterations to the highway need to be carefully considered in respect of conservation issues.

31. Surveys of the carriageway will need to be undertaken before a consultation design can be established. All proposed traffic calming schemes are then by legislation subject to a formal consultation period with stakeholders and the public.

32. Any objections to a traffic calming proposal would have to be determined in due course by the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment.

Other Options Considered

33. Several other options have been considered, and these are detailed in the report.

Reason for Recommendations

34. Any long-term solution for the ford must carefully balance the perspectives of all stakeholders, and it is evident from the consultation process that opinions remain strongly polarised regarding the most appropriate course of action. Having undertaken further detailed assessment, it is considered that the implementation of traffic-calming measures specifically designed to limit vehicle speeds to a minimum together with the provision of flood gates and CCTV surveillance, represents a comprehensive solution. This approach is expected to address the identified issues and facilitate the re-opening of the ford to the public.

Statutory and Policy Implications

35. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

36. The costs of the consultation process will be minimal and can be absorbed within existing staffing costs. The detailed costs of the proposed measures would be considered by the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment together with responses received after the consultation period.

Consultation

37. Public consultation will be undertaken in accordance with the Highways (Traffic Calming) Regulations 1999. All responses will subsequently be considered by the County Council. The Police, Fire Service, District Council and Rufford Parish Council who supported a permanent closure will be engaged with directly as part of the consultation process to ensure that their views are clearly represented in any subsequent decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That the County Council commences design work on a proposed traffic calming scheme for Rufford Ford that incorporates both vertical and horizontal deflection measures designed to slow vehicle speeds through the ford to a minimum together with flood gates to be closed at a pre-determined water level. In addition, the design would include CCTV cameras on the ford monitored by the County Council. The design will then be subject to a public consultation with the results reported to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment.

Derek Higton
Executive Director, Place

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Gary Wood, Head of Highways and Transport. 0115 9774270. gary.wood@nottscc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (EKH 23/09/2025)

38. It is appropriate for the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment to consider this report under their terms of reference TE.1, TE.6 and TE.12.

Financial Comments (PAA29 23/09/2025)

39. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 36 of the report. There are no Local Government Reorganisation implications arising from the recommendation.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- [Rufford Lane Ford-Options Report](#)

Report to Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment 4th December 2023.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- Sherwood Forest Councillor James Gamble