



MARPLE AQUEDUCT OFFSIDE PARAPET FENCING RESPONSE TO DESIGN CONSULTATION

Thank you to everyone who responded to our consultation relating to our decision to install a fence on the off-side parapet at Marple Aqueduct.

In recent years there has been a growing concern about the risks presented from the potential for falls from height at some historic structures owned by the Canal & River Trust.

The Trust's approach is generally one of minimum intervention and the installation of fencing to reduce risk is always a last resort as we seek to protect and preserve the historic structures in our care whilst recognising modern requirements for public safety.

At Marple Aqueduct a significant potential risk exists for members of the public on Trust land to fall from the unprotected off-side parapet with a fall almost certainly causing death.

While there has been warning signage in place to discourage access to the unfenced area for over 10 years there have been recorded incidents and anecdotal information in recent years that demonstrates that some people are exposing themselves to the hazard despite clear signage and there is a real prospect of people accidentally falling to their death.

Recorded incidents:

- 2014 – social media footage of a holiday hire boat where people had stopped on the aqueduct and stood on the unfenced edge. .
- 2011 - near miss reported by a member of the public relating to the ability to access the off-side area
- 2009 - a person exited their boat not realising the extent of the fall and nearly fell.
- 2009 - a child exited their holiday boat onto the off-side, parents recovered child.

Anecdotal stories include:

- As a local youth's game, reports of children jumping the canal to land on the off-side, doing this at locations where they judge that trees might break a fall if they don't land safely on the offside.
- Several stories of people stopping on the aqueduct and walking on the unfenced parapet area.

The Trust has to make a judgement on the possibility of a fall occurring with evidence indicating that the risk is real, the consequence of one fall would be catastrophic and a cost effective prevention mechanism in the form of heritage sympathetic fencing is available.

A very significant factor to be taken into account is that the Trust is investing a significant amount in the aqueduct and it would be reckless to ignore the risk which exists when a simple and cost effective prevention measure can be implemented alongside other works.

Taking full account of all factors involved the Trust has reluctantly decided that it is reasonable to install fencing to sensibly mitigate the risks that the Trust has to manage at this location.

During our consultation 24 people gave comments about the design of the fence, the favoured approach was for a traditional approach to the parapet, with vertical rails. We will use this to help guide the design of the fence.

It is well understood that some will not be supportive of the installation of safety fencing because of the important heritage aspects at the site and views to this effect have been made clear during the consultation process. 69 people used the consultation opportunity to express their concerns, although acknowledging the risk in many instances. We acknowledge that not as much information about the safety incidents that have occurred was readily available during the consultation as is outlined here and believe that will have been a driver for some of the comments made.

We have thought very carefully about the objections presented. In addition to the public consultation we have consulted with our advisory committees for navigation and heritage who have acknowledged the issues and support our taking action. On balance we believe we have to give greater weight in this situation to the risks to public safety that exist whilst recognising that any safety measures introduced should be sympathetic to the heritage of the structure.

David Baldacchino

Waterway Manager, Manchester & Pennine