



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

Hill Top (Slaithwaite) Reservoir Upgrade

Briefing Pack

Version 1

September 2025



Overview of the project

We're Canal & River Trust, the UK's biggest canal charity. We care for 2000 miles of canals and navigable rivers along with over 70 reservoirs in England and Wales.

Between Autumn 2025 and Spring 2027, we'll be carrying out important maintenance and upgrade work at Hill Top Reservoir in Slaithwaite.

Also known as Slaithwaite Reservoir, this 200-year-old site not only feeds water into the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, but is also a much-loved spot for walking and fishing.

This briefing pack explains why the work is needed, what benefits it will bring, and how we plan to deliver the project with the help of water and environmental engineering experts JN Bentley.



Ground investigations
Early 2025

Preparation works
Late 2025

Spillway construction start
Early 2026

Spillway construction end
Early 2027

Legal completion deadline
Spring 2027

Why the works are needed

Following a recent inspection, we are undertaking essential upgrades to improve the reservoir's performance and long-term resilience.

To keep a steady flow of water into the canal, we carry out regular checks and maintenance at the reservoir.

This includes:

- Twice-weekly checks by our safety inspectors.
- Yearly inspections by our reservoir engineers.

Our charity's team regularly carries out maintenance and minor upgrades as needed and the reservoir is currently in good condition.

Part of our responsibility for the safe running of the reservoir means we must follow strict guidelines set out by the Reservoirs Act 1975. This includes specialist civil engineers undertaking in-depth inspections of the reservoir and the structures around it every 10 years.

At the most recent inspection it was identified that significant works are needed to upgrade the reservoir and ensure it continues to operate safely and reliably for the future.



A brief history of this 200-year-old reservoir

Hill Top (Slaithwaite) Reservoir was built between 1795 and 1799 by the famous canal engineers Benjamin Outram, George Binnie and Thomas Telford.


At 72 feet high, the reservoir dam might have been the tallest of its time. It can hold over 300 million litres of water, which is about the same as 120 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

The reservoir was first built to supply water to the Huddersfield Narrow Canal which was a busy route for boats carrying goods to the local mills during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Today, it still continues its vital role supplying water to the canal and is a much-loved place for the community to enjoy water-side leisure activities.

This historic structure has played a key role in Slaithwaite for over two centuries and now requires essential upgrades to ensure it can continue supporting both the canal and the local community for generations to come.




300ML

Slaithwaite Reservoir can hold 300 million litres of water, which is about the same as 120 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

What the project will achieve

Key upgrades

- **Spillway replacement:** The spillway is designed to safely release excess water. It acts as an overflow channel, preventing the water from overtopping and potentially damaging the dam or other retaining structures. We will build a new spillway with greater capacity to safely manage high water levels, strengthening the reservoir's safety and reliability while also improving its resilience to extreme weather.
- **Dam repairs:** We will carry out repairs to the dam to reduce water leakage and enhance its structural performance.



Photograph of the current spillway.

Additional features

- **New stone covering** We will add stone cladding to the external faces of the new spillway to blend in with the local environment.
- **Modern fencing** We will replace the existing fencing along the public footpath, which is in need of repair, with new, modern fencing.
- **Improved access** We will improve access to the reservoir for operational and public use.
- **Environmental enhancements:** By carefully managing tree planting, with up to five trees replaced for every one removed, and clearing away vegetation, we will maintain and enhance the appearance of the landscape surrounding the reservoir.



Visualisation of the new spillway once works are completed.

Preparing for construction

Work to date

Planning for the upgrade work began after we received the results of the most recent 10-year inspection. Multiple options were considered and detailed plans and models were created and tested.

The works benefit from Permitted Development Rights, which means that a planning application is not required. However, we have sought approval for the detailed plans from Kirklees Council.

The application was submitted in March 2025 and approval was received in June 2025.

Ground investigations

Our contractor, JN Bentley, has already completed some minor maintenance work including repointing and grouting, and carried out ground investigation works on the reservoir dam.



Pre-construction works

To prepare for the upgrade works, we will prepare the site by:

- Building a site compound.
- Creating access routes to the reservoir.
- Delivering equipment and materials to the site.
- Building a platform that will be used to access the spillway.

Site clearance

Some trees and vegetation around the reservoir will need to be removed so that we can safely access the site. This work will be carefully carried out to minimise tree loss and any impact on nesting birds. Our ecologist will oversee the process to ensure it is carried out responsibly.

What to expect during construction

Some disruption to the local community will be unavoidable, but we will do our best to keep it to a minimum.

Construction traffic

The heaviest period of construction traffic will be during the pre-construction works. Stone will be delivered by large construction vehicles. We expect there will be up to 11 deliveries a day over the course of one month. There will be additional traffic bringing deliveries of concrete and steel but these will be less frequent.

During construction, most traffic at the site will come from staff and contractors travelling to and from work. There will be less frequent deliveries of materials. All larger vehicles will come in from the south, using Manchester Road, avoiding the narrow northern roads.

Where possible, deliveries will be made between the off-peak hours of 09:30 to 15:00 to minimise disruption.

Accessing the reservoir

At times during the works, there will be temporary closures to reservoir access to allow work to be carried out safely.

Footpath

Access to the footpath across the reservoir is expected to remain open the majority of the time. Temporary closures and signposted alternatives will be in place at times for public safety and to allow vital works to be undertaken.

Closures will be agreed with the local highway authority. We will notify residents of any planned closures in advance wherever possible.

We will aim to schedule any footpath closures during school hours to avoid school drop-off and pick up times, as we know this is a popular route to the local primary school. We will also inform the local primary school to help update the school community of possible disruptions ahead of time.

Fishing

To enable anglers to continue to use the reservoir for fishing, we are planning to maintain access for anglers throughout the works.

There are no plans to fully draw down Slaithwaite Reservoir, though water levels will be significantly reduced at times during the construction works for safety reasons.

We will carefully manage any water reduction to avoid impacting on the fish stocks in the reservoir. Our team will continue to update Slaithwaite and District Angling Club of any potential disruption throughout the project.

Staying connected during the work

Our charity is committed to keeping local communities informed and empowered. We will ensure they are aware of upcoming works and regularly updated on progress. We will also make sure they know how to reach out with questions or concerns.

How we will keep people updated



Post:

We will send letters to residents to provide significant updates.



On site:

Our team will be onsite regularly during the project and will be happy to answer questions and explain the works. Signage and information boards around the reservoir will detail the works and expected timelines.



In the community:

Posters and leaflets will be distributed at local community hubs, such as libraries, schools, and community centres, to help keep residents informed.



Webpage:

We have a dedicated page on our charity's website with information about the project.



www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/slaithwaite-reservoir

Contact channels

Please contact our Community Relations Team if you have any questions.



Email:

info@slaithwaite-reservoir.co.uk



Freephone:

0808 281 4669

Our phonenumber is monitored Monday to Friday, 09:00 to 17:00, excluding bank holiday. We have a voicemail facility outside of these hours.



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