

Runcorn Options Workshop

Report from meeting

FEBRUARY 2022

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This report was developed by Arcadis for Halton Borough Council on behalf of the council and Runcorn Lock Restoration Society and includes input from both.



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Version Control

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1 Introduction to the Project

- 1.1.1 The UK Government invited Halton Borough Council (HBC) in 2019 to submit a Town Investment Plan (TIP) for Runcorn. Runcorn Locks Restoration Society (RLRS) put phase 1 of Unlock Runcorn forward for the TIP, and HBC included it in the bid submitted to Government January 2021. Unlock Runcorn is the name of the aspiration of RLRS to connect the Bridgewater Canal (BWC) with the Manchester Ship Canal (MSC). Unlock Runcorn is one of seven projects in the Runcorn TIP, and this project should work in tandem with the others to deliver the TIP objectives.
- 1.1.2 Council plans were unveiled for demolition of the 1975 Silver Jubilee Bridge viaduct approaches and slip road in the area, that was the main blocker for connecting the BWC to the MSC. RLRS commissioned a Masterplan (made by SLR), a 'business plan' (Chittenden Horley), and a cost overview (Pelli Property) to provide justification for the scheme. RLRS submitted an outline planning application for phase 1 in 2020, which is pending, in the meantime various investigation work was undertaken.
- 1.1.3 Arcadis was procured to run an optioneering workshop with the stated purpose of arriving at 3 clearly defined and distinct options to take forwards to outline design.

2 Meeting Attendees

Table 1 - Attendees

Participants

Nick Kealey (Chair)	Arcadis
Alex Holt	Arcadis
Edward McCartney-Moore	Arcadis
Aydin Zoulutuna	Arcadis
Martin Smith (Teams)	Arcadis
Simon Edwards (Teams)	Arcadis
Dave Steele	RLRS
Steve Illidge	RLRS
Oliver Ferguson	RLRS
Daren Andrews	RLRS
Jochem Hollestelle	HBC
Sara Munikwa	HBC
Daniel Foster	HBC
Patrick Moss	Moss Naylor Young

3 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The workshop was chaired by Arcadis to develop a series of options that could be taken forwards in the RIBA business case model for further investigation. The workshop provided a floor in which both Halton Borough Council and Runcorn Lock Restoration Society (RLRS) could discuss and agree a preferred way forward, strategic alternative, and the Do Minimum options. A multi-criteria-analysis was used to score each option, with the criteria, assumptions and constraints agreed in discussion. These discussions were also used to identify and capture project risks, as well as share knowledge between the respective parties.

3.2 Constraints

Each option was discussed on the understanding that the constraints below applied to every situation.

- Any restoration/works to facilitate wide beam boats – dimensions to be provided by RLRS in due course.
- New canal line is to go through 'Northern Line' of the canal i.e., arch 6.
- All solutions to provide footpath and cycle access across site.
- No current agreed water supply for the restoration and deemed unlikely that additional water supply would be facilitated. As such any water usage would need to be back-pumped.
- No works will prevent the eventual full restoration of the canal.

4 Options development

- 4.1.1 RLRS produced an initial set of options to be considered at the meeting. These formed the basis for the options discussions and were the basis for the options taken forward.

4.2 Original options concept

- 4.2.1 Initial concept was of a single boat lift of 8m from current canal line to proposed level of a new basin (North of Percival Lane). Through discussion of the meeting and evaluation of topography by Arcadis, it became clear that the proposed drop would place the canal more than 4m below existing ground levels in the area between the railway viaduct and Percival Lane. This would present significant H&S risk and make the canal user experience intimidating. While an 8m boat lift remains one of the options, all parties agreed that this arrangement was problematic.

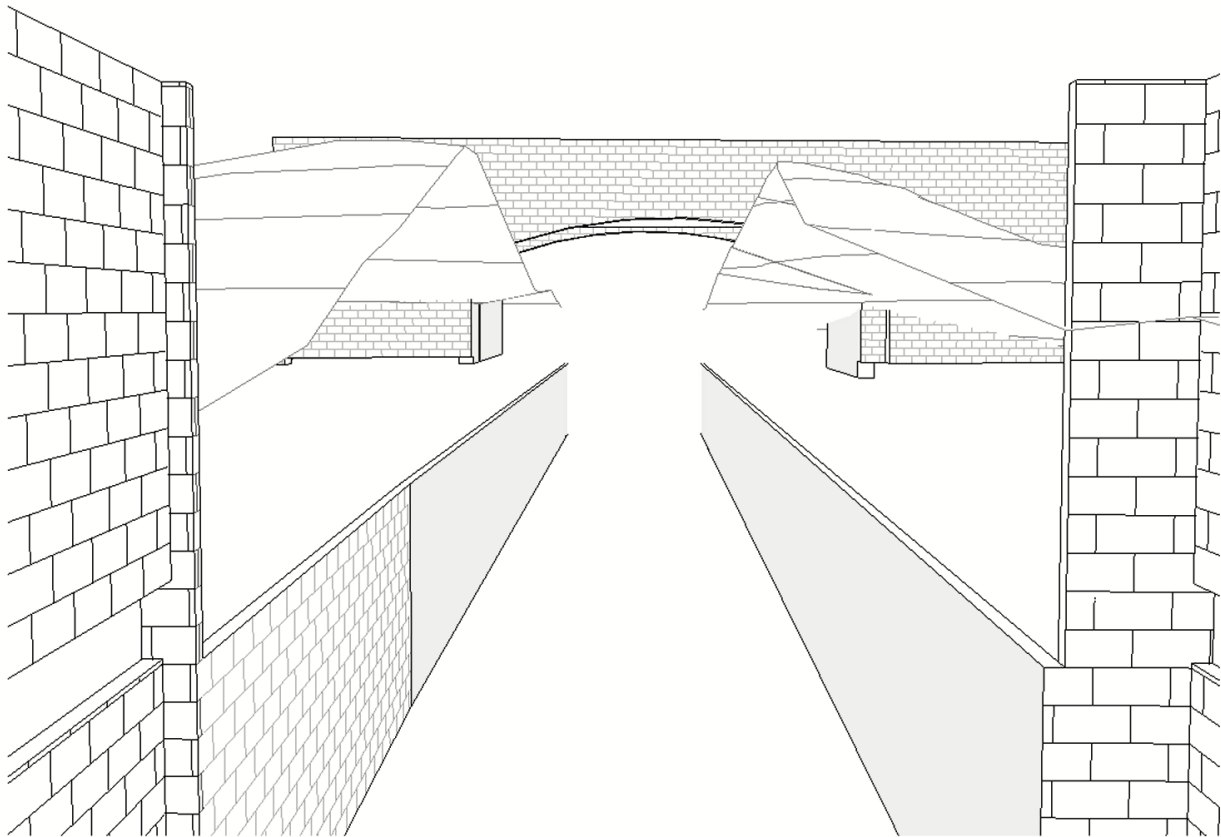


Figure 1 - Topographic model with proposed canal line

4.3 Longlist of options

Longlist

Double Drop Lift

This would consist of 2 vertical boat lifts each of approximately 4m to lower the canal to the level of the marina and “show locks”. The would be a winding hole between the lifts. Due to funding constraints the Phase 1 project would probably only build the first lift and do as much preparation for the second lift as funding allowed.

Reinstate Locks

Reinstating the original line of locks and the winding hole beyond the rail viaduct. It should be possible to rebuild/restore to modern standards with a pump back system.

Single Lock

Similar to option 1, but this would drop to below Percival Lane but not to the “show lock” level. Increasing the drop level to greater than 4m i.e. around 6m to 8m.

Single Lift

Boat lift as per the reference scheme from WSP, i.e. 8m boat lift.

Curved Incline plane

A curved plane, which pulls/lowers boats, in a caisson, along it. Consideration given to energy recovery or counterbalancing but acknowledged that the gradients required for the site make counterbalancing difficult.

Aqueduct Over Percival Lane

Raising the canal level to pass over Percival Lane

Boatlift (up and over)

Lifting the canal level above the current top level before bringing it down on the other side at a lower level.

4.4 Shortlist and criteria

A list of criteria was developed and then they were grouped against the 5 cases that have to be presented in the FBC. Weighting was discussed but the view was to try the scoring without weighting then review the result:

- **Strategic**
 - Contribution to delivery of work
 - Contribution to Town Improvement Plan (TIP) priorities
 - Visibility/Accessibility
 - Sustainability
- **Economic**
 - Footfall/boatfall generation
 - Public appeal/destination quality/dwell time
- **Financial**
 - Maintenance Costs
 - Target budget
- **Commercial**
 - Delivery risk – water/Network Rail (NR)
 - Community Support
- **Management**
 - Safety
 - Management Risks

4.5 Discussion

Further discussion was held on the preferred way forward, scoring the long list and generating a series of discussions:

The main discussion points were around:

- public appeal
- how an option might facilitate the TIP funding stream
- creating an iconic canal location to drive footfall.
- constructability
- operation and maintenance

- 4.5.1 Discussion also revolved around ownership and operation and maintenance liabilities of the finished project. HBC are concerned that at some future date they could become the owner and operator of the site and that this may be problematic for the council. They are also concerned that the more novel and unique the solution is, the more difficult the HBC position becomes. This outcome could arise in a number of ways:
- The funding agreement may require an 'organisation of substance' to be named as beneficiary and may require commitments for the long-term operation.
 - HBC are a significant landowner and internally may view the asset as council owned because of this.
 - RLRS may secure insufficient future funding, on insufficient active members and cease to operate.
- 4.5.2 The Preferred Way Forward is novel and the nature of the solutions creates specific risks and responsibilities. There are a limited number of organisations that would be willing to take on these responsibilities and the process of developing the business case will need to assess these in full and confirm that a robust arrangement can be put in place. Notwithstanding the concerns listed in 4.5.1 proposals may include the creation of a separate Trust to operate the asset and carry long term liability, and the business case will need to consider whether this is sufficiently robust.
- 4.5.3 The Strategic Alternative and do minimum options would need to address this concern by identifying fewer novel structures with lower maintenance and operation costs. For that reason, the Strategic Alternative would include locks which HBC already own in other locations.
- 4.5.4 The view of RLRS is that the reduced novelty is likely to reduce visitor numbers and thus reduce their ability to operate in the future, however it is possible that the reduction in visitors is offset against the reduction in operational costs.
- 4.5.5 The options will be developed to outline design, but it will be necessary when developing the funding bid and business case, to address this issue and develop a future ownership plan for each option that is robust and meets the approval of those authorising the funding.

4.6 Scoring

- 4.6.1 The longlist was scored against the criteria. The Aqueduct over Percival Lane option was discontinued due to the significant financial requirements to facilitate it.
- 4.6.2 The scoring indicated what the general consensus was, and it determined that no additional weighting was required. The table below should only be viewed as indicating the general 'front runners' and is not an absolute score due to the amount of uncertainty that remains.
- 4.6.3 The options that seemed the most likely to be taken forwards were the curved incline plane, Reinstate Locks and 4m Drop lift.
- 4.6.4 Following further discussion around ownership, maintenance, and future operation, the two options to take forward as the preferred and strategic options were the Double Drop Lift and Reinstating the Locks. It was felt that the scoring on the incline plane was likely to have been optimistic.

Table 2 - Multi-Criteria-Assessment Scoring

	4m Drop Lift	Reinstate Locks	Single lock Vertical drop	Single lift	Curved Incline Plane	Aqueduct over Percival Lane	Up & Over
Strategic	4	4	4	5	4	-	5
Economic	4	4	2	5	5	-	5
Financial	5	5	3	1	3	0	0
Commercial	4	4	1	1	3	-	2
Management	3	3	2	2	3	-	1
Total	20	20	12	14	18	0	13

5 Defining the options

- 5.1.1 The conclusion of the meeting was the defining of the following options, which will now be taken forward to RIBA stage 2.

5.2 Option 1 – Preferred Way Forward - Restoration of canal including a 4m Boatlift.

- 5.2.1 Levels broadly matching the original canal level. Boatlift could be basic or enhanced to increase attraction value. Access point through Station Road only will include formal landscaped area for car parking and facilitate construction of visitor centre (although visitor centre excluded from current scope of TIP). Additional funding would be sought for enhancements and only a basic option would be presented in the RIBA 2 outline design. Back pumping would be required but is less relevant in comparison to option 2. Area of land downstream to incorporate winding hole and facilitate construction on next phase. Additional consideration will need to be made to connect into the existing water pipe and by-wash facilities.
- 5.2.2 All management strategies and costs will be produced based on market values and prevailing standards or codes of practice. Maintenance will be assessed at nationally accepted intervals as will statutory inspections. Usage levels will be assessed by RLRS and fed into the design process so that costs can be assessed.
- 5.2.3 Management of the asset needs to be determined however the intent is that this option would be managed by RLRS. The project will include a workshop to identify how this would work alongside the funding constraints and an investigation into alternative management strategies. Any savings that can be generated by RLRS 'self-delivering' any of these aspects will be assessed by RLRS and fed into the business-case-Consultant's work. The business-case-Consultant will need to consider potential savings, income, and socio-economic benefits of this scheme. RLRS, the business-case-Consultant and the Council will need to assess the income potential alongside the ongoing maintenance and operational costs.

5.3 Option 2 – Strategic Alternative - Restoration of canal, incorporating 2 restored locks.

- 5.3.1 Levels and location broadly matching the original canal. Additional access point may be required, possibly off Station Road, and will include formal landscaped area for car parking and facilitates and construction of visitor centre (although visitor centre excluded from current scope of TIP). Locks likely to be more modern than original and will incorporate back pumping to manage water supply issues. Area of land downstream to incorporate winding hole and facilitate construction of next phase. Additional consideration will need to be made to connect into the existing water pipe and by-wash facilities.
- 5.3.2 All management strategies and costs will be produced based on market values and prevailing standards or codes of practice. Maintenance will be assessed at nationally accepted intervals as will statutory

inspections. Usage levels will be assessed by RLRS and fed into the design process so that costs can be assessed.

- 5.3.3 Management of the asset needs to be determined. Either of the main partners could feasibly operate the asset. The project will include a workshop to identify how this would work alongside the funding constraints and an investigation into alternative management strategies. Any savings that can be generated by RLRS 'self-delivering' any of these aspects will be assessed by RLRS and fed into the business-case-Consultant's work. The business-case-Consultant will need to consider potential savings, income, and socio-economic benefits of this scheme. RLRS, the business-case-Consultant and the Council will need to assess the income potential alongside the ongoing maintenance and operational costs.
- 5.3.4 It is noted that the footfall and 'attraction value' of this option may be less than for option 1, however the ongoing costs are also likely to be lower and so this assessment needs to be made.

5.4 Option 3 - Do Minimum

- 5.4.1 High quality 'permanent' destination public park that supports contemporary 'tracing' of the former canal corridor, heritage interpretation, town centre green infrastructure strategy, biodiversity net gain and carbon sequestration. Provision of a SUDS car park with access from historic Rutland Street, and a café pod / kiosk (on site of a potential future visitor centre), with all park layout to safeguard future opportunity for the re-opening of the former canal (see preferred and strategic options). To include some water space as partial canal end restoration to facilitate a boat mooring at existing canal level (with isolation to satisfy Peel), with an overall focus on the ongoing restoration of the historic canal.
- 5.4.2 All management strategies and costs will be produced based on market values and prevailing standards or codes of practice – although these will be very minimal in this case. Maintenance and inspection will be assessed alongside the local authority's standard 'parks' maintenance plans. Maintenance of the newly created length of canal will be nominal.
- 5.4.3 The desire of all parties is that the wider public space will be maintained by the Council but that the ongoing restoration by RLRS will be established and supported, and the setting of the area should specifically market and create interest in the restoration. A management agreement may be required to ensure this remains a priority, and the intention is to have a workshop to identify how this would work alongside the funding constraints and an investigation into alternative management strategies.
- 5.4.4 Any income that can be generated will be assessed by RLRS and fed into the business-case-Consultant's work. The business case may also include capital investment into a trip boat and some ongoing activity. The business-case-Consultant will need to consider the costs and socio-economic benefits of this scheme.

5.5 Project Risks

- 5.5.1 This report should be read in conjunction with the project risk register.

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