

HALTON COUNCIL'S NEW BRIDGE: A COMMITMENT TO RESTORE SANKEY CANAL



Halton Borough Council has firmed up its commitment to the future of Spike Island and The Sankey Canal, with plans to replace the ageing wooden bridge there with a steel swing structure.

It is another step towards a restoration of the UK's oldest canal, which is great news for wildlife and other users of the popular waterway.

The new bridge will be similar to the swing bridge contractors installed at Carter House in 2010, see pic, with a weight restriction of 15 tonnes.

Halton's representative on the Sankey Canal Restoration Society for more than 20 years, Cllr Keith Morley, said: "The Council is committed to an eventual restoration of the Sankey Canal that would include opening it up to boat traffic. That is why a swing bridge is being installed.

"The closure of Fiddlers Ferry Power Station in March 2020 does mean that there is going to be an issue in relation to a water supply for the canal but the Council is working with Warrington Borough Council and other partners to resolve this matter.

“We are looking at all ways to counteract the expected loss of water from Fiddlers Ferry and preserve as much water as possible for the benefit of the local environment.

“Halton and Warrington Councils are trying to come up with solutions to a difficult situation. The request to clear the slipway at Spike Island came from the boat club. We are at last in a position to do this.”

When opened in 1757, the canal followed the valley of the Sankey Brook from where the brook joined the River Mersey past Warrington to Parr at the north east of what became St Helens town centre.

Extensions were constructed at the Mersey end to Fiddlers Ferry and then to Widnes, while at the northern end it was extended to Sutton. The canal was abandoned between 1931 and 1963

There had been a metal swing bridge crossing the Sankey Canal at Spike Island since February 1833 when the St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway opened.

The bridge carried the railway over the canal (the latter under construction when the railway opened – it opened in July 1833).

When Spike Island was being developed as a park and a cosmetic restoration of the canal was ongoing (between 1979 and 1983) it had been the intention to repair the old swing bridge and use it as a fixed bridge.

However it was found to be so rusted that it had to be removed and a wooden bridge was erected in its place.

The wooden bridge is now almost 40 years old and it has become life expired and it needs to be removed for safety reasons.