

Reducing Access to Means as Part of a Suicide Prevention Strategy

[\(135\) I Jumped Off The Golden Gate Bridge - YouTube](#)



Suicide from the Clifton Suspension Bridge:

Nowers M, Gunnell D (1996) Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 1996: 50: 30-32



- David Gunnell and Mike Nowers carried out a case control study Of falls from the Bridge between 1974 and 1993
- During this period there were 127 falls
- They concluded that patterns of suicide in the (then) Bristol and District Health Authority area were affected by The presence of the Bridge
- *‘Provision of safety measures on the bridge may lead to the prevention of some suicides’*

Effect of barriers **on** the Clifton suspension bridge, on local patterns of suicide

Bennewith O, Nowers M, Gunnell D. (2007) The British Journal of Psychiatry, Vol 190: 3



- Barriers were put on the bridge in 1994
- Researchers assessed the effect of the installation of barriers on the bridge, by examining suicide data 5 years before (1994 – 98) and 5 years after (1999- 2003)
- Deaths from the bridge halved from 8.2 per year (1994-98) to 4.0 per year (1999 – 2003)
- Although 90% of the suicides from the bridge were males, there was no evidence of an increase in male suicide from other sites
- *‘This study provides evidence for the effectiveness of barriers on bridges in preventing site – specific suicides and suicides by jumping in the surrounding area’*

Place of Suicide in Devon 2015-17

Public Health Devon



Home

57%

122 deaths



Hospital

15%

32 deaths



Elsewhere

28%

61 deaths

Devon Case Study



- Devon has the largest stock of bridges in the UK
- In 2016 Devon County Council were approached by about a particular bridge in the North of the county
- There had been 72 reported suicide related incidents in one year
- A multi – agency group was formed including: Police; Ambulance; Fire Service; RNLI; Public Health England; DCC Highways; DCC Public Health and people with Lived Experience

Process

- A multi agency meeting was convened in April 2016 following a number of suicide attempts on Barnstaple Bridge.

First Stage:

- Highways agreed to extend meshing to the top third of the barrier
- Samaritans provided signage
- Letter of Hope shortened and added

Second Stage:

- Parapet fence was modified



Enablers



- DCC has in-house engineers and the capability to make decisions needed
- The numerous bridge closures required to deal with incidents was having an impact on the local economy which helped with the business case
- Local MP and campaigners were a galvanising factor – it helped bring agencies together
- Made use of existing knowledge from other regional bridge teams

'It was vital to share research and data about suicide with the multi agency team. Once they understood that suicide is preventable and if a bridge is made safe it will save lives because research shows that people simply don't go elsewhere, it made a big difference to their willingness to support more expensive work'

Challenges



- This bridge was owned by DCC, but some Bridges are privately owned which can be problematic
- Design issues with modifying the parapet fence
- Little appetite for suicide prevention to be considered at the design stage of new structures

Impact



Between January and December 2019 there were 24 incidents on the Bridge

Between January and December 2020 there were 3 incidents

A comment from the police log from someone states :

'The changes on the bridge has made it too difficult to climb!'

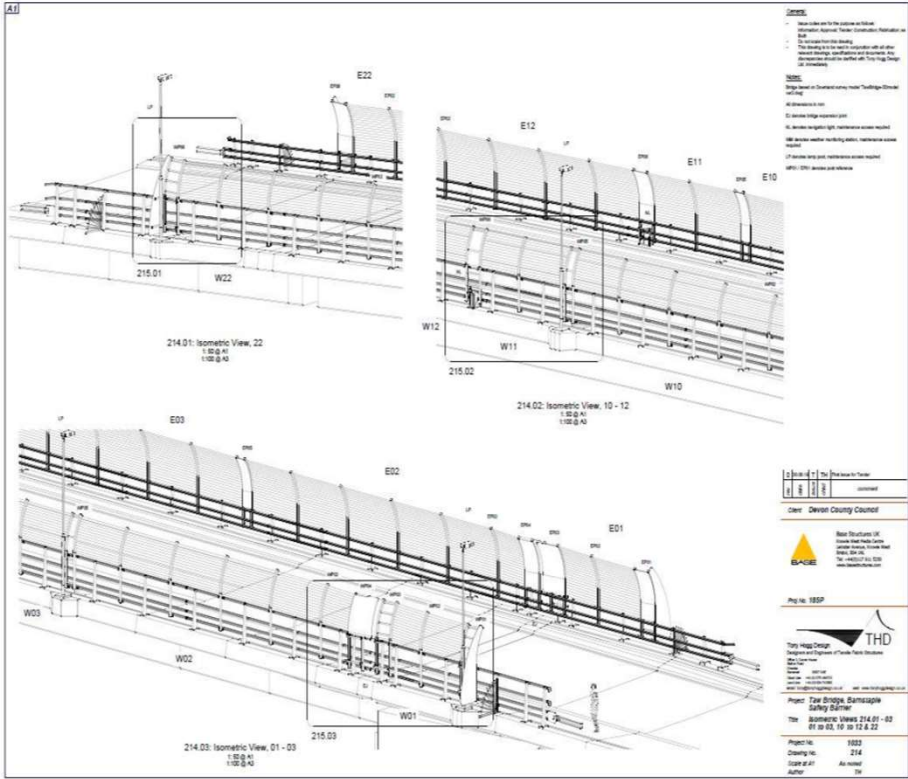
This resulted in her not being able to scale the bridge and gave time for services to respond and make her safe

Learning Points



- Don't be afraid to do an engineering intervention - It is an evolving approach to a long-term Public Health issues
- Look at options such as signage and options to prevent people getting to the outside of the bridge
- Increasing the parapet is the most expensive bit – stopping access to the bridge can certainly help in the meantime

- Speak to someone who has already done this, seek advice from each other
- Looking ahead, this work will set a precedent and deliver some tangible evidence of what amendments can be made to similar bridges that pose a known risk safer.
- Devon Highways have continued an open dialogue with NSPA and the local police which enables better reporting and understanding of incidents and attempts



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