

Rebuilding Elland Bridge

For the Canal & River Trust the devastating floods of 2015 generated a series of challenges affecting operational structures, requiring a managed approach through a framework of heritage/conservation policy, by a specialist in-house Heritage Advisor.

The most seriously affected engineering asset, and in media terms the most high-profile, was Elland Bridge; a Grade II listed structure on the Calder & Hebble Navigation, built in 1811. So extreme was the damage, Listed Building Consent had to be sought for its total demolition and a design for a replacement bridge submitted for planning approval. The rebuilding process needed to address a number of tensions and conflicts generated by the various stakeholders involved in, and affected by, the project, in particular the severing of the main link from the town of Elland to the major road network.

Originally constructed for horse-drawn traffic of the day, the changed nature and volume impacted on regulatory construction techniques and materials used in the rebuild. Additionally, the societal changes over the intervening 104 years had seen the bridge become a major communication channel carrying 17 utility and data artefacts. The need to maintain and restore this functionality, together with the desire of the Canal & River Trust to allow boat access through the canal, retain community support of a 12 month plus project, and ensure heritage authenticity of the replacement, presented a huge challenge to the Heritage Advisor attached to the project.

Design decisions were informed by the retention of form, masonry and detailing, and community engagement was encouraged by working with local schools and holding Open Days to explain progress. The various conflicts of construction management, were set against, and successfully reconciled with, the imperative of retaining a heritage-driven agenda.

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