



Summary Report

Marple Aqueduct safety fencing consultation

Consultation undertaken between November 2014 and February 2015



Canal &
River Trust

Report produced June 2015

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1. Summary

Marple Aqueduct is a scheduled ancient monument on the Peak Forest Canal in Greater Manchester. The Aqueduct has an unfenced parapet on the off-side, there is a substantial fall and any fall from the Aqueduct would almost certainly lead to a fatality. Since 2003 there have been near misses recorded and a suicide relating to falls from the unfenced parapet. There is anecdotal evidence of unauthorised access to the area.

In 2014, funding was secured to complete repair and conservation work on the structure. The ongoing refurbishment project will attract more people to the area, increasing potential risk of accidents.

It is the Trust's view that it is becoming an unacceptable risk and that a parapet should be installed.

During 2014/15 a 2-month consultation was held into the design of the fence. 105 people contributed to the consultation. 23 people provided their views on the design and style of the fencing. As a consequence of the consultation process 69 people / organisations have registered their disagreement with the principle of installing a fence.

2. Background

Marple Aqueduct, dates from 1800, and is also known as the Grand Aqueduct. It is the tallest aqueduct in England and the tallest masonry arched aqueduct in Britain. It was designed by the engineer for the Peak Forest, Benjamin Outram. The Peak Forest Canal was promoted and financed by the Peak Forest Canal Company, formed in 1793 to promote the building of a canal to transport the limestone deposits from the Peak District to the existing canal network. The proposed canal ran from the Ashton Canal to Bugsworth, with a short branch to Whaley Bridge.

The Aqueduct is a Grade 1 listed structure and Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is subject to a Scheduled Monument Management Agreement dated 2007 and falls within the Greater Manchester Heritage Partnership Agreement boundary, reviewed in May 2014. The structure also lies within the Marple Bridge Conservation Area.

Heritage Lottery Funding was secured in 2014 for the Revealing Oldknow's Legacy project. As part of the project Marple Aqueduct has undergone over half a million pounds worth of repair, conservation and access improvement works. In July 2014, a Scheduled Monument application was submitted for the works including small scale masonry and cramp repairs, and maintenance painting of the pattress plates and ties. These improvement works were completed in April 2015.

In parallel, there has been growing concerns within the Trust about unprotected edges on its structures as people's expectations in relation to public safety have altered. Marple Aqueduct has a history of incidents / near misses relating to its unfenced parapet and a consensus has formed that this should be fenced. The anticipated increase in visitor numbers at the site is a key driver.

3. Visitor safety

The Canal & River Trust has experienced a number of incidents, including loss of life, as a result of falls from waterway structures with insufficient edge protection. Safety of our visitors is a priority for the Trust. Marple Aqueduct has suffered two relatively recent suicides, the last in 2014. We have recent social media footage of a holiday hire boat where people had stopped on the Aqueduct and stood on the unfenced edge. In 2011 a near miss was reported by a member of the public relating to the ability to access the off-side area. In 2009 two near misses were recorded, one when a child got off a boat to the offside and the second when an adult nearly fell having exited their boat on the off-side.

Fencing blocking the off-side access at either end of the Aqueduct has been in place for some time but concerns exist about the adequacy of this as a control measure. In 2013 with the project imminent safety was reviewed here and our conclusion was that additional mitigation measures at the Aqueduct were required including provision of a parapet guard.

In October 2013, a letter outlining the Trust's safety concerns regarding the unprotected edge was sent to English Heritage. The letter sought to gain an indication that, subject to designing a mutually agreeable fenced solution, English Heritage would consider granting Scheduled Monument Consent for its installation at the site. Following a site visit with English Heritage confirmation was given as to their open-mindedness in supporting the Trust in addressing the issue.

Given the intention to increase visitor numbers, prior to the start of the recent repair and conservation works, the Canal & River Trust has taken the opportunity to take forward the fencing proposal. It is expected that the project will result in increased visitor numbers following the works, and the investment in digital and on-site interpretation, education activities and promotion of the site will attract people to the area. Additional measures are now required to reduce the risk that visitors acting irresponsibly or those unintentionally taking a risk will have an accident.

The Trust is undertaking further consultation with its supporting advisory groups (Navigation advisory group and Heritage Advisory Group)

4. Consultation framework

The Marple Aqueduct safety fencing consultation was conducted between November 2014 and February 2015. The aim of the consultation was to gather the feedback on the various fencing options for the offside parapet of the structure. The consultation asked respondents to provide feedback on the safety fencing options and the plans for wider gateway improvements which included vegetation clearance to reveal the sweep of the Aqueduct, gateway markers, suitable safety signage and improved green space at the entry points to the Aqueduct (see appendix 1)

A range of methods were used to gather feedback from stakeholders, statutory bodies, visitors and users.

On Sunday 30th November the Canal & River Trust held the Marple Locks and Aqueduct open day. The event was used to gather feedback from attendees. We provided a number of examples of existing safety fencing used elsewhere on the canal network and illustrations of one solution on Marple Aqueduct (see Appendix 3). The examples and illustrations aimed to stimulate discussion. Visitors were invited to write their comments on postcards and discuss the proposals with the Revealing Oldknow's Legacy project officers and Canal & River Trust officers. 22 written comments were received on the day.

The invitation to participate in the consultation was added to the Canal & River Trust consultation pages in December 2014. The consultation asked respondents to give their feedback on the various fencing options for the offside parapet of the structure. The page included the examples of safety fencing and illustrations used at the open day event. A consultation email address was set up to gather further feedback. Aqueduct.fence@canalrivertrust.org.uk

The email address was open from December 2014 to the end of January 2015. The email address was promoted at the Open day. There were notices displayed at the Aqueduct and information was displayed in Marple Library between December and January

2015. The consultation and email address was also promoted on the Marple Civic Society website, The Marple Website (Oldknow Project Noticeboard) and the Trust waterway noticeboard.

Internal consultation was conducted with the Canal & River Trust executive, Manchester & Pennine Waterway Partnership and the Canal & River Trust heritage advisory committee (HAC). A briefing note was produced for the committee (HAC) in January 2015.

In December 2014 a site meeting was held with Andrew Davidson, English Heritage, Paul Hartley, Stockport Council and Judy Jones, Canal & River Trust Heritage advisor to discuss the options for fencing. English Heritage recommended that a Conservation Architect be engaged to look at some potential solutions and that any solution should be bespoke.

The feedback received through the public consultation process has been collated and this report provides a summary of the responses.

5. Consultation findings

The question asked of consultees was to provide their feedback on the various fencing options for the offside parapet of Marple Aqueduct. 105 responses were received. The consultation responses were varied and often conflicted. Many responses focused on the arguments for and against the installation of safety fencing at the location and fewer comments were received on the design.

There has been lively debate on various social media feeds. As these were not direct responses to the consultation they have not been recorded in this consultation summary but those views have been captured and reflected in the feedback received via the consultation email address and at the open day.

24 respondents commented on the design of the safety fencing

Comments on the design of the safety fencing can be grouped as follows:

- Style

Comments on style can be further broken down into the following categories:

- A contemporary approach offering a contrast to the existing structure favoured by 3 respondents
- A traditional approach in keeping with the existing structure and taking pointers from the landscape favoured by 6 respondents
- A design / style with added interest was favoured by 1 respondent
- The use of vertical railings was favoured by 10 respondents

- colour / material

Respondents discussed various materials including wrought iron, galvanised steel and stone work.

- 1 respondent favoured the use of wrought iron
 - 3 respondents favoured the use of black or darkly coloured metal work railings
 - 1 respondent favoured grey galvanised steel
 - 1 respondent favoured stainless steel
 - 1 respondent favoured the construction of a mirroring masonry parapet
- design / fixing
 - Comments on design and fixing can be further broken down into the following categories
 - Railings / fencing that does not cause additional safety issues eg allowing people to climb the fencing or fencing that may cause a crush or trap hazard for boaters
 - Fixing that does not cause damage to the structure

5 respondents commented on the wider gateway improvements

Responses included comments on installing / improving the fencing at each end of the Aqueduct, improving the safety signage and clearance of the vegetation at the entrances to the Aqueduct.

6. Other comments

23 respondents registered their support of the principle of installing a safety fence at Marple Aqueduct

Reasons provided by the respondents in support of the installation can be grouped as follows:

- Need to address the risk / safety concern

These can be further broken down into the following categories:

- Safety of boaters
- Safety for casual boaters with young families
- Safety of towpath users
- Ensuring the safety of irresponsible users

- The advantages of the fence in widening public access

These can be further broken down into the following categories:

- Opening up access to the Aqueduct
- Opening up views from the Aqueduct
- Access for boaters and boat hirers

- A belief that there would be no adverse impact on the aesthetic value of the structure.

69 respondents registered their disagreement with the principle of installing a safety fence on the offside parapet

Reasons provided by the respondents opposed to the installation can be grouped as follows:

- Concerns regarding the lack of evidence of the risk

This can be further broken down into the following categories:

- Need for evidence – number of incidents
- Need for greater understanding of the nature of the risk
- No access can be gained by accident and no reason to access it by boat

- Heritage impact and damage to the historic integrity of the structure

This can be further broken down into the following categories:

- Setting a precedent at Marple Aqueduct for other historic waterway structures
- Inability to eliminate all risk from historic structures
- Historic structures should not be touched

- Impact on the aesthetic value of the structure

This can be further broken down into the following categories:

- Impact on view from the aqueduct
- Fence spoils the appearance of the aqueduct

- Funding would be better used elsewhere

- Significant cost in implementing the scheme that should be used elsewhere

- Responsibility for safety should be with the user

- Boat user responsibility
- The installation of the fence will create greater health and safety issues
This can be further broken down into the following categories:
 - Fencing will encourage more to use the offside creating a greater risk.
 - Fencing will encourage people to climb over
 - Fencing will encourage greater numbers to jump over the canal by reducing the perceived risk

9 respondents were undecided or offered conflicting views on the principle of installing the safety fencing

7. Evidence of findings

The consultation findings were gathered from comments made through the consultation process. The following section provides evidence of these findings.

Comments on the design of the safety fencing

- Style

'Needs to be in-keeping and sympathetic to the aqueduct'

'Design in keeping with the railway viaduct'

As a listed monument any changes to the Marple Aqueduct should be handled in a minimalistic and sympathetic way'

'Antique style of construction and aspect'

'Similar in style to the railings on the viaduct'

'Railings similar to the Paddock Aqueduct'

'It doesn't need to be ornamental, just functional'

'The only acceptable solution on a structure which is both grade 1 listed and a Scheduled Ancient Monument is to construct a masonry parapet to mirror that on the towpath side'

'Vertical rails seem the best'

'Examples are too municipal'

- Colour / material

'The design and material in keeping with the stone work i.e. something perhaps in wrought iron with interest. Nothing looking modern, utilitarian and cheap'

'Utilise dark colours for the railings to make them less conspicuous'

'If the railings are in dark colours, green, brown, black, they will be less conspicuous'

'Black would be best'

'Grey galvanised steel – not black as grey fits better with the stone work'

- design / fixing

'Use a Y profile which is hard to surmount'

'It is important that any fence is installed sufficiently far from the water's edge to avoid trapping anyone who leans out of a boat side-door, window or cockpit'

'My suggestion would be to have some sort of structure independent of the current structure – anchored on both sides – like a suspension barrier?'

'Keep it simple'

Support for the proposals

- Need to address the risk / safety concern

'Safety first'

'I strongly support a railing on both sides. In 2014 walkers and safety are important'

'A fence on the unprotected side seems to me like a very sensible proposition. I support the proposal'

'Something is required if the canal is to be maintained and promoted for leisure traffic'

'Increased footfall due to the wider project will inevitably bring increased footfall so it has to be a safe experience'

'It is a terrible accident waiting to happen and I would suggest it would be money well spent for the CRT budget'

- The advantages of the fence in widening public access

'Handrail is a great idea not just for health & safety but for boaters and boat hirers to stop and look'

- A belief that there would be no adverse impact on the aesthetic value of the structure.

'There was a wall on the other side of the aqueduct on the 1960s'

'It wouldn't be out of place or detract from the aqueduct'

Opposition to the proposals

- Concerns regarding the lack of evidence of the risk

'Unless you can provide reliable statistics detailing exactly how many people in the last 200 years have accidentally fallen off that side of the aqueduct, then I suggest that the proposal is not even worth discussing'

'Boaters have managed the risk on the non-towpath side at Marple without incident so what is the new risk?'

'In the absence of any evidence of real, rather than theoretical danger we see no justification for ruining the look of the Aqueduct'

'The frequency of accidents, and their causes, must be explained before a decision is made'

- Heritage impact and damage to the historic integrity of the structure

'Need to conserve heritage not modify it to the point where it is no longer worth conserving'

'Never had one so don't add one'

'Damage to a historic structure'

'CRT have an obligation to protect these historic structures, so additional safety facilities, which detract from their originality should only be considered in the face of robust evidence of danger'

- Impact on the aesthetic value of the structure

'Fencing at some distance from the aqueduct, preventing illicit access to that side on foot would be entirely sufficient'

'The offside fence will seriously detract from the beauty of this stunning location'

'Putting up the safety fence is not only unnecessary but from the artist impression will totally ruin the aesthetics of the structure'

- Funding would be better used elsewhere

'I would much rather any funds for this be spent on improving the towpath surfacing, particularly through the Rose Hill tunnel cutting and the dangerous uneven paving in the area below Stockport Road at Marple'

'All of this money could be spent elsewhere on the system, improving other areas of the networks, and in cases, preventing accidents in other and more positive ways'

- Responsibility for safety should be with the user

'From a H&S point of view are you seriously that there is a need to provide for actions of Darwin Award applicants prepared to jump an 8ft gap over open water in order to trespass'

- The installation of the fence will create greater health and safety issues

'If the fence is fitted against the exposed edge it will simply encourage more trespass, as boaters will alight offside thinking they can safely look over the edge, and {people jumping across} will be encourage by a safety fence stopping them overrunning the exposed edge'

'Your proposal is unnecessary and is more likely to entice people to step out onto the unwalled side'

8. Next steps

The consultation summary report will be circulated within the Canal & River Trust for internal scrutiny in June. The consultation report will be published on the Canal & River Trust website.

Once agreed the forward strategy for the Aqueduct safety fencing will be published on the Canal & River Trust website.

Subject to the agreed forward strategy the following steps will be taken:

- Design work period – 5- 6 months
- Agreement of source of funding, consultation with the Revealing Oldknow's Legacy Steering group
- Further public consultation on the design work - 2 months
- Scheduled Ancient Monument consent – up to 13/14 weeks
- Application for planning permission (as required) – 8 weeks. Note: For the installation of the fence it is likely that planning permission would be required and a formal consultation would be conducted as part of that process.
- Application for funder approval

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Consultation invitation

Appendix 2: Summary figures

Appendix 3: Illustrations and examples used in the consultation

Appendix 1

Marple Aqueduct is undergoing over half a million pounds worth of repair, conservation and access improvement work as part of the Heritage Lottery funded Revealing Oldknow's Legacy project.

The anticipated increase in visitor numbers following the improvements has led to a safety review of the Aqueduct. The review concluded that additional measures are required to reduce risk to visitors and we would like your feedback on the various fencing options for the offside parapet of the structure.

Marple Aqueduct is a significant heritage structure on the Peak Forest Canal. The safety fence will need careful planning and design and will be to be part of wider gateway improvements creating a sense of arrival at the Grade 1 Listed structure and Scheduled Ancient Monument. Other proposals include vegetation clearance to reveal the sweep of the Aqueduct, gateway markers, suitable safety signage and improved green space at the entry points to the Aqueduct.

We have a number of examples of safety fencing and railing used in other locations on our network.

We would like to gather your feedback on the safety fencing options and the plans for wider gateway improvements.

Comments can be made on the postcards provided or email aqueductfence@canalrivertrust.org.uk

The consultation period will be open until **January 31st 2015**.

Following the outcome of this consultation the Canal & River Trust will seek Listed Building consent and Scheduled Ancient Monument consent to carry out the preferred options. Statutory consultation will be conducted at this stage.

Further information about the Revealing Oldknow's Legacy project is available at www.canalrivertrust.org/Oldknow



Appendix 2: Consultation figures

Overall agree – 23 (22.2%)

1. Agreed with fence and have commented on design 14 (13.3%)
2. Agree with fence and have made other comments / justification
 - 2a Safety / risk / need 10 (9.5%)
 - 2c No impact on aesthetic value 1 (1%)
 - 2d Wider access 3 (2.9%)
3. Agree with fence no comment 2 (1.9%)

Overall disagree – 69 (65.7%)

4. Disagree with fence and commented on design 4 (3.8%)
5. Disagreed with fence and made other comment
 - 6a Safety / risk / need (evidence of risk, unnecessary, won't increase safety) 29 (27.6%)
 - 6b Heritage impact / historic integrity 22 (21%)
 - 6c Aesthetic impact 13 (12.4%)
 - 6e money better used elsewhere 19 (18.1%)
 - 6f responsibility should be with the user 15 (14.3%)
 - 6g encourage greater risk / health and safety issues 13 (12.4%)
- 7 Disagree with fence and made no further comment / justification 4 (3.8%)
- 8 neutral or doesn't comment either way but comments on design 6 (5.7%)
9. Undecided 3 (2.9%)
10. Additional information comments 4

Appendix 3: Illustrations and examples







Illustration of fencing at Marple Aqueduct