

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Enterprise Planning and Infrastructure
DATE	29 AUGUST 2013
DIRECTOR	Gordon McIntosh
TITLE OF REPORT	Union Bridge – Suicide Prevention Measures
REPORT NUMBER	EPI/13/128

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is in response to the following motion raise by Councillor's Kiddie and Cormie at the meeting of Council on 1st May 2013:

“In view of recent tragedies, that Council consults the NHS, Police Scotland - Aberdeen City Division and the Samaritans and calls for a report thereafter on possible measures to prevent access to the parapet of Union Bridge, which may involve placing decorative spikes, which would in turn require consultation with Historic Scotland given the bridge's listed status.”

The Committee Resolved:

‘To instruct officers to submit a full report to the next meeting on the terms of the motion, and to include reference to the measures which have been taken by other local authorities with similar issues.’

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee agree:

- a) To instruct officers to proceed with the development of option A and to submit applications as necessary for the relevant permissions
- b) The project to be funded from the Capital Project ‘City Centre transport Infrastructure’

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Officer's time for the investigation and preliminary design has been funded from the roads revenue budget.

It is estimated that option A would cost approximately £120k to install. Option B approximately £85K. The works could be funded from the Capital project budget for 'City Centre transport Infrastructure'.

Network Rail has confirmed in writing that it would waive costs associated with the installation work – i.e., the cost of track possessions.

4.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Union bridge is dominant in the city centre landscape. Any alterations to its appearance may attract comment and possibly opposition by way of objection to planning application.

5.0 BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

5.1 Two reports on suicide prevention measures at Union Bridge were submitted to committee in 2008. The outcome was the erection of signs on the bridge, advertising the Samaritans (February 2009):

5.2 In April 2013, the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Council – Choose Life Steering Group – Union Bridge Incident Review Sub Group, drew up an action plan for the site. Details of the plan are given in appendix 1.

5.3 Police Statistics for Incidents at the Bridge (threatening to jump or actually jumped)

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
13	14	29	17	12	15

There is also the possibility that injuries and even fatalities could be suffered by road and rail users as a result of someone jumping from the bridge.

5.4 The preparation of this report has considered the following physical measures as possible deterrents:

- i) Netting attached to the north face of the bridge.
- ii) Finials (spikes) attached to the top rail of the parapet.
- iii) Increasing the height of the existing parapet to a minimum of 2m above footpath level.

The installation of netting would require alterations to the existing listed structure. There are also concerns that the presence of the netting might be seen by some as a challenge and attract jumpers. In addition there would be maintenance issues with litter accumulating in the netting and the access required to clear it.

The attachment of finials to the top rail of the parapet was discussed with specialists in cast iron work. There was concern that they would not be able to get a fixing of suitable strength. There were also concerns about damage to the listed structure.

It was therefore decided to proceed with a more detailed investigation into the possibilities for increasing the height of the parapet.

- 5.5 Recent studies have concluded that the erection of barriers is effective in reducing suicide attempts at bridges. Whilst signage, provision of phones and CCTV surveillance can have some effect they should be seen as a supplement to the erection of barriers and not as an alternative. The studies consulted are listed as background papers.
- 5.6 Since the May committee a meeting has been held with Police Scotland the British Transport Police and Historic Scotland. Discussions have been held with Network Rail, and Choose Life Scotland.
- 5.7 Officers have drawn up two possible schemes for increasing the height of the parapet – these are detailed in appendix 2. Discussions with Aberdeen City planners and Historic Scotland indicate that option A or a variation on option A has less risk of being rejected for listed building consent than option B.
- 5.8 A wide range of measures have been used at bridge sites to prevent suicide attempts both here in the UK and worldwide. The report by Robert Dearman, listed below, gives the most comprehensive description of measures within the UK and can be made available to elected members on request.

6.0 IMPACT

Union Bridge is dominant in the landscape of Union Street/Union Terrace. Changes to its appearance will attract comment. This has to be balanced against the ongoing loss of life at the site and the possibility of third party injury or death.

7.0 MANAGEMENT OF RISK

There is a risk that listed building consent could be refused. However initial discussions have taken place with Historic Scotland and some indication of what might be possible indicated.

Police Scotland has requested the erection of temporary barriers as an interim measure in advance of a permanent barrier. There is a risk that the implementation of a permanent solution is prevented or significantly delayed leaving the temporary solution as the de facto permanent solution.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Knapp, McDaid and Parsonage, Mental Health promotion and Mental Illness prevention: The Economic Case, London 2011.

Draper John, Suicide Prevention Measures on Bridges: The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Position, New York 2008.

Dearman Robert, Hope for Bridge of Despair: Measures to Prevent Suicide at Archway Bridge, London 2001.

9.0 REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

Alan Robertson
Structures, Flooding and Coastal engineering Manager
alanr@aberdeencity.gov.uk
01224 (52)2419

Appendix 1

Action Plan Prepared by 'Chose Life' Steering Group – April 2013/Revised July 2013

Action Number	Task	Owner	Outcome
1	Provide constant CCTV coverage of footpath on Bridge	Police (Sgt Megan Heathershaw)	Police have operating procedure in place Complete
2	Replace signage on bridge	Neil Murray	Signs replaced on 3 rd April Complete
3	Street Pastors to give location passing attention. Also agreed to explore further training for Pastors and recruit a Pastor as a Safetalk Trainer	Gerry Bower	
4	City Wardens to provide passing attention and consider scheduling static duties in the area of the bridge. Training to be arranged for city centre wardens	Colin Walker Neil Murray	Met with Colin Walker on 19 th April and agreed that NM would speak informally to small groups of wardens to raise awareness of issues on the bridge and give advice on course of action to be taken in the event of someone seen in distress etc. Dates to be set. Email correspondence with Colin and likely dates to be 20/21/27/28 th June. Complete
5	Enhanced signage in the area of statue on	Neil Murray Colin Walker	Met with Colin Walker on 19 th April and agreed

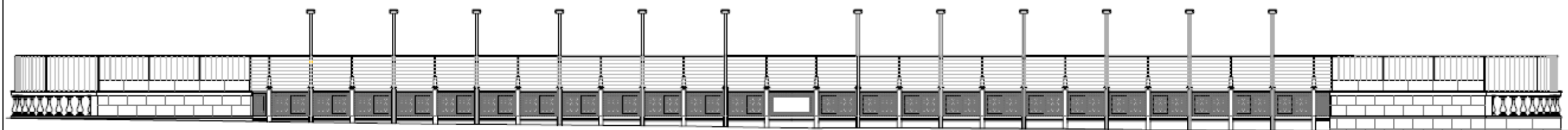
	Union Terrace junction		<p>to progress. 23rd April advised that flower tubs are sponsored by private companies: ACC to contact them to ascertain if they have objections to Samaritans signage on bench side of tubs displaying their adverts.</p> <p>23rd May Confirmed ACC to erect signs on "seat" side of pots. Posters delivered to Colin on 16/5/13</p> <p>Complete</p>
6	Brief staff in shops opposite bridge to report persons of concern to the Police (neighbourhood watch) Consider posters etc	<p>Sgt Megan Heathershaw</p> <p>Neil Murray</p>	<p>Consider meeting Emily McQueen Community Safety Officer ACC. All shops overlooking bridge visited and advice given and material left for staff.</p> <p>Complete</p>
7	Blast Adds in vicinity of bridge	Neil Murray	tbc
8	When operational, consider activity in area by City Ambassadors	<p>Colin Walker</p> <p>Neil Murray</p>	tbc
9	Information stand in Trinity Centre	Neil Murray	<p>Neil to arrange introductory meeting with Linda Stewart, Manager, Trinity Centre Management have been consulted and</p>

			agree to stand within Mall. To be considered in the autumn/winter.
10	Greater use of social networks to promote Choose Life message	Neil Murray	Consider meeting with Ruairi Campbell, Espionage to utilise message screens in city centre clubs. Further discussion with Police to take place.
11	Use existing pages on Police and ACC Facebook to promote Chose Life message	Neil Murray Colin Walker Insp Iain Maclelland	Link from Police facebook and twitter pages to Choose Life established 4 th April Complete
12	Adverts on buses	Neil Murray	Samaritans progressing this on buses and Scotrail services.
13	Links to Samaritans etc on ACC internet pages relating to bridge	Colin Walker Neil Murray	19 th April met with Colin walker. ACC have set up a dummy site to test the concept of linking to support pages when researching Union Bridge. 17/5/13 still being assessed
14	Global text messaging	Neil Murray	
15	Screen Projector and Safe Space Vehicle	Neil Murray	Kath at Samaritans contacted to source electronic version of poster (on bridge) sent to Police for inclusion in ppt display. Requesting email sent 17/5/13.

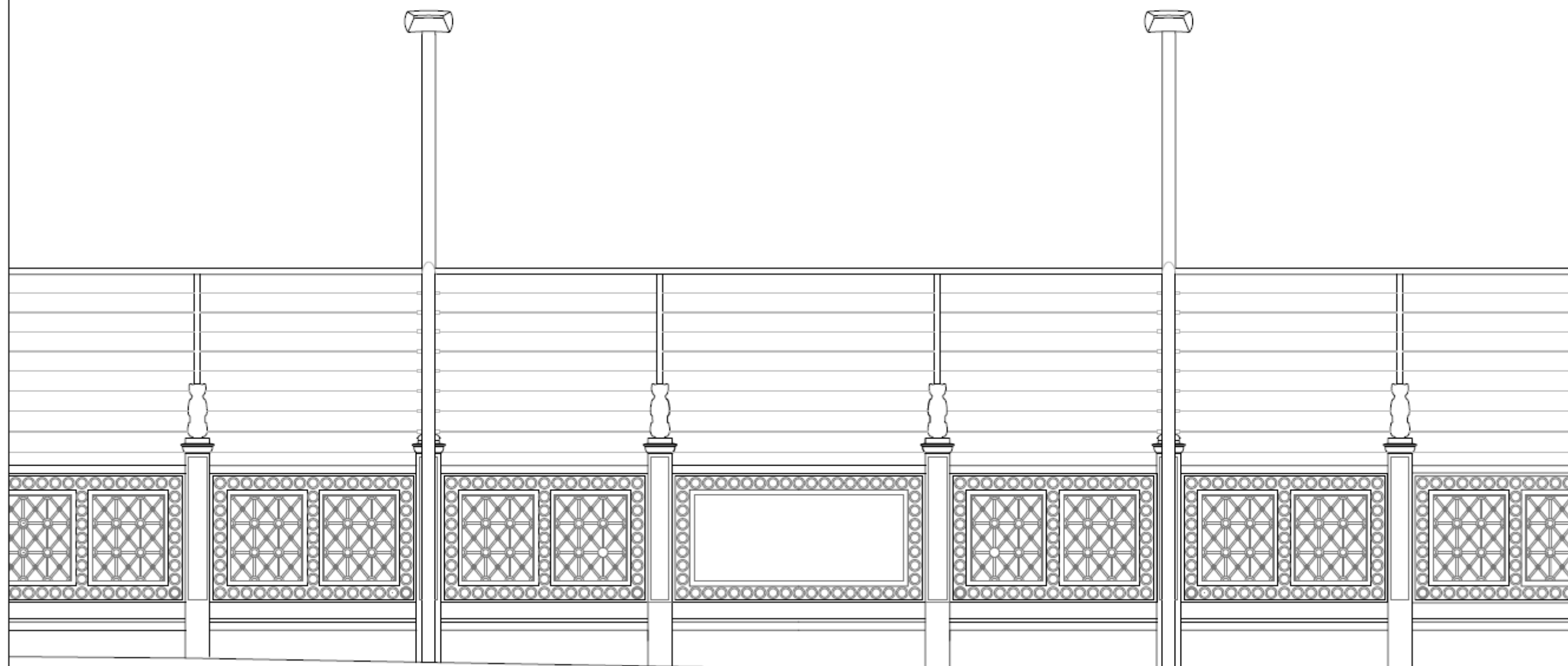
			Confirmed this will go ahead in the autumn. Samaritans and Choose Life will be present at launch.
16	Make contact with Andrena Lawrence at Marywell Health Clinic re Homeless	Neil Murray	16/5/13 Email sent to Andrena suggesting dates for meeting. Very good meeting, Andrena now an 'Ambassador'. Significant CL material available to homeless community.
17	Make contact with Susan Montgomery and Scott at Aberdeen Cyrenians	Neil Murray	Met with Susan on 16/5/13 and arranged introductory meeting with her and Scott early June. Because of sickness meeting postponed to August.

Appendix 2

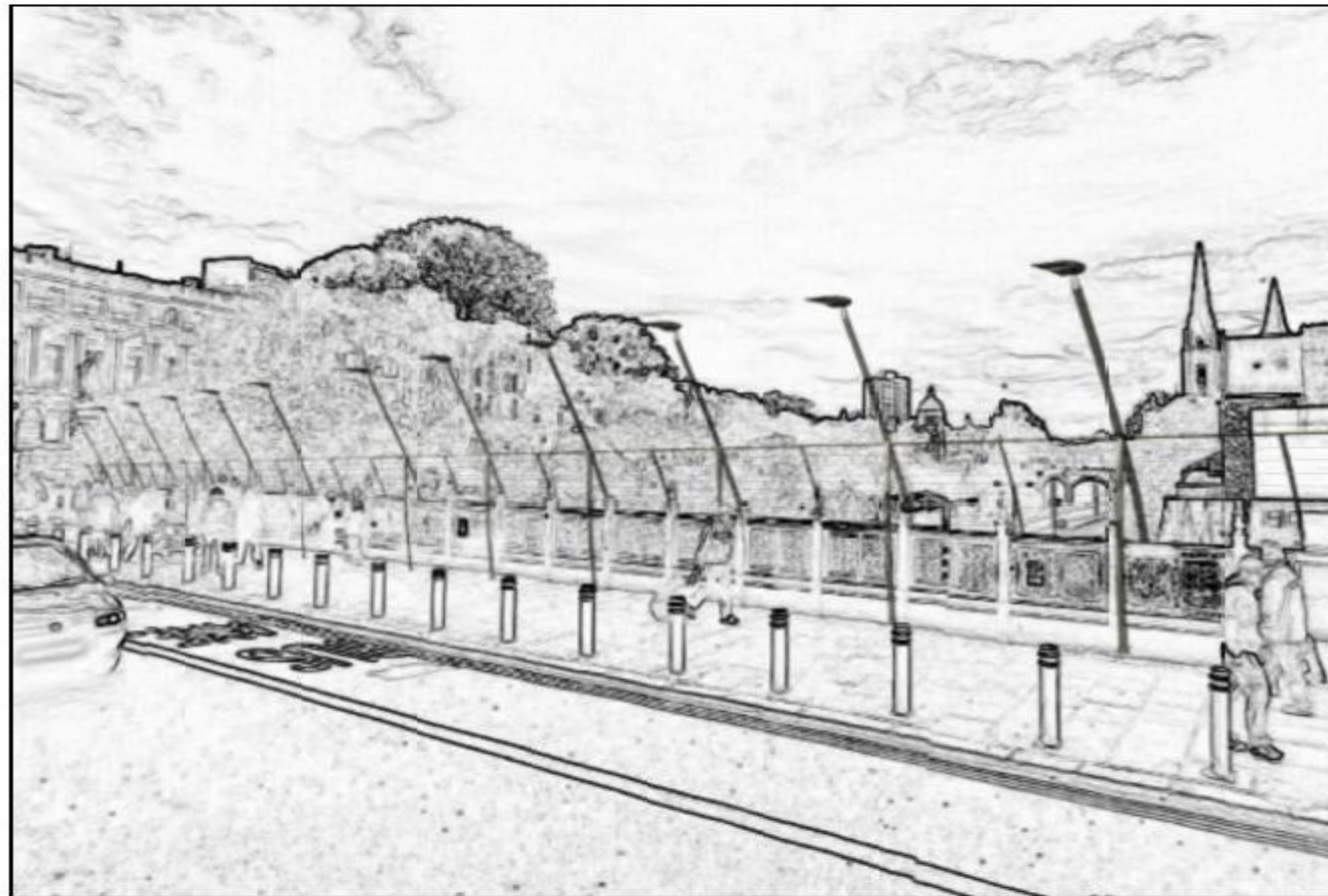
(Option A)



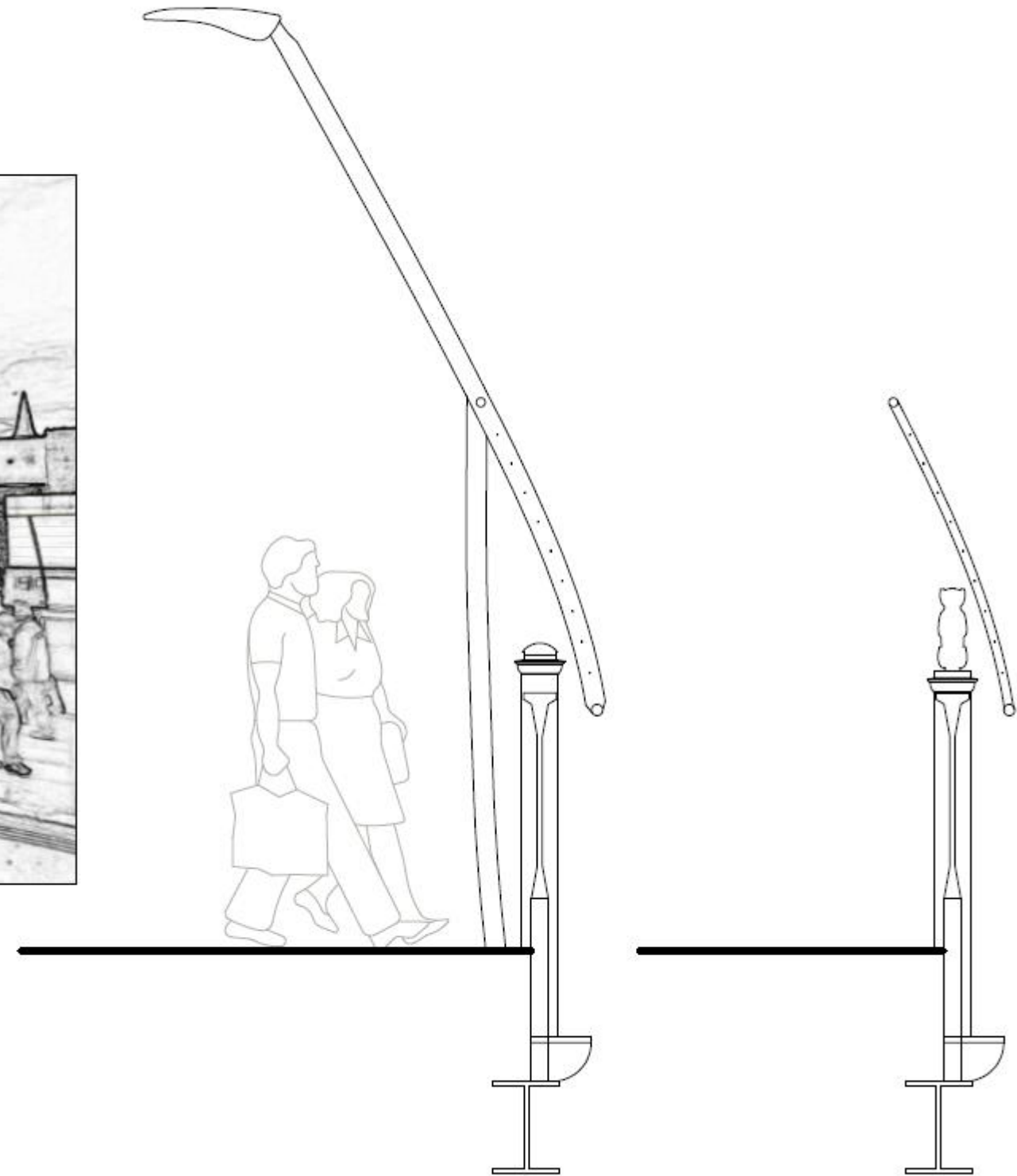
Option A
Overall Elevation



Option A
Parapet Elevation

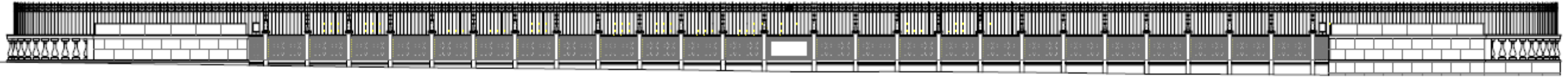


OPTION A

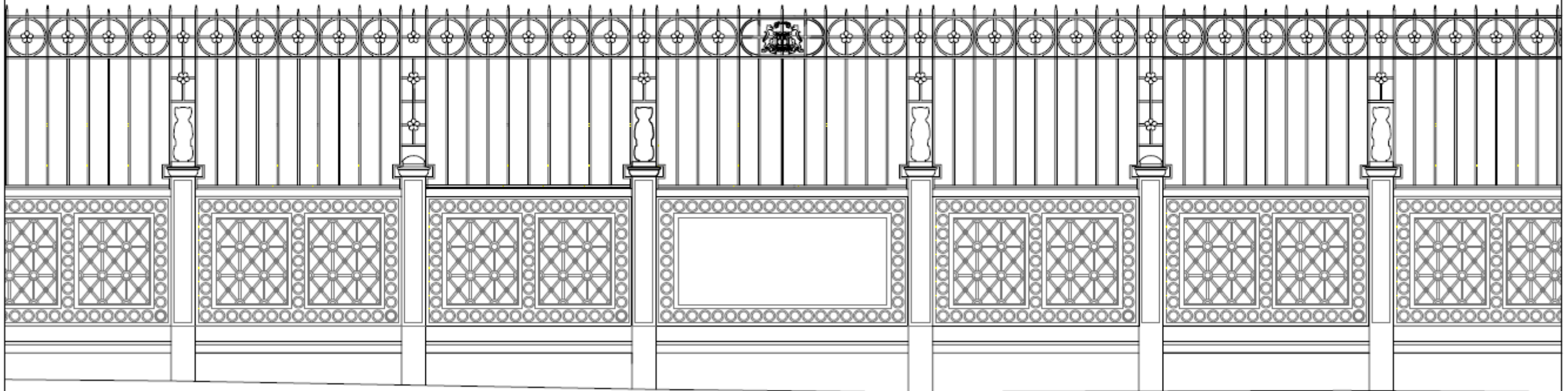


Appendix 2

(Option B)



Option B
Overall Elevation



Option B
Parapet Elevation