

**REPORT TO:** Safer Halton Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 20 January 2009

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director - Environment

**SUBJECT:** Incidents of objects being thrown from footbridges in the Borough

**WARDS:** Borough-wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To enable members to consider the issues associated with incidents in the Borough involving objects being thrown from footbridges onto the live highway.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

The Board supports the investigation of potential funding sources that would enable a proposed programme of works to enclose defined footbridges to be based on an agreed set of priorities endorsed by the Board.

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 There are 49 footbridges within Halton's boundary which HBC are responsible for either as Highway Authority or structure owner. Of these, 29 span the public highway or busway network. The remainder span watercourses, railway or unadopted tracks.
- 3.2 Only 2 of these 29 bridges have anti-vandal enclosures fitted to minimise the possibility of vandals throwing objects on to the highway. These are Bongs North and Bongs South footbridges over A557 Watkinson Way in Appleton/Halton View Wards in Widnes.
- 3.3 These particular enclosures formed part of the Highways Agency's original bridge construction in 1993. It is assumed that this was related to the primary function of these bridges being to allow access for schoolchildren to and from Fairfield High School.
- 3.4 HBC have only retro-fitted an anti-vandal enclosure to one footbridge which spans the railway in Hough Green, Widnes. This was completed in 2005 as a result of Network Rail's serious concerns for train safety arising from frequent reports of missiles being thrown at moving trains and debris being dropped onto the tracks.
- 3.5 The issue of objects being maliciously dropped from footbridges received significant local publicity after incidents in the spring of 2007. As a result HBC's Road Safety team started putting together a package of measures

to be delivered through the “Stop the Drop” campaign, which was initiated in September 2007 and was funded through the Cheshire Safer Roads Partnership. It was evident from Police reports that the majority of the problems were centred on the Halton Brook/Halton Lodge/Asda area.

- 3.6 The campaign was delivered by Halton Council staff, the Police Schools Liaison Officer, the Fire Service and representatives of Arriva and Halton transport to year 5,6, 7 and 8 children throughout the Borough though with special focus on the high schools near the sites with the most frequent incidents. Posters were also placed on buses and the campaign pack made available to all schools in Halton for use as part of the PSHE curriculum. The issue is always included in any work done with high school students.
- 3.7 A specific example is that of the Antisocial Behaviour PSHE Day at the Heath school on 21st October 2007, when year 9 students took part in a whole day event at the Heath Business Park which focussed on the devastating consequences of attacking vehicles, including emergency vehicles and public transport.
- 3.8 Table 1 in Appendix A indicates the total number of incidents of objects being thrown or left on the highway reported to the police in Halton since April 2006. This includes 36 reported incidents of objects being thrown from bridges. The majority appear to be from pedestrian footbridges.
- 3.9 Resource restrictions have meant that Cheshire Police have been unable to mount regular, increased patrols in the area affected, though the CSOs have been used to show an increased Police presence.
- 3.10 Chart 1 in Appendix A indicates the frequency of reported incidents since April 2006. This would appear to indicate that with the exception of months Nov 07 and Oct 08, since introduction of the Stop the Drop initiative there has been a significant decrease in reported incidents.
- 3.11 Following the latest incident on the Spur Road, letters are being sent to all high schools in the area (Heath/St.Chads/Grange) to request an assembly for each year group to be delivered by a representative of the Stop the Drop team and all partners will be reminded to include the problem on any relevant future presentations. Posters are also to be reissued and placed in relevant locations such as schools, youth clubs, community centres and so forth.
- 3.12 Any incident of this kind has the potential to see an innocent motorist killed, but so far in Halton we have been extremely lucky in that no vehicle occupants have been physically injured. The Stop the Drop initiative has been successful, but each year brings a fresh crop of children through the education system requiring continuing efforts to address this issue.

- 3.13 If we were to consider enclosing footbridges, then due to the different geometry of each structure, each enclosure would have to be a bespoke design.
- 3.14 It is estimated that the cost of designing, fabricating and erecting a galvanised steel enclosure of a similar nature to that indicated in Appendix A photos 1 & 2 (Hough Green Railway Footbridge) would typically be in the order of £40k/footbridge.
- 3.15 The reported incident information highlights the Central Expressway and Runcorn Spur Road corridors as being the highest risk areas for such an incident in the Borough. There are 4 footbridges spanning the Central Expressway and 2 spanning the Spur Road so enclosing all could cost in the order of £240k although it would undoubtedly be less if this were addressed in packages comprising multiple sites.
- 3.16 The nature of these works is outside the scope of structural bridge maintenance so could not be funded from the LTP derived Highway Maintenance Block allocation. The total 2008/09 revenue budget for reactive and non-structural bridge maintenance is £116k and this is insufficient to address the issue without significant detriment to structural bridge maintenance liabilities.
- 3.17 The effectiveness of enclosing individual footbridges has been questioned in the past as the activity could easily be transferred to nearby unprotected footbridges or road bridges which are impossible to enclose.
- 3.18 It is also worthy of note that, as is evident from the attached photos 1 & 2, these type of enclosures are unattractive and austere in appearance. This could be the source of significant objection as they could detract from other neighbourhood or community initiatives to improve the image of the areas in question. The intimidating nature of their appearance could also deter some members of the public from using the footbridges. Consultation before committing to provision would be advisable.
- 3.19 There is the potential for architecturally driven alternatives, which could be more aesthetically pleasing, but the costs of installing and maintaining these would be significantly greater.
- 3.20 For the Expressway and Spur Road footbridges, the option of removing the footbridge and replacing with a surface level pedestrian crossing is not feasible on the grounds of road safety.
- 3.21 Consultations have been made to other NW area local authorities to ascertain whether they have experienced similar incidents and how these had been addressed. From the responses received it would appear to be a common problem although only HBC have statistical data regarding number and frequency of incidents.

- 3.22 The Merseyside Bridge Engineers Group examined this a couple of years ago as a result of several incidents in Wirral which culminated in a motorist being killed when a youth dropped a car battery off a bridge over the Rock ferry bypass. The Group decided in the end to recommend that enclosures or other measures should not be installed as it was felt that if individuals were determined, it would only push the problem to another bridge which hadn't been protected. Furthermore it wouldn't be logical to just consider footbridges, as road over road bridges would have to be considered too.
- 3.23 Also, if the enclosures were to employ solid infill panels on the vertical parapets the additional wind loading on the structure could become an issue as regards the stability of the footbridge.
- 3.24 Individual authorities have also reported problems with existing footbridge enclosures. These have also been experienced by HBC at the Bongs footbridges. The presence of the enclosures becomes a challenge to certain individuals to climb onto the top of them, causing persistent vandalism as a result. The resulting damage can then lead to claims for personal injury, damaged clothing etc against the Authority.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 None.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Resource Implications

If it were decided to fund retro-fitting of one or more enclosures, further investigation into the potential sources of funding would have to be undertaken.

- 5.2 Crime and Disorder Issues

The ASB and criminality aspects of this issue have been focussed upon in the education and publicity initiatives undertaken by the Council.

#### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

##### **6.1 Children & Young People in Halton**

Police records and anecdotal reports tend to show that the perpetrators of such incidents are overwhelmingly children or young persons.

Therefore any preventative measures in terms of education and publicity should continue to be targeted accordingly.

##### **6.2 Employment & Learning Skills in Halton**

None.

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

None.

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

Consideration of the issues outlined in this report is important in the interests of maintaining and potentially improving public safety.

### **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

None.

## **7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

7.1 None.

## **8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

8.1 None under the meaning of the Act.

## **APPENDIX 1**

**Table1                      Incident Summary**

**Chart 1                      Incident Frequency**

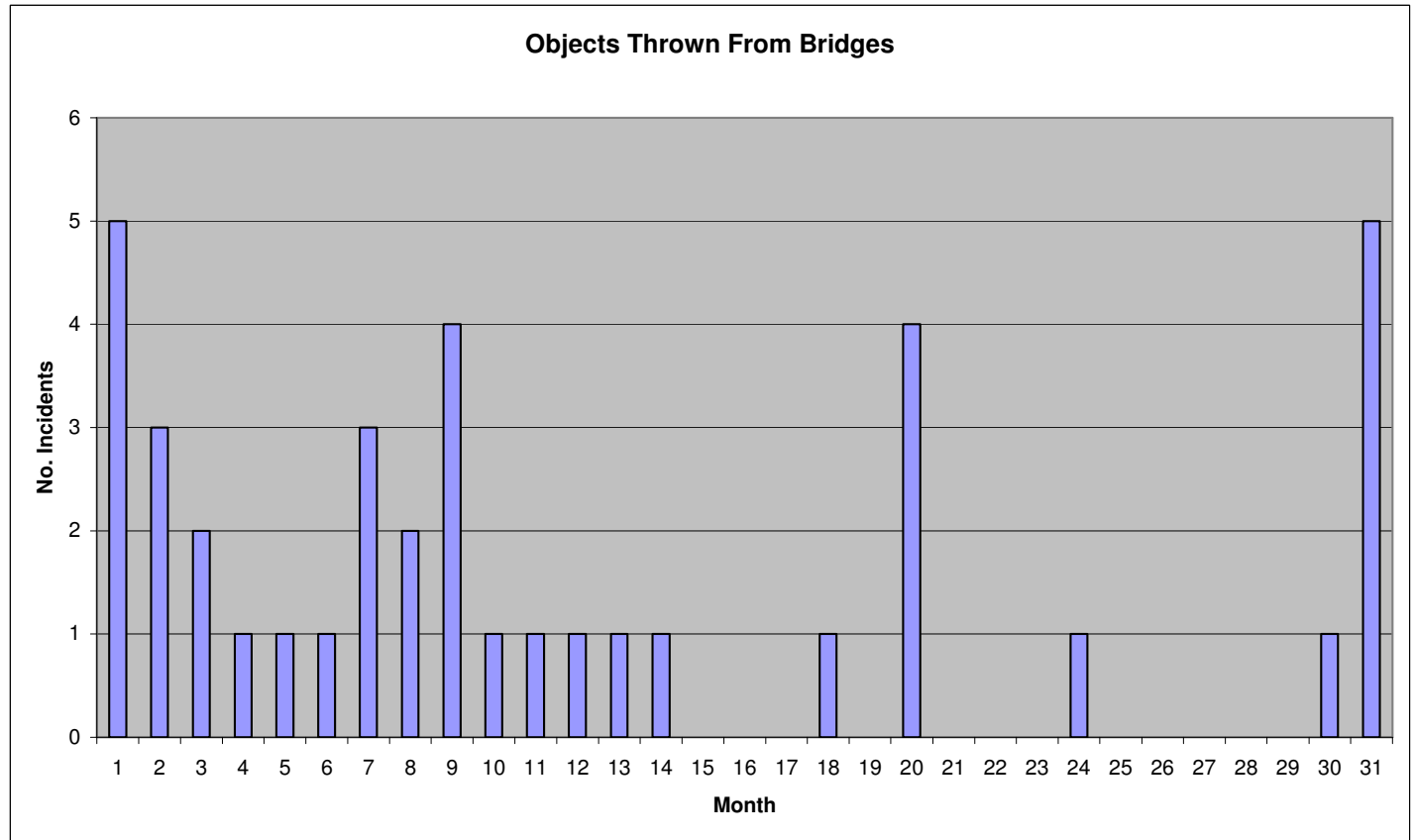
**Photos 1 & 2              Enclosure Installed at Hough Green Railway  
Footbridge**

DAY	DATE	TIME	NUMBER YOUTHS	LOCATION	OBJECT	RESULT
Thur	06/04/2006	21:22	2 Males	Central Expressway	Stones	No Damage
Wed	12/04/2006	03:58	2 Males	Boston Avenue	Brick	Damage to Vehicle
Fri	14/04/2006	11:26	2 Males	Central Expressway	Golf Balls	No Damage
Thur	18/04/2006	15:58	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Golf Balls	No Damage
Thur	18/04/2006	20:30	3 Males	Central Expressway	Unidentified Objects	Damage to Vehicle
Tue	09/05/2006	20:16	2 Unidentified Youths	Unidentified location	Unidentified Objects	No Damage
Sat	20/05/2006	01:16	3 Unidentified Youths	Wtn Point Expressway	Unidentified Objects	No Damage
Sat	27/05/2006	20:53	Unidentified Youths	Wtn Point Expressway	Unidentified Objects	No Damage
Thur	01/06/2006	15:05	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Unidentified Objects	No Damage
Wed	07/06/2006	04:09	Unidentified Youths	Unidentified location	Trees	No Damage
Thur	20/07/2006	20:10	2 Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Unidentified Objects	No Damage
Tue	05/08/2006	15:53	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Debris	No Damage
Wed	13/09/2006	18:00	Unidentified Youths	Southern Expressway	Water Bombs	No Damage
Tue	10/10/2006	13:13	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Stones	Damage-Windscreen Smashed
Fri	13/10/2006	19:34	Unidentified Youths	Bridge- Unidentified	Stones	No Damage
Fri	13/10/2006	23:26	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Shopping Trolley	No Damage-missed
Sun	12/11/2006	12:44	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Stones	No Damage
Fri	22/11/2006	19:13	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Unidentified Objects	No Damage
Wed	06/12/2006	16:38	2 Unidentified Youths	Unidentified location	Glass	No Damage
Fri	08/12/2006	19:35	6 Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Unidentified Objects	HGV Windscreen smashed
Mon	11/12/2006	19:35	Unidentified Youths	Unidentified location	Unidentified Objects	Damage- Windscreen Damaged
Fri	29/12/2006	21:06	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Stones	No Damage
Fri	19/01/2007	15:08	Group of School children	Central Expressway	Stones	Hit Car- No Damage
Fri	27/02/2007	17:17	1 Female	Central Expressway	Concrete	No Damage
Tue	27/03/2007	21:53	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Flares	No Damage
Sun	29/04/2007	17:18	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Stones	Damage-Windscreen Damaged
Sat	12/05/2007	15:34	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Unidentified Objects	No Damage- Driver lost control
Sat	29/09/2007	15:24	4 males (8-9years old)	Central Expressway	Drinks Cans	No Damage- No Patrols Available
Mon	12/11/2007	14:41	4 lads	Daresbury Expressway	Bricks	Hit Car- No Damage
Fri	16/11/2007	21:59	Unidentified Youths	Central Expressway	Stones	No Damage
Mon	19/11/2007	17:03	2 children	Daresbury Expressway	Unidentified Objects	No Damage
Mon	19/11/2007	17:09	3 8year olds	Daresbury Expressway	Stones	No Damage
Wed	05/03/2008	19:37	Unidentified Youths	East Lane	Bricks	No Damage
Sun	28/09/2008	21:28	Unidentified Youths	Spur Road	Unidentified Objects	No Damage
Mon	20/10/2008	21:35	2 males	Spurr Road	Paving Slab	DAMAGED Windscreen
Wed	22/10/2008	09:25	Youths 8-10yrs - bottle green uniform	Spur Road	Stones	No Damage
Wed	29/10/2008	09:19	2 young lads throwing stones at vehcile	Spur Road	Stones	No Damage
Wed	29/10/2008	15:02	2 Youths	Spur Road	Unidentified Objects	No Damage
Wed	29/10/2008	15:12	2 Youths	Spur Road	Stones	No Damage

Table 1: Incident Summary

Month	No. Incidents
06-Apr	5
06-May	3
06-Jun	2
06-Jul	1
06-Aug	1
06-Sep	1
06-Oct	3
06-Nov	2
06-Dec	4
07-Jan	1
07-Feb	1
07-Mar	1
07-Apr	1
07-May	1
07-Jun	0
07-Jul	0
07-Aug	0
07-Sep	1
07-Oct	0
07-Nov	4
07-Dec	0
08-Jan	0
08-Feb	0
08-Mar	1
08-Apr	0
08-May	0
08-Jun	0
08-Jul	0
08-Aug	0
08-Sep	1
08-Oct	5

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**Chart 1: Incident Frequency**





Photos 1 & 2: Enclosure Installed at Hough Green Railway Footbridge