

AINA CASE STUDY

PLACE MAKING AND SHAPING

Hall Bridge, Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation



Before and after photos show the marked improvements at Hall Bridge

Volunteers help to design and refurbish an historic footbridge

The Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation runs through a largely unspoilt part of rural Essex and connects Chelmsford with the Blackwater Estuary at Heybridge Basin. The waterway has independent, never having been nationalised, and is now maintained and managed by Essex Waterways Ltd, operating as a subsidiary of the Inland Waterways Association.

Since taking on responsibility, Essex Waterways Ltd have carried out a full range of maintenance and improvement work, and Hall Bridge at Heybridge was completely refurbished as part of a convenient route for residents in an adjacent residential development. This work was supported by Maldon District Council who had made funding to improve the bridge a condition of planning consent.

The bridge is believed to have originally been a swing bridge which allowed sailing barges to navigate to a nearby warehouse. The later brick built bridge was subsequently modified with a concrete deck and standard “Keyclamp” handrails and looked rather forlorn when compared with the original listed bridges elsewhere on the Navigation. Whilst not forming part of the official public footpath network, Hall Bridge has an important role as a link in a circular walk which takes in the towpath and the sea wall to the Blackwater Estuary.

The design for a replacement bridge was based on the original timber bridges, and all architectural design and engineering work was undertaken by volunteers. Necessary consents were obtained and work commenced in 2010 with a week-long Waterway Recovery Group camp undertaking demolition of the badly eroded old deck. This was followed by local contractors who fitted a new timber bridge deck and rebuilt the brick parapet walls.

The end result has been a welcome enhancement of the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area. Further work was undertaken by another Waterway Recovery Group camp which linked the new bridge with the existing footpath network through the construction of three new connecting paths.

At the opening ceremony the Chairman of Essex County Council praised the project as a shining example of volunteers and local government working together for the improvement of the waterway environment. By using volunteer expertise, the work cost less than half the original estimate provided by consultants. Hall Bridge is now an attractive feature close to the gateway of the Navigation.