

Chirk Railing Replacement – Heritage Impact Assessment

Application Type

This assessment has been prepared to support an application for planning permission and demolition in a conservation area in relation to replacing the existing steel railings on the brow of Chirk Tunnel and along path towards Chirk Aqueduct within the Chirk Conservation Area.

Context

The proposed replacement railings have been designed to improve the existing railings (see Figure 1), which have deteriorated over time and are failing in some areas (see Figure 2), as well as the wider public realm. The railings were originally installed in 2007 (by the Canal & River Trust in partnership with Wrexham County Borough Council) before the development of the World Heritage Site, following inscription in 2009.

Historic Information

Chirk Tunnel and Aqueduct lie within the Scheduled Monument covering the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and the Llangollen Canal. They are both also currently designated at Grade II* and are situated within Chirk Conservation Area. The structures are a key feature within the boundary of the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site, inscribed by UNESCO in 2009.

The section of the canal between Gledrid Bridge and Horseshoe Falls comprises an exemplary group of civil engineering structures from the 'heroic' phase of transport improvement that accompanied the industrial revolution. The aqueduct and canal channels form part of the main line of the Ellesmere Canal, constructed between 1795 and 1805, and were designed by two of Britain's most important canal engineers, William Jessop and Thomas Telford.

Chirk Aqueduct together with other features such as tunnels, cuttings and embankments, provide examples of the new approaches to engineering developed in Britain during the industrial revolution. The route of the Ellesmere Canal, later known as the Welsh arm of the Shropshire Union Canal or the Llangollen Canal, has remained intact and complete since its construction. No major features have been removed. The aqueducts, tunnels, embankments and cuttings that define this stretch of canal maintain the same form as when they were built.

Summary of Heritage Significance

The significance of the particular part of the Conservation Area where the replacement railings are being proposed is largely manifested by the group of canal and railway related structures (aqueduct,

viaduct, tunnel and embankments) and whilst these structures retain large amounts of historic fabric, this is not reflected in the public realm that forms part of their overall setting. As the existing railings were installed in 2007, they have no heritage value in the context of other elements or the broader characteristics on the Conservation Area.

Proposed works

The proposed development comprises the installation of new railings to replace the existing life-expired railings, which are in a poor condition. The total length of railings to be replaced is approximately 120 metres.

The majority of the new railings will reflect other 'estate style' railing installations within the broader World Heritage Site, such as at Trevor and Llantysilio (see kissing gate example in Figure 4).

Vertical railings will be installed to the viewing area, similar in height and appearance to those which they replace. A new vehicular access gate will be installed where there is currently a failed section of railing.

Summary of Heritage Impact

As stated above, the heritage significance of the particular part of the Conservation Area concerned is largely manifested by the group of canal and railway related structures (aqueduct, viaduct and tunnel etc.), and it is perceived that there would be no direct impact on these structures or their settings. As the existing railings were installed in 2007, they have no heritage value in the context of the characteristic elements of the Conservation Area. Based on this assessment, it is proposed that the replacement railings would serve as an overall enhancement to this particular area and therefore the Conservation Area and the World Heritage Site as a whole.



Figure 1: Example of the existing railing



Figure 2: Example of failed elements



Figure 3: Example of the use of multiple designs.



Figure 4: Example of proposed estate type railing.