

B968 Aboyne Bridge

Community Drop-In Feedback Summary

January / February 2026

Prepared by Fix Aboyne Bridge

fixaboynebridge.org

*Based on 125 individual responses collected by Aberdeenshire Council
from 127 feedback forms across in-person, online, email, and Community Council channels*

Introduction

Aberdeenshire Council held two community drop-in sessions to present options for the B968 Aboyne Bridge: one at Birse Hall on 29 January 2026 and one at Aboyne Scout Hall on 4 February 2026. An online feedback form was also available, closing on 19 February. Additional responses were received by direct email and via Aboyne Community Council.

In total, 127 feedback forms were collected, although not every attendee completed a form. This document summarises all 125 published written responses to Question 2: “Do you have any comments on the options presented today?”

The purpose of this summary is to give the community a clear, accessible overview of what was said — the preferences, the concerns, and the questions that remain unanswered. It has been prepared by the Fix Aboyne Bridge community action group and is based entirely on the published feedback.

Participation

Responses came from residents on both the north (Aboyne) and south (Birse/Birsemore) sides of the river, across multiple channels.

Channel	North (Aboyne)	South (Birse)
In Person – Birse (29 Jan)	1	21
In Person – Aboyne (4 Feb)	34	3
Online	26	39
Direct Email	1	–
Aboyne Community Council	1	1
Total	127 feedback forms	

The high proportion of south-side online responses (39 of 65 online forms) likely reflects the difficulty Birse residents have in travelling to attend in person — itself a consequence of the bridge closure.

Option Preferences

The council presented two main options: repair of the existing bridge using a propping/suspension system, and construction of a modular (Bailey) bridge alongside the existing structure. A number of respondents also raised the case for a completely new replacement bridge. The following reflects the balance of stated preferences across all 125 responses.

Existing Bridge Propping and Repair

This was the most frequently preferred option. Supporters cited several advantages:

- Longer lifespan — estimates of 60–90 years (some heard 120 years) compared with 30–40 years for the modular option
- Retains two-lane traffic, avoiding the bottleneck of a single-lane bridge with traffic lights
- Preserves the appearance of the village and the listed bridge structure
- Avoids the significant disruption to Charlestown Road parking, the Boat Inn, and the canoe club

- A number of respondents argued that a full life-cycle cost analysis — factoring in the shorter modular lifespan, ongoing maintenance, and the cost of eventually dealing with the old bridge anyway — would favour repair
- No additional flood risk from new structures in the floodplain

Modular (Bailey) Bridge

This option had significant but lesser support. Its advocates primarily valued speed of delivery, although many acknowledged the timescale difference was smaller than expected (approximately six months). Supporters cited:

- Potentially faster construction timeline
- Full 40-tonne weight rating, reconnecting Birse to essential services and enabling heavy vehicle access
- A pragmatic “get something done” approach after more than two years of closure

However, even some modular supporters expressed reservations about its appearance (5 metres high), the single-lane restriction, and the practical impact on village life.

New Replacement Bridge

A notable minority regarded a completely new bridge as the only truly future-proof solution, offering a 120-year design life and eliminating the uncertainties of repairing a 90-year-old structure. Most acknowledged the cost is likely prohibitive under current budgets but argued this option should not be ruled out entirely. Two respondents suggested alternative locations, including the end of Rhu-na-Haven Road and near the gliding strip.

“Just Fix It”

A number of respondents expressed no strong preference between options, stating simply that whichever could be delivered fastest was acceptable. The overriding message from this group was frustration at the lack of progress and a demand for action.

Key Concerns

Timescale and Delay

This was the single most prominent concern across all responses. The bridge has been closed to vehicles since late 2023 — over two years at the time of the drop-in sessions. Both options presented carry a further estimated timeline of approximately two to three years, meaning the community faces the prospect of six years without a functioning road crossing at Aboyne. Multiple respondents questioned why, given the time already elapsed, parallel workstreams had not been progressed and why bodies such as SEPA had not already been engaged.

Financial Hardship on Residents

The closure is imposing a direct financial burden on residents, particularly those living south of the river. Respondents cited the cost of additional mileage (commonly an extra 20+ miles per day), increased fuel and vehicle wear, and in one case the need to purchase, insure, and maintain a second car at a cost approaching £5,000 — for a family dependent on Universal Credit. Several elderly residents described difficulty accessing Aboyne’s surgery, shops, and school, and some indicated they may have to sell their homes.

Emergency Services and Safety

Multiple respondents raised serious concern about delayed emergency response times to properties south of the river. The diversion routes via Dinnet or Potarch add significant time, particularly in poor weather. Several respondents stated bluntly that it may take a fatality before the urgency is properly recognised.

Impact on the Boat Inn and Charlestown Road

The modular bridge option would require parking restrictions on Charlestown Road and changes to the road layout adjacent to the Boat Inn. This was one of the most frequently cited objections to the modular option. The Boat Inn was described repeatedly as the last remaining pub and restaurant in Aboyne (following the closure of the Huntly Arms), operating as a social hub for the community and an important part of the local tourist economy. It is also currently for sale. Respondents noted that loss of parking would also affect walkers, the canoe club, and residents.

Riverbank Erosion and Flood Risk

Several respondents with apparent local knowledge raised concerns that the north bank near the proposed modular bridge location is actively eroding, particularly since Storm Frank. The river's main flow has shifted toward the south-west channel, accelerating erosion on the village side. Concerns were also raised about debris blocking the modular bridge's flood arches in future storm events, and about the adequacy of a mid-river prop in the face of increasing climate-related flood severity.

Dinnet, Potarch, and Bridge of Ess

The condition of neighbouring bridges was raised by many respondents. Dinnet Bridge, which now carries greatly increased traffic including heavy timber lorries, was identified as needing urgent repairs first flagged in 2019. Several respondents asked what happens if Dinnet Bridge also fails while Aboyne remains closed. Questions were also raised about the inspection status of Potarch Bridge and the Bridge of Ess, and about road safety at the Potarch junction with the A93.

Listed Building Status

Multiple respondents called for the Category B listing of Aboyne Bridge to be reviewed or removed, arguing that heritage status should not take precedence over a functioning community crossing. At least one respondent formally requested this at the previous drop-in session in March 2024 and asked what action, if any, had been taken. One respondent pointed out that a structure which has failed within its expected lifespan is arguably not a triumph of innovation worth preserving.

Historic Environment Scotland (HES)

At least one well-informed respondent warned that HES has not been consulted on the modular bridge option and would almost certainly object and call in any planning application, potentially causing further delay and making the modular option undeliverable in practice. The council's position that HES "cannot block it" was acknowledged as technically correct but practically misleading.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Several respondents referred directly to deteriorating mental health as a consequence of the prolonged closure. Isolation, anxiety about elderly relatives, and the cumulative stress of daily disruption were recurring themes. One respondent's feedback consisted almost entirely of describing the emotional and financial toll on their family.

Economic Impact on Aboyne

The bridge closure has reduced footfall in the village, affecting shops, hospitality businesses, and the broader tourism economy. One respondent reported losing bed and breakfast bookings because two wedding venues are now on the wrong side of the bridge. Another highlighted the importance of the crossing for the 50,000+ annual visitors to Tarland Trails and the wider Howe of Cromar. Several respondents asked who is conducting a formal social and economic impact assessment.

Communication and Process

Criticism of the council's communication was widespread and forceful. The main themes were:

- Demand for a Town Hall meeting rather than drop-in sessions, so the community can hear consistent answers and discuss options collectively
- Call for published minutes, timelines, costings, and engineering reports (including the WSP options report, P1 inspection reports for Dinnet, Potarch, and Bridge of Ess, and scour surveys)
- Request that all consultation feedback be published in full on Engage Aberdeenshire
- Frustration that there has been no direct communication with the most severely affected households
- Criticism that some residents received different information from different staff at the same session
- Questions about whether the consultation feedback will genuinely influence the decision, or whether the sessions are for public relations purposes only
- A specific request that display materials be made available in the library or community centre so residents can study the details at readable scale

Several respondents acknowledged that council officers were professional, knowledgeable, and helpful at the sessions. The criticism is directed primarily at institutional communication and decision-making processes, not at the individuals present on the day.

Questions Raised but Unanswered

The feedback contained a number of specific, direct questions that respondents expected to see addressed. These include:

- What are the accurate, published timescales and costs for each option?
- Who is conducting a social and economic impact assessment, and when will it be published?
- Has the listed building status of Aboyne Bridge been reviewed as formally requested in March 2024?
- When were the most recent Principal Inspections (P1) carried out on Dinnet Bridge, Potarch Bridge, and Bridge of Ess, and what did they find?

- Have scour surveys been carried out on Aboyne Bridge? If so, when?
- Has consideration been given to load-testing the bridge columns to determine if restricted traffic could be permitted in the interim?
- Has HES been consulted on the modular bridge option? If not, why not?
- Has SEPA been formally engaged? If not, why has this not been progressed in parallel?
- What contingency is in place if further problems are uncovered during the repair process?
- What weighting will cost, human impact, and other factors carry in the final decision?
- Where is the money coming from, and has the case been made to the Scottish Government for additional funding?
- Is any financial support available to directly affected residents, and if so, how can it be accessed?
- Has an equalities impact assessment been carried out on the current closure?

Conclusion

The community's message is clear: the bridge must be restored to vehicle traffic as a matter of urgency, and the preferred route for the majority of respondents is repair of the existing bridge. Where the modular option is preferred, it is almost always on the assumption that it would be significantly faster — an assumption undermined by the council's own estimates showing only a modest difference in timescale.

Beneath the option preferences lies a deeper frustration: two and a half years have passed since the bridge closed, and the community feels no closer to a resolution. Residents are experiencing real financial hardship, social isolation, and anxiety about emergency access. Trust in the council's handling of the situation is low, and calls for transparency, accountability, and a proper Town Hall meeting are near-universal.

The Fix Aboyne Bridge group urges Aberdeenshire Council to publish a clear, costed, and time-bound plan; to engage HES, SEPA, and other statutory bodies in parallel rather than sequentially; to explore every possibility for interim access; and to communicate directly and regularly with the community.

This is a community that has shown remarkable patience and resilience. That resilience should not be mistaken for acceptance.