

BRUNEL SWIVEL BRIDGE NEWS

November 2026

WESTERN HARBOUR DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The Western Harbour Development Framework has just been released by Bristol City & WECA's master planning consultants Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands for consultation. CLICK HERE to view.

It restates much of the policy of last year's draft master plan, but adds helpful detail.

Key outcomes:

01) Respect and celebrate heritage assets - retaining key views, and visual relationships.

02) Establish long-term stewardship and maintenance strategies - securing the sustainable future of these assets through appropriate management, consultation and funding mechanisms.

03) Prioritise the sensitive reuse and adaptation of historic buildings and dock infrastructure - bringing them back into viable, long-term economic or social use.

04) Undertake robust heritage assessments, including historical, structural, and setting analysis to inform proposals.

05) Sensitively upgrade retained historic structures to meet modern safety and energy efficiency standards.

06) Mitigate unavoidable loss through detailed recording, creative interpretation, and heritage-led landscape strategies that acknowledge and commemorate the site's history.

07) Respond positively to the materials, character, and maritime-industrial identity.

08) Retain and celebrate non-designated heritage assets by creatively incorporating former industrial and maritime features into the emerging urban fabric and public realm.

02.04 Existing Context , Heritage (P 48)

The Brunel Swivel Bridge Group strongly endorses the KEY OUTCOMES above, and is ready to play its part in delivering them.

Most encouragingly this section specifically mentions the reinstatement of the Brunel Swivel Bridge *for 'use by pedestrians at certain times of the year'.* The restoration of these and other heritage assets is warmly welcomed, but they are presented as '*Placemaking Opportunities'*. Surely they should be presented as **core essentials** not mere '*opportunities'*.

Design Parameters 'Safeguard treasured assets' (p 32) states: *'The treasured assets of Riverside Garden Centre and the Brunel Way Pump Track **will** be accommodated within the areas regeneration'* Surely all **heritage** assets deserve similar certainty.

But the Swivel Bridge not to be used ! Worryingly, no pathway is shown crossing the Brunel Swivel Bridge on the Waterside Trail (04.04, P 57), Avon River Trail, (04.05, P 61), nor the cycle route (05.05 P72). Why not use the Swivel Bridge after it has been restored? Doing so would enable the flood-defence around the Knuckle to be made narrower and much cheaper.

Desilting Brunel Lock & The Grid Iron. 04.05 F (P 62) suggests *'exploring'* the exciting opportunity of de-silting Brunel's (south) Lock, displaying its majestic elliptical stone construction. 07.02 (P 95) suggests the Brunel Lock sluice-gates be repaired (04 & Fig 118) revealing the Grid Iron (Fig 169) and Brunel Lock, (Fig 170).

However subsequent pages show the silt remaining in place. On the sections (P 96) show the water polo area desilted but not Brunel Lock, which is an impossibility.

There is some confusion here, and no firm recommendation on whether to stabilise the silt or wash it out. Revealing, displaying, and interpreting major heritage structures are critical to the Western Harbour Development's success.

Unlisted structures destroyed. Fig 172 (P 96) suggests that the 'tilting toll house', tide gauge, jigger pits and hydraulic capstan will be obliterated by the substantial new flood defences. Given that the defences are only 2m high, and Brunel's Swivel Bridge could carry cyclists, the defences could be made narrower with less impact on heritage features.

Ferry. We welcome the proposal for extending the ferry route into Cumberland Basin. (P 55)

B Bond. We are awaiting Bristol City permission to put a temporary exhibition in B Bond, see below. This helps fulfil *Placemaking* aim 04.02 -02 (P 48) at no cost to the Council.

SUMMARY: We welcome the Development Framework but feel it should firmly recommend action on heritage assets, not present them as '*opportunities.*'

PLEASE CLICK HERE to submit your views to the Council BY 4th JANUARY 2027.

The process is easy to navigate, and the Council does take note of feed-back.



ENTRANCE LOCK OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Consultants Jacobs have just published an Options Appraisal for repairs and upgrading of the Entrance Lock Gates. CLICK HERE to view the 233 page report.

Four mitre or sector gate options are shortlisted, the lock chamber being 19m wide as now, or reduced to 16m wide. The option of re-engineering Brunel's south lock is also considered.

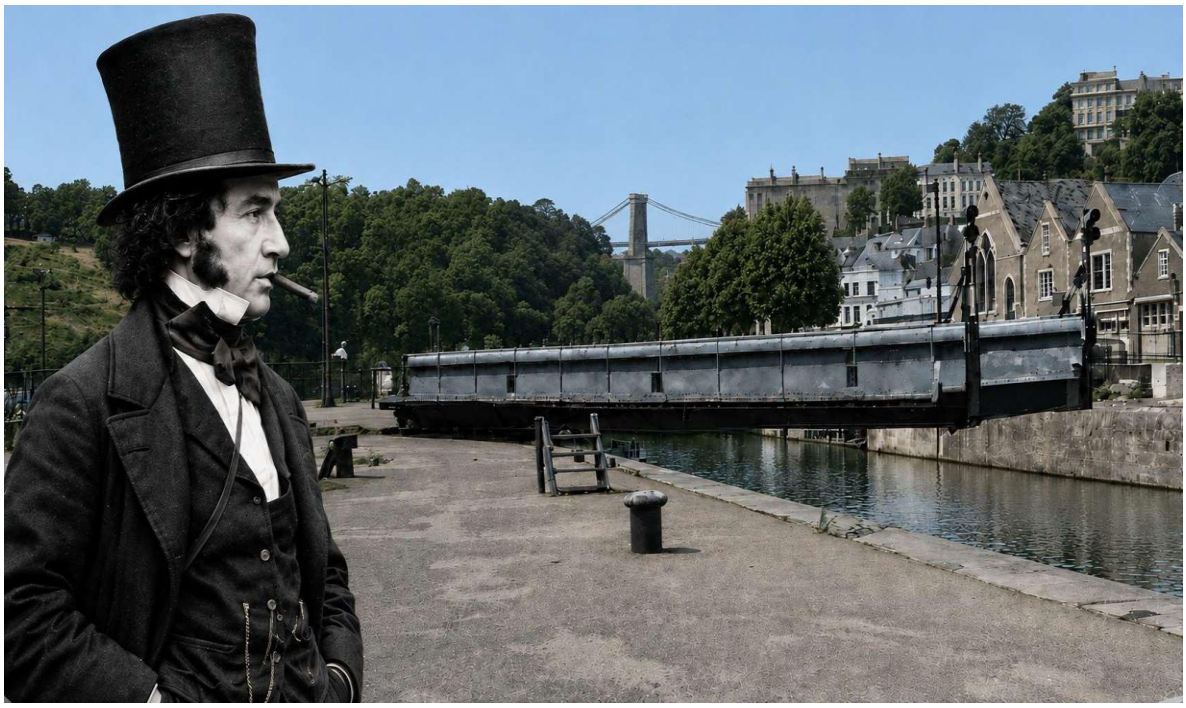
The preferred option is new propped mitre gates at the west end of the north lock, which is actually a strengthened and heightened version of the existing gates.

Interestingly the report states (3.1.1, P 17) that the Harbour operations team would like to decommission the Underfall Yard sluices as they are *'… oversized, difficult to maintain, and limit opportunities to use the adjacent quayside for moorings'*.. Their preferred long-term approach is to reinstate the Brunel Lock dam sluicegates.

The Brunel Swivel Bridge Group supports reinstating these sluice-gates. Their water-flow would wash away the silt in Brunel Lock, revealing its impressive scale and workmanship.

With clever design the famous grid Iron could also be desilted naturally, without the need for significant dredging. The Grid Iron, Brunel Swivel Bridge and Brunel Lock would provide an unique, popular and awe-inspiring focus for the Western Harbour Development.

2026 - AN EXCEPTIONAL YEAR !



The Brunel Swivel Bridge volunteers and trustees have progressed the project further in 2026 than in any other single year since inception in 2013:

Financial Resilience The £1 million donation from our generous philanthropic donor has been invested with professional fund managers. The Fund now provides an income for the Bridge's restoration, and once the Bridge is working again, it will support its ongoing maintenance.

Capital growth is expected to inflation-proof the Fund, and in the medium term may allow our successors to care for other local heritage features too.

However, we are still at an early stage, and we need a further £2m million swiftly if we are to restore the Bridge in time for its 180th birthday in 2029.

The Bridge Restoration has advanced. Our fully-funded 2026-7 programme of engineering design and repairs is under way.

This year we completed the critical but difficult task of removing Brunel's original adjuster which once carried most of the rotating deck's weight. Next year we'll fit a new one, re-creating Brunel's original design-concept.

Project Resilience. Over the year three Bristol City Councillors who chair committees, the Regional Mayor of WECA, Bristol City Harbour-Master, the Suspension Bridge-master, the Council's Master-Planner, and Avon Riversides 2100 Project Manager have visited us on site, and been supportive. We continue to receive support from Bristol City senior officers, and the Swivel Bridge CIO holds a license for site-work.

This year we welcomed Dr. Julia Elton as our patron, and Chris Godden as our treasurer.
TV presenters Dr.Jonathan Foyle and John Craven have recorded videos promoting the project and our social media presence has increased significantly.

Our eleven newsletters this year have been well-received by 500 supporters, and our monthly volunteer workdays have proved to be fun as well as productive, with average attendance almost doubling.

The dedication and enthusiasm of our amazingly talented trustees has raised the project's profile, and developed supportive contacts in our funders, Bristol City Council, WECA, Historic England, engineering professionals, and specialist suppliers and contractors.

A new website, leaflet, poster and signs on the sides of the Bridge have improved our public-face, whilst internally the Group now has written procedures and protocols in place to support our expansion, and letting larger contracts next year.

We have been delighted with the progress made in 2026. If you have played an active part in our success, THANK YOU. We look forward to an exciting 2027 together !

AND INTO 2027…….

We plan a major fund-raising event in the new year to accelerate the rate of restoration, aiming to complete the work by 2029, the Bridge's 180th anniversary.

We aim to complete our engineering design, and achieve technical approval for the restoration from Bristol City Council's Bridges and Highways Team.

Practical restoration work will continue on the primary structure, mechanical parts, and surrounding environment, through a combination of volunteer work-days and contractors.

We shall continue to develop technical plans and costings for ongoing care of the Bridge once it is working again, and progress negotiations with Bristol City on a long-term lease.

We have applied to Bristol City Council to put a temporary exhibition in B Bond celebrating the trade and industry represented by the ships that passed through the entrance locks, the seamen that manned them, and their owners. Displays will explain the technology and operation of the dock, with a focus on the Brunel Dock and Swivel Bridge. Videos of volunteers' conservation work on the Swivel Bridge and historic artefacts from it will feature.

We also plan permanent sign-boards explaining other heritage features around the Cumberland Basin. All these plans support and help deliver the Western Harbour Place-Development Framework as featured on the first page of this newsletter..

PLEASE DONATE TOWARDS THE SWIVEL BRIDGE RESTORATION VIA THE WEBSITE OR TO:
Metrobank Sort: 23-05-80, Acct. name: Brunel Swivel Bridge Group. Acct. No: 56433724

THANK YOU, WE GREATLY APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT ! Geoff Wallis
Secretary, Brunel Swivel Bridge Group is a CIO, Charity No: 1214276

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