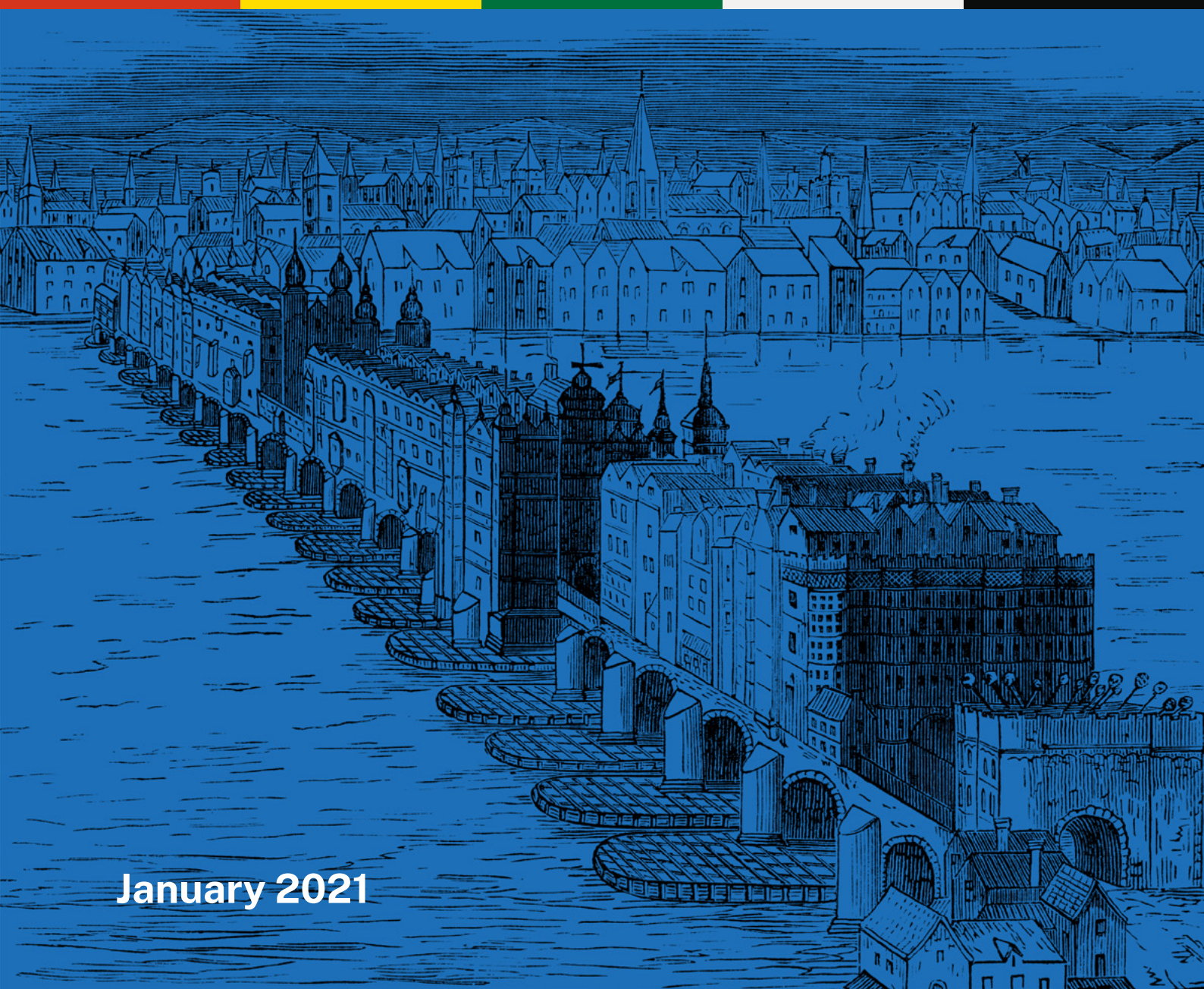




Department for
cats and safety

Inquiry into the procurement of repairs to London Bridge

January 2021



Those of us who bemoan the calibre of public sector procurement in the UK will be particularly alarmed by this latest demonstration of ineptitude.

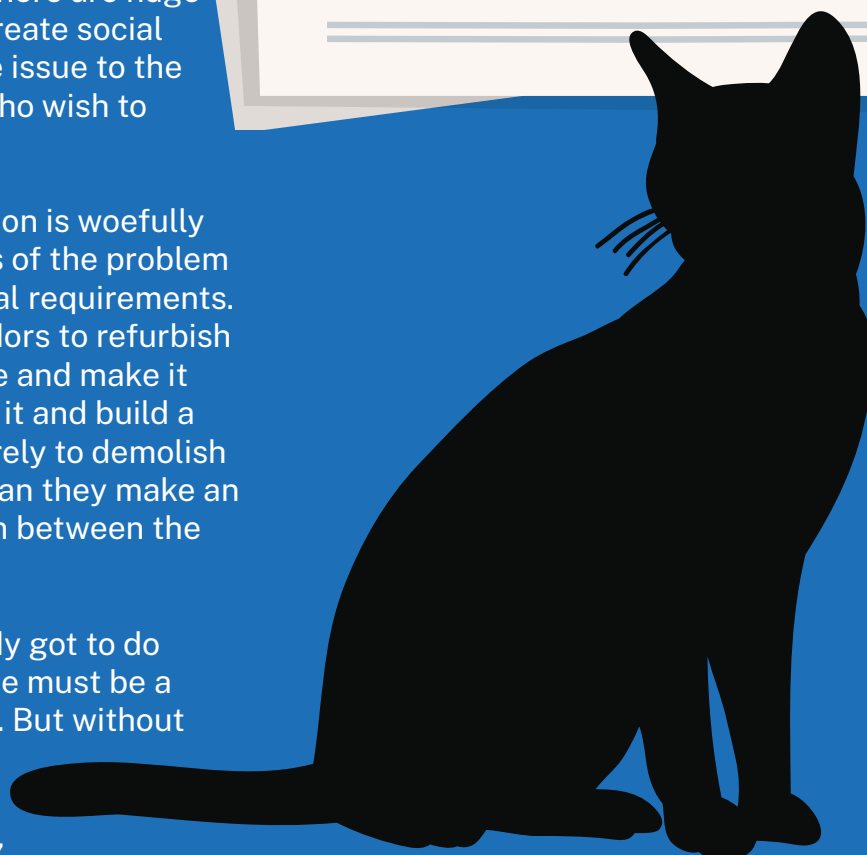
Here's the ITT, reproduced verbatim:



So we know the issue here. A falling-down bridge must be a source of major concern from a health & safety perspective, and there are huge opportunities to create social value by fixing the issue to the benefit of those who wish to cross the river.

But the specification is woefully imprecise in terms of the problem and the client's real requirements. Do they want vendors to refurbish the existing bridge and make it safe? To demolish it and build a replacement? Merely to demolish it? How on earth can they make an objective selection between the bids they receive?

And what's the lady got to do with it? Clearly, she must be a major stakeholder. But without any information as to her role or evaluation criteria, we're left at something of a loss.



We search in vain for further information, finding merely the following:



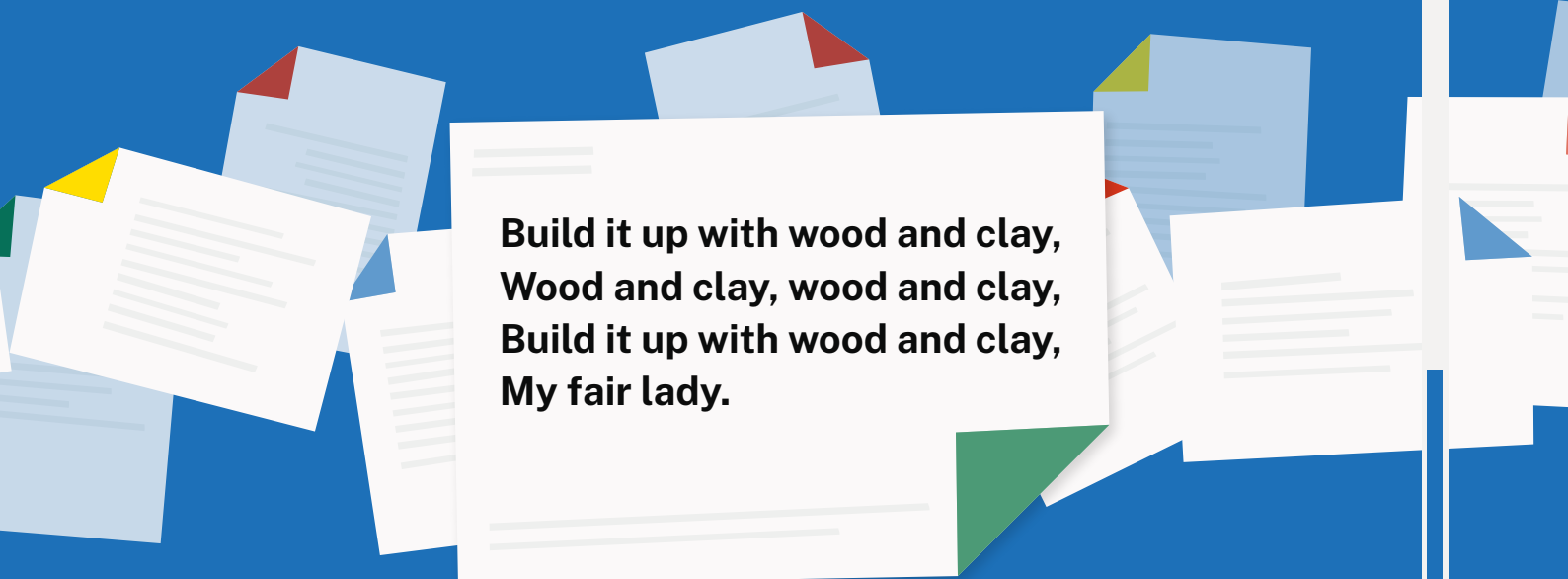
So, what's the real issue here? Is it falling down, or broken down? Both would seemingly require very different solutions from the market. But, as is too often the case, the ITT is downright contradictory and confusing.

And I see the fair lady's back, interfering in due process again.

Still, it sounds like a prestigious project. 'Strategic', even. A true 'must win' for every sales team.



So, let's have a look at the first proposal that was received:



**Build it up with wood and clay,
Wood and clay, wood and clay,
Build it up with wood and clay,
My fair lady.**

Seriously? What were the technical team thinking? One can only assume that the “price to win” meeting set an unrealistic target cost. As the evaluation team’s report astutely noted:

**Wood and clay will wash away,
Wash away, wash away,
Wood and clay will wash away,
My fair lady.**



The second bidder appears to have spent a little more time on their solution design.

**Build it up with bricks and mortar,
Bricks and mortar, bricks and mortar,
Build it up with bricks and mortar,
My fair lady.**



I'm afraid the evaluation for this bid leaves the procuring body open to challenge. They merely commented that:

**Bricks and mortar will not stay,
Will not stay, will not stay,
Bricks and mortar will not stay,
My fair lady.**

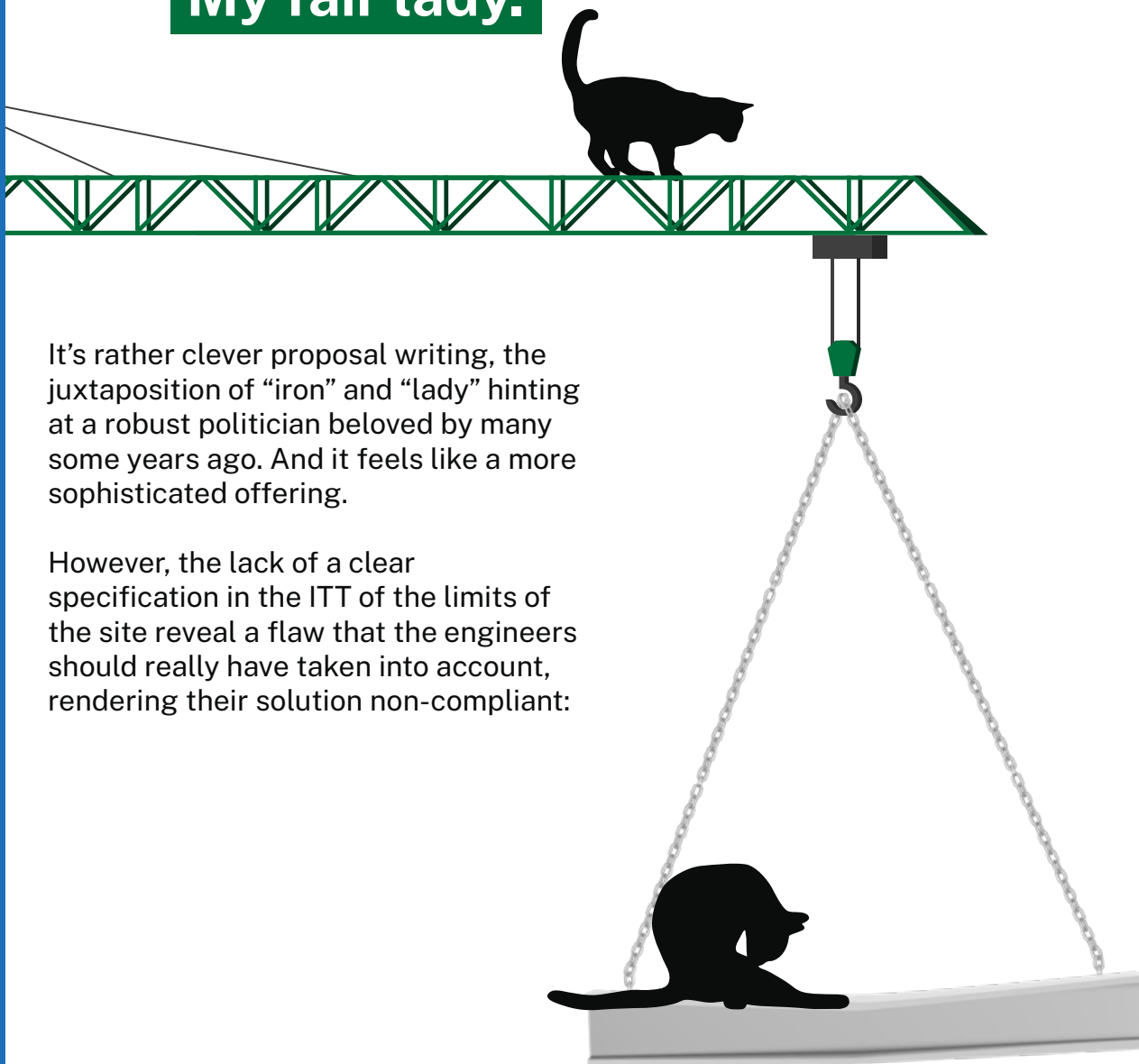


“Will not stay?” What, the bricks and their mortar friends will suddenly decide to up and off in the middle of the night and take themselves off to some new construction site?

How on earth did the evaluation team believe that that would stand scrutiny? And, we have to ask: did the lady bring about unfair influence over the evaluation process?

We move on to the third tender:

**Build it up with iron and steel,
Iron and steel, iron and steel,
Build it up with iron and steel,
My fair lady.**




It's rather clever proposal writing, the juxtaposition of "iron" and "lady" hinting at a robust politician beloved by many some years ago. And it feels like a more sophisticated offering.

However, the lack of a clear specification in the ITT of the limits of the site reveal a flaw that the engineers should really have taken into account, rendering their solution non-compliant:

**Iron and steel will bend and bow,
Bend and bow, bend and bow,
Iron and steel will bend and bow,
My fair lady.**

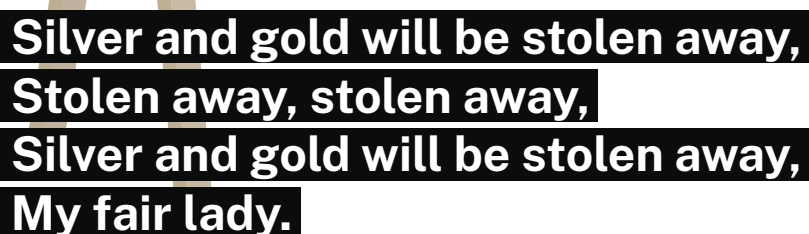
Finally, we turn to the last bidder, who made a strong play for a high 'quality' score:



**Build it up with silver and gold,
Silver and gold, silver and gold,
Build it up with silver and gold,
My fair lady.**

Oh, right. Because the public sector purse is awash with silver and gold right now. Can you just imagine the public outcry? The cost of that one bridge would be able to pay the salaries of huge numbers of teachers or nurses. There'd be questions in the House of Commons, I tell you.

The feedback strikes a strange note:




**Silver and gold will be stolen away,
Stolen away, stolen away,
Silver and gold will be stolen away,
My fair lady.**

Are the procurement team worried that the Treasury will withdraw the funding? Or are they genuinely suggesting that the local community are dishonest? I think we should be told.

Apparently, this bidder had submitted a non-compliant proposal anyway, mitigating the weakness of their solution:

Where did the ITT include a specification for security services, my friends?

(And, while we're on the topic: could whichever member of the procurement team pocketed the scale model in gold and silver of the bridge, used in the pitch, please return it. Thank you.)



**Set a man to watch all night,
Watch all night, watch all night,
Set a man to watch all night,
My fair lady.**



At this point, version control becomes an issue. There are some copies of the documentation that also contain reference to said “man” “falling asleep”, and a rectification approach that advises the delivery team to “Give him a pipe to smoke all night”. I’m not entirely sure what would be in the pipe, and whether that’s compliant with drugs and alcohol policies. But, as I say, those sections of content don’t appear in every version, which suggests a technical issue with the portal. (Perhaps: a grounds for challenge, then?)

So we’re left without a practical or affordable solution, and with four bidders who’ve wasted a significant amount of time and cost. And, on closer inspection, I can find no trace of the bid on the relevant public sector procurement portal: has due process even been followed?

Is anyone from the National Audit Office out there? I think we need your help...





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