

River Dee chain bridge get refurbishment go-ahead

18/07/2013

The funding will allow for refurbishment work to begin on the bridge and reopen it to the public after being closed for 30 years.

The current bridge was constructed in 1929, although the original was built in 1817 by a local coal merchant looking to open a cheap transport route across the River Dee and it enabled the passage of coal from the Llangollen canal across the river. The grant has been awarded to Llangollen Town Council and Llantysilio Community Council who have been seeking funds to carry out the bridge's repairs since 2007. Following the completion of development work, made possible through HLF funding, a 12 month restoration project will now commence.

The distinctive bridge is of vital importance to the area's industrial history and has been described as 'a landmark of a crucial part of British engineering history' by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. Jennifer Stewart, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Wales, said: "We are delighted that the chain bridge will now be restored and used once more, ensuring that a prominent feature in Llangollen's past will become a key attraction in the area."

Engineering landmark

Included in the Institution of Civil Engineers' (ICE) database of historically important engineering structures, the significance of this bridge is widely recognised and acknowledged. The project aims to transform the bridge from a derelict and unsafe historical site into a strong, functional structure while remaining faithful to its heritage.

Welcoming the grant award, Chairman of ICE Wales Cymru, Geoff Ogden, said: "We were extremely happy to offer our support to this grant application and are delighted at its success. This structure is one of Wales' most significant engineering feats, representing both local and national industrial heritage. It should be celebrated and recognised and the funding made available to restore the bridge to its former glory will ensure that this happens."

World Heritage Site

Situated within a World Heritage Site and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the value of the area's heritage is widely recognised and once repaired, there are hopes that the bridge will form a valuable addition to the region's existing tourist attractions with both local people and visitors able to access the bridge again.

Town council clerk, Gareth Thomas, said: "Once re-opened, the bridge will resume its place at the centre of local industrial transport heritage whilst also re-establishing the link between the railway and the Llangollen canal for a whole new generation to appreciate and use. We also have plans to provide hands-on learning experiences to schoolchildren, local groups and visitors so that they can

engage with the bridge's heritage.”

Notes to editors

This £350,000 grant awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund follows the approval of a round one pass, including a development grant of £28,900, by the Heritage Lottery Fund Wales Committee in May 2012.

Plans for Llangollen Chain Bridge include:

- Conservation and restoration of the chain bridge and re-open for public access
- Improvements to pedestrian footpath access to both sides of the bridge from the Chain Bridge Hotel on one side of the river and from Berwyn Station on the other
- Undertake a programme of community activities to produce interpretation materials; events to celebrate the reopening of the bridge and school education packs
- Develop strong linkages and partnerships with other attractions and local agencies
- Employment of a project co-ordinator, heritage consultant and a heritage assistant to deliver the project

About the chain bridge:

- Originally constructed in 1817 by local coal merchant Exuperius Pickering, the chain bridge in Llangollen had claim to the oldest known surviving chain cable links in the world
- The bridge is believed to have reached a state of disrepair during the 1870s and was replaced by a different structure by Henry Robertson, a renowned bridge and railway engineer, as well as an owner of the Brymbo Ironworks. The majority of the bridge was washed away in 1928 during severe flooding and the bridge that was rebuilt remains in place today
- The current bridge (constructed in 1929 using elements from the 1876 and possibly 1814 bridges), occupies the original location and its scale and features, such as the chain links, strongly echo the design of the first bridge, which played an important part in the industrial and commercial history of the area opening up a cheap transport route from the Llangollen canal to the A5 constructed by Thomas Telford. It became one of the most famous crossings on the River Dee and a tourist attraction in its own right
- The bridge sits within a World Heritage Site and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- The bridge was closed in the mid 1980s due to its advanced dilapidation and is considered at risk

Further information

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