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Three firms shortlisted to build temporary road bridge for flood-hit Workington

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Cumbria County Council has announced that three companies have been shortlisted and invited to tender for the contract to build Workington's new temporary road bridge.

A total of 12 contractors sent expression of interests to Cumbria County Council ahead of last week's deadline and this longlist has now been whittled down to the three being invited to formally tender.

The selection process was done on a points system where each company was evaluated on a range of criteria including experience, capacity to deliver and their use of local supply chains.

The names of the three shortlisted companies cannot be revealed for legal and financial reasons as the procurement process is being undertaken in compliance with the EU procurement legislation that prohibits disclosing the identity of tendering organisations.

The process to build a temporary road bridge across the River Derwent to connect the two sides of Workington by road is being done on a far quicker timescale than normal for procuring such a large engineering project. The condensed process will ensure that a temporary bridge is built as soon as humanly possible.

Now three companies have been shortlisted, Cumbria County Council has met with them, talked through the tender requirements and asked them to return detailed tenders by Monday 18 January. The tenders will then be evaluated over 24 hours, with two days scheduled for negotiation with bidders on 20 and 21 January. Final bids then need to be returned by 25 January, with a further day scheduled for final evaluation on 26 January. A decision is then due to be made on 27 January on the preferred bidder who is the intended winner of the contract. EU Procurement Directives dictate that all public authorities must allow 10 days between deciding on the intended contractor and formally awarding the contract and announcing the winner so that unsuccessful bidders can mount a legal challenge if they think the process is unfair or discriminatory.

Cumbria County Council has already arranged for a separate contractor to begin work on the site early next week carrying out vital borehole and investigative ground excavation work to provide detailed information for the design of the foundations for the bridge and connecting roads. By doing this work before the start of the main contract, it will mean the main construction work can begin as soon as possible in February. The county council will ensure work on the bridge is carried out 24 hours a day, seven days a week where it is possible to do so.

The bridge, which will be built around 200m east of the flood-destroyed Northside Bridge, is targeted to be completed and open to traffic by the end of May. The exact timescale will be clearer once bidders have drawn up more detailed contract details and had the necessary discussions with their own supply chains.

The county council will ensure everything that can be done will be done to shorten the lead-in time for the delivery of the temporary bridge, including working with the appointed provider to make sure their key supply partners deliver to the shortest possible timescales for this project.

The county council's Cabinet has already given permission for council officers to make key financial decisions on awarding the contract in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the council so there is the minimum of red tape and bureaucracy.

Cumbria County Council Leader Jim Buchanan said: "Building a temporary road bridge by late May would represent a tremendous achievement - accelerating a process that would usually take months to complete. To put the timeframe laid out here in perspective, it's a bit like buying a house from a standing start within a week.

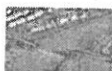
"We are on track for work to start on site early next month. Our highways engineers have worked tirelessly to make this a reality as we know how vital it is for local people for links between north and south Workington to be restored as quickly as possible."

Stewart Young, Deputy Leader of Cumbria County Council, said: "Suggestions that the county council is dragging its heels over restoring bridges across the River Derwent could not be further from the truth.

"We have been absolutely clear that supporting communities and restoring our transport infrastructure following the November floods remain priority. And it will remain so for the foreseeable future.

"I can assure the public we really are doing everything possible to get this bridge built as soon as possible. We appreciate people's frustrations and completely understand how fed up they are with the disruption caused by the floods. We are genuinely doing our best and have cut a swathe through the red tape to make this happen quickly."

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