

Heritage Assessment

Giles Quarme Architects, April 2020



King's Cross Bridge 2 – Heritage Assessment

Introduction

Giles Quarme Architects have prepared this statement outlining the history of the site of the proposed 'Bridge 2' and the impact this will have on the character of the conservation area and the adjacent historic buildings.

History

Following the arrival of the Grand Junction Canal at Paddington in 1801, a scheme was approved in 1810 to construct a new canal link from Paddington to Limehouse. Construction of the Regent's Canal began in 1811, and was opened in stages between 1815 and 1820. The canal's use for transporting goods across London made it a critical link for railway companies arriving into the capital in the 1840s and 50s. The Great Northern Railway built a new goods yard, with associated basins, immediately to the north of the Regent's Canal in 1851, at the same time as their passenger terminal at King's Cross on Euston Road to the south. A number of industrial buildings associated with this initial phase of the Goods Yard remain, along with historic bridges, walls and other features of archaeological interest.

The canal remained in commercial use until the early 20th century, by which point rail, and increasingly road transport, had rendered it largely redundant. Rail freight declined in the late 20th century. By the 1980s, much of the King's Cross area was derelict or in use for only light industry. The arrival of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link at St Pancras has seen a transformation in the area, from derelict industrial sheds, to high quality office, leisure, residential and cultural uses. As part of the scheme, listed warehouses have been refurbished, and the gas holders to the south of the canal have been demolished or relocated to the north west of their original location. This redevelopment, known as 'King's Cross Central' has resulted in the creation of new streets and public squares. "The proposed new bridge is intended to provide a new pedestrian link between these two parts of the development"

Designations

The site is within the Regent's Canal Conservation Area, designated by Camden Council in 1985 and subsequently extended. To the south side of the canal is the boundary of the King's Cross/St Pancras Conservation Area. The site location is adjacent to the unlisted 19th century Fish & Coal Offices, and within the setting of the Grade II listed Granary Building and Eastern Coal Drops, both of which were constructed by the GNR in the early 1850s. The wall to the north side of the canal is identified as a 'positive contribution' to the Conservation Area, as is the adjacent Fish & Coal Offices.

Character, Appearance & Significance of the Conservation Area

The 2008 Conservation Area Assessment mentions the industrial buildings and their 'sense of decay'. Since this was written, the area has been transformed. The site of the gas holders, at the southern end of the site, is now new office buildings. To the north, the land in front of the Granary Building is a popular public square surrounded by historic brick buildings. It is the interplay between the railway buildings and the canal with its associated towpath, bridges and locks that make this section of the conservation area significant. This is enhanced by the varying levels of the canal and the surrounding streetscape. In the stretch between Islington and Camden, the canal is crossed by many bridges, of varying heights, widths, materials and dates.

Proposals

It is proposed to construct a steel pedestrian bridge across the Regent's Canal connecting Goods Way and Canal Square to Granary Square. As part of the works, the stock brick walls to the north and south of the canal will need to be modified. The southern wall is of recent construction and is not considered to be of historic significance. The northern wall has been extensively altered and partially rebuilt, as is clear from the variety of brick types from which it is constructed. Furthermore, a section was demolished to allow the construction of the 'ghat steps' which link the towpath to Granary Square, and the upper part of the remaining wall was rebuilt as part of these works. Therefore, the impacted fabric is all recent construction.

The bridge is a pair of 'Warren Trusses' constructed of folded steel plates that support a stone paved deck. The alignment of the bridge has been developed in conjunction with the Canal & River Trust to allow the gutture restoration of the war-era gates in the canal, which are located in a narrowing of the waterway.

Impact of the Proposals on the Designated Heritage Assets

Although no listed fabric itself will be affected by the proposals, it will impact on historic walls that contribute positively to the conservation area, and affect the setting of listed buildings. These heritage assets must therefore be considered when deciding the planning application.

Impact on the Canal

From the canal, the new bridge will present a contemporary appearance, albeit one whose expressed structure is reminiscent of earlier truss girder bridges. The townscape of this section of the canal has been transformed in the past 30 years by several new bridges and the construction of large new buildings on both banks. This contemporary addition will enhance the canal-scape, and add to a 200-year-old tradition of bridge building. It will enhance the distinctive experience of the canal winding its way beneath the streets above. It can therefore be considered to be an acceptable change to the Regent's Canal Conservation Area, as defined within the Conservation Area Appraisal. The alignment has been agreed with the Canal & Rivers Trust, to ensure that historic gates can be repaired in the future. It will therefore have no impact on the future use or restoration of the Regent's Canal.

Impact on Surrounding Heritage Assets

As noted above, the bridge will have minimal impact on historic fabric. The northern canal wall, onto which the bridge will land, has been modified and partly rebuilt. The bridge will not, therefore result in the loss of original brickwork. The fabric of the adjacent listed and unlisted buildings will not be affected. There will be some impact on views of the Fish & Coal Offices, which are a positive contributor to the Conservation Area, when viewed from Goods Way. This will be outweighed by new views along the canal created from the new bridge. The bridge will not impact on the setting of the Granary or Eastern Coal Drops, because of its small size and discreet location when viewed from Granary Square.

Impact on Circulation within the Conservation Area

The bridge will allow better pedestrian connections between Granary Square and the northern part of King's Cross, with the southern part of the development, and the railway termini beyond. The existing bridge to the east is, furthermore, a pinch point that restricts access to the historic buildings of the Goods Yard that have been restored and repurposed.

Conclusion

The creation of an attractive, innovative new bridge, which takes inspiration from lost railway bridges across the canal, will improve circulation for pedestrians in King's Cross, and is in keeping with the special character of the conservation area. It will not result in harm to any listed buildings, and will require only a small amount of reconstruction of a wall that contributes positively to the conservation area. Overall, the proposals will enhance the King's Cross area, and these benefits will outweigh any harm to the heritage.

