

## **Whitchurch Toll Bridge has a new owner**



The General Estates Company Ltd, based in Hythe near Southampton, has become the new owner and operator of the Whitchurch toll bridge, having bought the privately-owned bridge company.

Geoff Weir, company secretary of Whitchurch Bridge (Holdings) Ltd said today: "Our directors are approaching retirement and for the last two years have been working to secure the future

of The Company of Proprietors of Whitchurch Bridge (COPWB) in order to ensure that the Bridge continues to be properly managed as an important part of the local highway infrastructure. We offered it to both local highways authorities. There was no interest from West Berkshire Council, but we know that Oxfordshire County Council considered the proposition carefully before deciding not to proceed. We then initiated talks with The General Estates Company as we know they have expertise in running toll bridges. The recent sale is the culmination of those talks. The Bridge Manager and her toll collecting staff will remain in post. COPWB will continue to operate under its Acts of 1792 and 1988, and the regulation of Tolls will continue unchanged."

It is understood that the General Estates Company, which has been in business for over 100 years, owns and operates the Batheaston Toll Bridge near Bath and also has an interest in Dunham Toll Bridge which crosses the River Trent. The company also operates a large number of mobile home parks. The company has been a shareholder in the Whitchurch Bridge Company for many years.

The following statement has been issued:

*The Directors of Whitchurch Bridge (Holdings) Limited announce today that the Company of Proprietors of Whitchurch Bridge has been acquired by General Estates Company Ltd based in Hythe, Hampshire. The Company of Proprietors of Whitchurch Bridge has been the bridge owner since the construction of the first Whitchurch Bridge in 1792, and was responsible for the recent reconstruction in 2013-2014. It is constituted under its own Act of Parliament which requires it to maintain the bridge in perpetuity, and that obligation, together with the rights to collect tolls subject to the approval of the Secretary of State for Transport, remains unchanged.*

*Commenting on the sale Mike Beckley, Chairman of Whitchurch Bridge Holdings said "General Estates has been a shareholder for over 90 years and have a long history of prudent family ownership. We are confident that they will be a good custodian of Whitchurch Bridge".*

*James Percy, Managing Director of General Estates commented "I am pleased to have acquired the Company of Proprietors of Whitchurch Bridge and look forward to building on the good work of Mike and his fellow directors in securing the long-term prospects of the bridge. The bridge is efficiently run and we have no intention to change how it's operated in the foreseeable future".*

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