

**Letter from Geoff Weir**  
**Secretary to the Whitchurch Bridge Company**  
**To the Bulletin**

The Whitchurch Bridge Company (the Company) submitted its well publicised Toll Application to the Department for Transport (DfT) in October 2008 for an increase in the cash toll from 20p to 40p. The subsequent well attended Public Inquiry held in June 2009 scrutinised the evidence very carefully and cross examined the Company on the reasons for the proposed reconstruction of the bridge in 2013, its history of financial management and provision for funding the project, its current financial situation and its financial projections to 2023.

The Toll Application and the Public Inquiry process validated both the reasons for the reconstruction and the careful and professional way in which the Company manages its finances. The Inspector's recommendation that the Toll increase be granted was accepted by the Secretary of State for Transport.

The cash toll was increased to 40p in October 2009, which should enable the Company to proceed with the reconstruction of the Bridge in 2013-2014, albeit that it is likely that the Company will still have a financial shortfall to fund.

The Company recognises that any increase in the tolls is unwelcome, but its obligation to provide a safe crossing over this point of the river is its priority. This was well understood at the Public Inquiry.

Whilst the Company is not obliged under its legislation to offer discounts it nevertheless offers these to users by way of Bridge Cards - these offer savings for regular users and efficiency benefits for the Toll collecting operation.

The discounted rate for crossing has increased from 13.89p to 20p with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010. This increase has been done in one step rather than as a phased increase because of the delay of some 4 months in being able to implement the new cash toll of 40p. This delay was the result of the number of objections to the Toll Application and the time taken by the DfT to set up and hold the Public Inquiry in June 2009. The loss of revenue over this period was some £60,000 and the Inquiry itself cost the Company some £40,000 – a total cost to the Company of some £100,000.

Although the new concessionary Bridge Card Toll of 20p gives a substantial 50% discount on the cash Toll, the Company wishes to limit further the impact of the concessionary rate on frequent users of the Bridge, including, particularly, local residents who need to use the Bridge several times each day. Therefore the Company has introduced a Frequent User Scheme which will allow any Bridge Card user an unlimited number of crossings for a fixed price of £18 per month, which is less than 60p or 3 crossings per day.

Neither the cash toll or the Bridge Card toll will be increased again until 2013 at the earliest, unless another Toll Application is submitted by the Company and approved by the Secretary of State.

The Company plans to submit its Planning Application for the reconstruction of the Bridge in early 2011. Discussions have been held with Planning officers from South Oxfordshire District Council and the Company believes that its proposals will fulfil the Planning requirements for this Grade 2 listed Bridge. However, the Company is aware that the Planning process and any additional requirements could add delay and cost to the reconstruction of the Bridge.

There is more detailed information on the Company website at [www.whitchurchbridge.com](http://www.whitchurchbridge.com) which is the Company's principal means of communication to users of the Bridge and the general public.

Finally, on a personal note I would like to thank our Bridge users for their courtesy towards our Toll Collectors during the last year.

Geoff Weir