

## Improving Protective Measures For Pedestrians At The Clifton Suspension Bridge And Avon Gorge

### Outline:

Chief Inspector Chegwyn has been working with senior managers from Avon Fire and Rescue Service and South Western Ambulance Service, the Bridgemaster Trisha Johnson and representatives from Bristol City Council, third sector agencies and families bereaved by suicide for some time. The intention of this work has been:

- a) To identify apparent trends in the identification of the Gorge area as a chosen suicide spot
- b) To address instances where a series of suicides are linked to a particular establishment (you may have noted the recent national media coverage relating to the University of Bristol on this subject)
- c) To consider if there is anything we can reasonably achieve to reduce risk of harm at the site

### Specific proposal:

In 1998, barriers were installed on the Bridge which significantly reduced deaths by suicide from the bridge. We feel we can achieve further significant reductions in deaths and serious injuries by developing unobtrusive protective measures at the gorge.

Given the value of the bridge and gorge, we accept that we are highly unlikely to be able to identify a physical solution (barriers etc.) which is acceptable to the relevant preservation bodies and land-owners which would **completely prevent** suicide and also not adversely impact tourism.

However, we do believe there are steps we can take to **improve existing provisions**. In talking about the site, I refer to three specific areas which are: The Observatory, the Bird Watchers' site and the Sea Walls. All three locations have some natural protection in the form of low metal railings, variable quantities of prickly foliage and in places, improvised repairs constructed from wire mesh.

We will explore physical measures which can be taken at the site which would have

- Limited visual impact
- Improved deterrence for distressed people seeking to self-harm
- The facility for existing users of the site (bird watchers, climbers etc.) to safely access it without making the area more appealing for distressed people

Our intention is to seek a general agreement from the Society of Merchant Venturers and the Lord Mayor on behalf of Bristol City Council (along with any other bodies you recommend) that they will give consideration to any measures we identify and fully debate whether or not they might consent to some structural improvements at the gorge.

Should we receive such an assurance, we will then seek similar assurances from Historic England, Natural England and the Clifton Suspension Bridge Committee regarding their willingness to consider such measures.

We would like to investigate measures such as:

- Permitting increased growth of appropriate spiny or prickly plants to unobtrusively block easy access to the cliff edge
- In specific places, fitting slightly taller and significantly more robust wrought iron or steel railings
- At certain sites, fitting appropriately sourced and constructed glass panels to allow views and discourage inappropriate access

We believe that attempting to source the funding to do this, it is appropriate and sensible to learn if key stakeholders like the Council and the Society would be willing to consider such suggestions.

We expect that any practical work on this issue would require the Working Group to look at sourcing funding from a broad spectrum of agencies, charities and organisations.

I look forward to hearing from you on whether or not this subject can be included in the agenda for the next meeting of the Downs Committee.

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**Mental Health Liaison Officer**  
**Chief Constable's Staff Office**  
**Avon and Somerset Constabulary**