

Bolton & Bury Arms Canal Restoration Feasibility Study

Executive Summary

The study was commissioned by a combination of the Canal & River Trust, Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society, Bolton Council and Bury Council. It was undertaken in late 2020 by a team from Atkins.

This feasibility report brings up to date earlier studies for restoration of the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal but unlike earlier studies it focuses only on the 5 miles of canal between Bolton and Bury. The breach section at Little Lever and the adjacent infilled length from Nob End are not covered by this report because restoration here is being progressed as part of a private development by Watson Homes.

The canal in this feasibility report terminates outside the centres of Bolton and Bury. At Bolton the demolition of several aqueducts has resulted in the logical terminus being at Hall Lane Basin close to Moses Gate Country Park. At Bury the canal terminates south of Wellington Street although longer term ambitions could see the canal extend towards the centre as part of future redevelopments.

Since 1987 the Canal Society has successfully managed fund-raising and volunteer working parties to maintain and keep much of the canal in water. Because the canal is severed in two places, at the breach and at Water Street, it has failed to make significant progress as a local amenity with this potential further held back by restriction on public spending since 2008.

This report examines the engineering challenges to be overcome to restore the canal as described above for amenity boating traffic and towpath use. This includes elements of maintenance and repair, dredging, leak repair and tree clearance but the most significant element of work required is the restoration of the canal under Water Street. Here a 60-metre length of canal has to be restored by raising and re-bridging the A665, a 4-lane carriageway near the centre of Radcliffe.

Updated costs have been developed against all identified works totalling £6.06 million.

A targeted consultation with local stakeholders and other bodies was carried out to inform the report on local opinions concerning the canal restoration. In the time that was allowed for this process to feedback a total of 88 responses were received which were overwhelmingly positive. Many of the consultation responses raised common points and concerns at how the restoration could be directed.

The planning policy framework for both Bury and Bolton is supportive of restoration of the canal and towpath along this route and such activity would help fulfil several of the national and local planning objectives, improving the attractiveness of local environs and improving health and wellbeing through provision of accessible green/blue infrastructure and opportunities for recreation, walking and cycling. Measures to restore the canal should recognise its high wildlife and biodiversity value and ensure the canal is accessible to all users including those with disabilities.

Socio-economic benefits to the value of £1 million per annum will accrue to Bolton MBC and Bury MBC areas. This indicates that the cost of restoration can be recouped within the local economy within 8 years and will then continue on an annual basis. These benefits will flow to Farnworth, Kearsley, Little Lever, Radcliffe, and Bury town centre as these areas are closest to the canal.

Although the restoration of the 5-mile length of the canal is the objective of this study a series of options are presented to make increased use of the canal while the obstacles at Water Street and the breach are being resolved. The source of funds to realise the restoration is discussed at the end of this study.

This report confirms the feasibility and overwhelming positive impacts that the restoration of this short section of canal can achieve. Opportunities for funding such a scheme have been limited for several years but now the many benefits that restoration can bring for the local community are better understood. With the clear support of local businesses and councils this scheme should have renewed impetus for delivery.