

PLANNING AND HERITAGE STATEMENT

Re: Repair and refurbishment of Swing Bridge.

 **Canal Basin, Albion Parade, Gravesend DA12 2RN.**

Prepared by Hume Planning Consultancy Ltd.

On Behalf of: The Embankment Marina (Gravesend) Ltd

Our Reference: HPC/1578

Date: July 2024

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared in support of a detailed planning application to Gravesend Borough Council as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) for the repair and refurbishment of the Swing Bridge at the Canal Basin, Gravesend, DA12 2RN.
- 1.2 This Planning Statement provides an assessment of the proposed development against the development plan for Gravesend Borough Council, the National Planning Policy Framework and other relevant material considerations. The Statement focusses on the refurbishment and repairs to support the operation of the Swing Bridge and to restore the use of a heritage asset.
- 1.3 This application has been informed by advice received from the LPA in March 2024 through the Council's pre-application advice service for the repairs and refurbishment of the Swing Bridge. The advice received has helped to inform the most appropriate design of the repairs to the bridge whilst taking into account health and safety concerns which considers the public use of the Bridge.



Figure 1. Aerial View of the Swing Bridge, Gravesend.

2. Site Description & Context

- 2.1 The Swing bridge is located over the tidal lock, to the entrance into the Canal Basin from the River Thames. It is situated east of Gravesend Sailing Club, along Albion Parade. The bridge provides a pedestrian and cycle route, connecting to Gravesend Town Centre to the west of the bridge. The use of the bridge allows access from the River Thames for boats entering and leaving the Canal Basin, the mechanism allows the bridge to move horizontally. However, in its current poor state of repair, the bridge is currently closed to the public due to the safety risks the current condition presents to public use.
- 2.2 The Swing Bridge is located in the Riverside Conservation Area which covers the Canal Basin. The Swing Bridge is a Grade II Listed Building, dates to the late-19th Century, included within this listing is 'the barrelled lock chamber, sea walls, locks and canal basin.'

- 2.3 The bridge mechanism to the bridge is placed on the east bank and allows the bridge to pivot horizontally 90 degrees and lay on the east bank. The deck of the bridge is formed by timber sleepers and intermediate timber beams, this is covered by two layers of plywood and a waterproof membrane.
- 2.4 The site is a Public Right of Way (NG2A), it is located within the Gravesend Opportunity Area and the Canal Basin Regeneration Area Key Site.
- Planning permission has been granted for the restoration of the bridge under planning number 20210406, however, following investigations it has become evident that if these works were completed, the weight loadings from this proposal would still prevent the mechanism from operating, which is the reason for this revised application. The current timbers were last replaced in the 1980's, over the years, temporary repairs have increased the weight of the bridge, reducing the ability of the bridge to operate.



Figure 2. Grade II Listed Swing Bridge, located in the Riverside Conservation Area.

3. Relevant Planning History

- 3.1 Application for Listed Building Consent for alterations and refurbishment of Grade II Listed Swing Bridge in association with the redevelopment of Albion Waterside. Permitted under LPA Ref: 20210406 on the 6th September 2021.

Pre-Application Advice

The proposal is to repair and refurbish the swing bridge at the canal basin, preapplication advice was received in March 2024 after a meeting on site in November 2023.

The LPA advice is summarised as follows:

- A lighter, new design for the bridge is considered acceptable by the council to allow the original operating mechanism of the bridge to be resumed.
- Removing the side walkways and return the bridge to its original single carriageway width would be acceptable if the bridge is not suitable for vehicle use
- Listed Building Consent would be required

4. Development Proposal

4.1 Planning permission is sought for the repair and refurbishment of the Grade II Listed Swing Bridge at the Canal Basin in Gravesend. It is currently in a poor state of repair, as a result of this, it has been closed to the public due to safety reasons. The previously approved planning application for refurbishments was considered not to provide a sufficient reduction in weight on the Swing Bridge, which has led to this application for the amendments to the previous proposal.

4.2 The overall design responds to the pre-application feedback, further discussions with Gravesend Council were completed to confirm a different design style which is considered acceptable in terms of operations. The proposed materials take into account the necessary requirements for light weight materials and the removal of the sidewalk ways will assist in reducing the weight in its current state.

4.3 The proposal includes 3 significant changes from the preapplication feedback, which include:

- Removal of the walkways on both sides of the bridge;
- Removal of the hardwood decking overlay and spacing of the sleepers below;
- The railings to revert to post and rail design;

These will be considered in turn below to understand the benefits of these changes to the operation of the bridge and its intended public use to be reinstated.

4.4 This proposal will reinstate the public rights of way to pedestrians, cyclists and the use by horse and carriages, however cars/vans will not be permitted to use the bridge for access, which have not been allowed to use this for the past 15 years.

4.5 It is considered that the direct works to the bridge are modest in their nature and in keeping with the functional character of the bridge and the wider Canal Basin, the submitted design has evolved to reduce the bridge weight so the original operating mechanism can function.

5. Planning Policy Context

- 5.1 Decisions on planning application must be made in accordance with the policies of the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance the Development Plan for the purposes of S38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) comprises the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) and the Saved Policies in the Gravesham Local Plan First Review (1994).
- 5.2 In addition to the policies of the Development Plan, there is other guidance which is material to the determination of planning applications including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Section 72 of the Planning Act 1990.
- 5.3 The relevant development plan policies are identified below and, these together with relevant NPPF references are addressed where appropriate within the planning assessment section below.

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS11 – Transport
- CS19 – Design and Development Principle
- CS20 – Heritage and Historic Environment

Saved Policies in the Gravesham Local Plan First Review 1994

- TC2 – Listed Buildings
- TC3 – Development Affecting Conservation Areas
- TC7 – Other Archaeological Sites

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

- Section 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development
- Section 9 – Promoting sustainable Transport
- Section 12 – Achieving Well-Designed and Beautiful Places
- Section 16 – Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area with respect to buildings or other land in conservation areas.

6 Planning Evaluation & Opportunity

Introduction

- 6.1 The Swing Bridge is a Public Right of Way, which is currently closed for public use, therefore, this proposal will address the re-opening of the bridge for use as a public right of way and the operations to allow boats to enter the canal basin. The objective of this application is to ensure the bridge reopens as soon as possible after an 10 month period during which cyclists and pedestrians have been currently diverted.
- 6.2 In accordance with Policy CS01, this proposal for the repair and refurbishment of the swing bridge and will encourage the use and allow for public access across the bridge and through the canal. This reinstates an important linkage and represents sustainable development due to the reinstatement of the public right of way, providing efficient connections within Gravesend for cycle and pedestrian use.
- 6.3 NPPF Paragraph 196 states that positive strategies for the conservation and enjoyment of heritage assets most at risk to decay should take into account the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits and to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

Design

- 6.4 The overall design of the repairs to the Swing Bridge have been informed by the preapplication engagement and maintaining its original appearance. These changes are necessary to reduce the weight of the existing bridge, this will allow the operating mechanisms to function because of the reduction in pressure on this system. The proposal is therefore in accordance with Policy CS19.
- 6.5 The removal of hardwood decking will reduce the weight of the bridge. This will also prevent the trapping of water on the bridge which has, in the past resulted in the rotting of the timbers, leading to the bridge closure due to safety reasons.
- 6.6 The current design includes sleepers without spacing below the wood. It is therefore proposed for the spacing of 12mm between the main sleepers, to provide ventilation to the timbers, allowing them to dry faster and reduce the chance of decay satisfying Paragraph 131 of the NPPF.
- 6.7 The existing railings on the Swing Bridge are metal, mesh framed railings, which are in poor condition and do not provide an attractive appearance to the listed bridge situated within the conservation area.
- 6.8 The current permitted railings present a safety issue to the public who would use this bridge. Notwithstanding the weight loading issue affecting the functioning of the bridge, if the approved railings were to be fitted, further protection and safety alterations would be required before public use. Other canal swing bridges have post and rails as the most common railing for these bridges rather than the cross-hatch design. It is, for this reason that this application proposes the bridge to revert to a post and rail design which will

improve the overall appearance of the bridge and is consistent with the pre-application feedback of the LPA. A post and rail feature will ensure the safety of the bridge to the public, reduce the weight of the existing bridge, whilst also improving its appearance, in accordance with Policy TC3 and NPPF Paragraph 195.

Heritage

- 6.9 To support this application, a Listed Building Consent application will also be submitted for the repairs for the revised design to the listed Swing Bridge.
- 6.10 Due to the removal of the side walkways, it is proposed to return the bridge to its original single carriageway width, this would be completed using traditional materials to preserve the special interest of the listed Swing Bridge and to provide sensitive refurbishments within the Riverside Conservation Area. This proposal is in accordance with Policy CS20 stating that proposals which preserve and enhance the significance of the Borough's heritage assets and enjoyment will be supported, especially where these contribute to the distinct identity of the Borough, as is the case in this instance.
- 6.11 This application is supported by the proposed plans which present the design features of the repairs to the Swing Bridge. These proposals are considered to be sensitive to the Riverside Conservation Area as well as the Listed Building, the heritage asset will be conserved whilst providing much needed maintenance and refurbishments in order to enhance the structural integrity of the bridge and its mechanical use.
- 6.12 It was accepted at the pre-application stage of engagement that the proposal would help to allow the original operating mechanism to be used, therefore, providing an enhancement to the listed building and the Riverside Conservation Area. For these reasons this proposal also accords with Section 72 of the of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Access

- 6.13 Kent Highways require the bridge to be accessible to the public on foot, cycle and horse and carriage, supporting active travel in the surrounding area, in accordance with NPPF Paragraph 108 and 116. The proposal will also be consistent with Policy CS01, by reinstating more direct linkages for pedestrians and cyclists who currently experience a significant diversion because of the bridge closure. Due to the proposed removal of the sidewalks on either side, this will create a shared surface, single carriageway, it is also relevant cars/vans have not been permitted to utilise the bridge in the last 15 years.
- 6.14 This proposal will ensure the Public Rights of Way will be re-opened for public use to connect the industrial area to the western promenade. Additionally, the proposal will reinstate the use of the opening bridge, providing access from the River Thames for boats entering and leaving the Canal Basin, supporting the objectives of local plan Policy CS11.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The proposed repairs and refurbishments to the listed Swing Bridge are moderate and sympathetic to its character using sympathetic materials. The design has been moderated because of the need to reduce the weight of the bridge and therefore allow the operating mechanism below (opening the bridge itself) to function.
- 7.2 These repairs will allow the public use of this closed right of way will improve accessibility linkages and connect the industrial units to the western promenade area. The repairs which follow pre-application engagement with the LPA will improve the appearance of the Swing Bridge and restore a functioning part of the heritage contributing to the Riverside Conservation Area in accordance with Policy CS20.
- 7.4 In summary, this application provides sensitively refurbishes the Listed Swing Bridge within the Riverside Conservation Area which allows improved accessibility to the surrounding community with direct sustainable pedestrian and cycle connectivity, which is considered to accord with the NPPF and Gravesham Local Plan Policies.