

FRAW News- July 2020



We hope that all our members and supporters are keeping fit, healthy, safe and in good spirits. This is only our second FRAW News this year so far but we hope that everyone on our email list has enjoyed and found useful our weekly submissions to them. In our last message we promised an update on the ongoing and long-standing sagas of Dowies Mill Weir and the Salvesen Steps replacement. Please get in touch for any further information.

DOWIES MILL WEIR – Possible good news

As previously reported, at a meeting later last year between the council and FRAW and our other local partnership organisations, agreement was gained to investigate our alternative to the council's preferred option. To summarise, by repairing the existing weir and installing fish easement below it would remove the visual and environmental risks posed by the preferred option. It would also be substantially cheaper in our view. It has understandably taken some time to implement this decision but we have just been advised by the council the following message that the process is going forward. This is good and welcome news which we hope will lead ultimately to a decision in line with the wishes of the large majority of local residents.

As you are aware, the City of Edinburgh Council has been looking at options for Dowies Mill Weir for some time in line with the Water Environment Framework legislation. After the feedback received from comment online and at the hosted exhibition, we are now in a position to be able to tender for costed design drawings for option 2 – partial notched removal at a central point in the weir with consolidation of the rest of the structure including appropriate provision for fish passage (based on Cramond Colab previous submission). The exercise will also include estimated costs for maintaining the weir/pass over its lifespan and a direct comparison for all attributes between options 1 and 2.

Covid-19 has impacted this process in terms of timescales, however we are looking to press on with the tendering and appointment process for the work described above. The whole project has been given an extension by Scot Gov meaning the support we receive from the Forth Rivers Trust can continue. Our Floods and Structures department have also been feeding into the procurement process.

Once the tendering spec is published, we should have fixed timescales for delivery meaning a report for committee should be written for inclusion autumn/early winter period with a view to works being undertaken mid-2021.

We are unsure if a possible obstacle remains. Officials in the Scottish Government, who control the multi-million pound funding of the River Life Project have stated that these funds cannot be used for 'repairs'. We strongly disagree with this interpretation and have requested a meeting, facilitated by our SMP Alex Cole-Hamilton with the Scottish Government. This is likely to await the end of the lock-down.

SALVESEN STEPS REPLACEMENT – Not good news.

Bad news has alas replaced the more optimistic mood of earlier 2019. Many of our members will recall that since 2013 we have promoted the replacement of the Steps by a disability compliant route around the rock-face. The resultant progress has been painfully slow with many disappointments along the way despite encouraging commitment expressed by officials and elected members of the council. Meanwhile the Steps have been closed twice – once in 2016 for repairs and once in 2017 for demolition and replacement by temporary scaffolding.

More recently, encouraged by the active commitment by the sustainable travel organisation Sustrans, the project has moved ahead at a more detectable pace. In this process FRAW has actively participated in meetings with the council, Sustrans and commissioned structural engineers. Our aim has been to see the various surveys etc through to an actual costing for the project. The final phase for this was to have been rock-drilling to test the stability of the vital path supporting brackets. However, the consulting engineers considered that they already had sufficient data to produce a costing without this and at a video conference in March this year these costings were finally presented.

The cost was expected to be high. Unfortunately, the sum presented was in the region of three times the available funds of £1M plus. Several factors had been at work. The structure is not a standard type of construction; therefore the possible risks were high. However, the 'optimum bias' or what would normally be termed 'contingences' were calculated at the very top of the range for the entire job – excessively so in our view. Also the specified structure around the rock-face was a considerable height over the water level to take account of a 200 year maximum flood level. This too in the view of some of us was excessive and unlikely and inflated the cost by the consequential need for long access ramps at each end. Thirdly, a drilled testing of the rock composition might have resulted in a more precise cost estimate of this crucial feature of the project. Nevertheless, it probably has to be accepted that that this particular option is unlikely to proceed. This is very sad indeed in view of the time, money and effort expended on it.

What now can happen? Sustrans are still very interested in the project as it fits all its criteria. They are looking into alternatives such as a double bridge option. There are of course snags with this idea as with all possible options. We have suggested that a tunnel might offer several advantages. Looking at all possibilities we have also looked at lifts at both ends – not such a way-out idea as first thoughts might indicate.

It would be a major upset, even defeat, should no solution be found for replacing the Steps. The council are keen to remove the scaffolding construction as soon as possible as it is far from satisfactory and a continuing financial drain. The council's first choice should the scheme collapse is likely to be to use their reserved funds for removing the scaffolding and replace the Steps with a permanent structure. This would be most regrettable as what is specified as a 'core path' would remain contrary to disability legislation. The worst possible outcome would be to remove the Steps without a replacement thus ending the Walkway as a continuous entity. This may be thought to be unthinkable but in the anticipated financial climate after the present emergency anything is possible. We together with our partner local organisations would of course fight this tooth and nail but greater priorities could be difficult to overcome.

FINALLY ON A CHEERIER NOTE – here are some nice pictures of the Cramond Brig and it's (under threat) surroundings taken during the lockdown.

