

**The Essex County Council (B183 Sheering Road (Ealing Bridge No.89) Sheering)
(7.5 Tonne Environmental Weight Limit) Order 202***

STATEMENT OF REASONS

Summary of the location

Ealing Bridge is located on the B183 Sheering Road on the eastern edge of Harlow and western edge of Epping Forest within a semi-rural setting, forming part of the local road network connecting the town to surrounding villages such as Sheering. The bridge carries a single carriageway over Pincey Brook and operates under traffic management due to structural constraints, including a 3.5 metre Width Restriction and a 7.5 Tonne Weight Limit, resulting in signal-controlled single-lane operation.

The surrounding area comprises low-density residential properties with open countryside nearby, and traffic is typically local in nature, including residents, commuter movements between Harlow and rural settlements, and light commercial vehicles, with through Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) movements restricted. Nearby features include dispersed housing, bus stops, local schools within the wider CM17 area, and access to Harlow's town centre amenities and rail services within approximately 2 km.

Reasons for the Proposed Changes

Sheering Road at Ealing Bridge in Epping Forest is subject to traffic management measures due to structural constraints associated with the bridge. The bridge contains previously extended elements that are structurally weak and an arch with limited load-bearing capacity. As a result, temporary restrictions were introduced to ensure public safety and prevent further deterioration.

The carriageway across the bridge is constrained, necessitating a reduction from two-way traffic to a single lane controlled by two-way traffic signals. Physical barriers are installed to protect vulnerable structural elements. In addition, a temporary width restriction of 3.5 metres and a weight restriction of 7.5 tonnes apply at this location.

Advance warning signage is installed across the surrounding road network to inform drivers of the restrictions and enable appropriate route planning. The current signage strategy will be kept under review to ensure it remains effective in discouraging HGVs from using the structure.

The proposed introduction of a 7.5 Tonne permanent Environmental Weight restriction is intended to formalise and support the existing structural limitation.

By implementing an environmental weight restriction, the highway authority can better manage traffic using the bridge, restricting use by heavier goods vehicles while allowing exemptions for essential services, including local buses. This approach ensures that the continued operation of the bus service is safeguarded, despite the structural constraints of the bridge.

Given the lack of viable diversionary routes, maintaining access for public transport is a key consideration. The proposal is therefore necessary to balance infrastructure protection with operational transport needs.

Whilst the term "permanent" may imply a final or long-term solution, this is not the intended future approach for the bridge. The overarching objective is to upgrade the structure to meet full highway loading standards (40 tonnes) and subsequently remove the current restrictions. However, while the design phase continues—recognising its complexity and scale—it is necessary to retain appropriate interim measures and legal orders to ensure safety and manage use of the structure until the main strengthening works can be delivered.

Benefits of the Proposed Changes

The proposed changes will provide several key benefits:

- Continued restriction of vehicles over 7.5 tonnes will help manage loading on the bridge and minimise the risk of damage to the weak structure whilst the design is progressed.
- The proposal enables buses to continue using the bridge, maintaining reliable public transport links for local residents and supporting sustainable travel.
- The environmental restriction will discourage inappropriate use by heavy goods vehicles, reducing unnecessary loading and improving overall safety on the approach roads.
- By allowing the bus service to remain on its existing route, the proposal avoids significant disruption, delays, and potential accessibility issues that would result from rerouting, which again supports & maintains sustainable travel.

Overall, the scheme provides a balanced and proportionate solution, ensuring public safety, protecting critical infrastructure, and supporting the continued operation of essential transport services.