

Canal bridge at Clarence mill, Bollington

History

A 106 agreement was made with the developers of Clarence mill as a condition of their conversion of the top floors into apartments. The condition stipulated that there had to be a pedestrian foot bridge across the canal close to the entrance to the canal side mill yard. A sum of £30,000 was deposited with Macclesfield Borough Council for this purpose, being sufficient at that time (about 2002) to cover the cost.

Prevarication on the part of British Waterways seriously delayed construction for more than four years. By the time they had agreed, the Disability Discrimination Act had come in and the specification for the bridge had to be significantly enhanced. The cost of materials and construction had also increased so the present sum required is of the order of £150,000. This covers the cost of the bridge as well as a £20,000 dowry for future maintenance.

Present situation

Macclesfield Borough Council, Cheshire County Council and British Waterways, as public bodies, are restricted from owning a new structure such as this. Bollington Civic Society have therefore stepped in and offered to take ownership. We (BCS), together with help from the Tourism Officer at MBC, are now raising the funds necessary. c.£32,000 is so far available as cash in the bank. £5,000 of this has been invested in a contract with Cheshire County Council whose bridge architect has now designed the structure and its location.

The additional funds will be raised from grants and donations. It is hoped that the largest part of the outstanding requirement will come from NWDA.

Justification for the bridge

1. The bridge is a condition of planning consent for the 2002 Clarence mill developments and has planning permission.
2. The canal towpath is on the opposite side of the canal from the mill. Large numbers of people use the towpath for recreational and pedestrian communication purposes. The towpath is a primary pedestrian route through more than three quarters of a mile of Bollington. The adjacent canal embankment is a prime mooring wharf and mooring is only possible and safe on the towpath side. The towpath also provides access to the Recreation Ground. Conditional upon the bridge a new footpath will be constructed between the Recreation Ground and the canal enabling a more rural and traffic free route.
3. A bridge across the canal has long been recognised as a requirement for the successful development of the canal side units in the mill. These units are intended to be public orientated – retail, café, the Discovery Centre. The Clarence Mill owners are fully behind the scheme and a bridge would allow them to revert to their original plan of encouraging retail development on the ground floor. We have this vision in writing now from Rupert Beckwith-Moore, the Director of Clarence Mill Ltd.
4. The absence of the bridge has contributed to several retail failures on the canal side. The café is successful but is clearly missing out on passing trade that cannot access it from the canal towpath, as is the Discovery Centre. The mill management is reluctant to develop the canal side units further until construction of the bridge is a certainty.

5. The only connection between the mill and the towpath is via the public highway 250m down Clarence Road, across the main road and under the aqueduct at a very busy and dangerous road junction, then up a very steep flight of steps rising over 20m to canal level, and 250m along the towpath to a point 20m across the canal from the starting point. This route is in no way obvious to the pedestrian standing on either side and wanting to cross over and, in parts, is not at all pedestrian friendly. As a result most do not bother to find their way.
6. The bridge would enable towpath walkers to reach the services of the mill, and the residents of the mill and surrounding houses to reach the towpath for recreation.
7. The residents of the mill together with those in Clarence Terrace behind the mill, Rock Bank Rise and Rock Bank House (incongruously known today as Carterbench House) beside the mill number approximately 260 and they all live in a No Through Road. Their only access to the outside world is via Clarence Road – there are no public footpaths leading from this area. Direct access to the canal towpath and beyond would provide a significant opening up of their local recreational environment.

Tim Boddington
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