



## Hollinwood Canal Society

# Council Demolishes Historic Footbridge



It came as a huge shock in April when we learnt that Oldham Council, without any warning, had sent in a team to demolish Pinch Farm footbridge. The 150 year old lattice sided iron bridge has been a well-loved landmark for generations of local people walking along the towpath between Waterhouses Locks and Crime Lake.

An officer for Oldham Council's Unity Partnership told us the bridge was

considered to pose a significant risk to members of the public and was also deemed to be irreparable as many of the principal elements of the structure had failed or were about to fail.

However, the Society is critical of Oldham Council for allowing the bridge to get into that condition. Photographs over a number of years show that brickwork had not been re-pointed and grass was allowed to grow on the



*Above: The towpath alongside Pinch Farm, minus bridge.*

wooden deck, possibly contributing to the corrosion of the ironwork.

Although it did not carry a public right of way it was an accommodation bridge providing access between the two parts of the Pinch Farm property. Oldham Council inherited the duty to maintain the accommodation bridge when they took over ownership of the canal within Daisy Nook [see page 2]

Country Park more than 40 years ago, around the time when the country park was established.

Some members have suggested that the bridge should have been 'Listed'. However, this would have reduced the options for repairing or replacing parts of the bridge but would not have prevented its demolition once it was deemed unsafe.

Sadly, with the budgets of local councils being cut severely, it seems possible that there could be more instances arising where the duty to ensure public safety could trump the duty to protect historic assets.

Angela Rayner, the MP in whose constituency the canal lies, met with canal society members at Daisy Nook in the week following the bridge's removal. The meeting, planned since January, was to give Angela an opportunity to see the historic features in the country park. She was dismayed to see what was left of the bridge.

Jim McMahon, the new MP for Oldham West and Royton and Councillor for the ward that includes Pinch Farm, was familiar with the bridge and expressed shock at its sudden

removal, feeling that the heritage value of the bridge had not been taken into account. He would welcome the Society's thoughts on how to put the matter right.

He said the council needs to develop a meaningful heritage asset list and management plan to ensure this can not be allowed to happen again.

Following the Society's complaint of a lack of consultation a regular partnership meeting has now been set up between Oldham's Asset Management team and the three canal

societies with interests within Oldham.

Hollinwood Canal Society Chairman Ian Davenport said, "The bridge was a well-known landmark and part of the history of the area. It had a very pleasing design but its appearance has been spoilt in recent years by evident signs of neglect. We appreciate that health and safety is important but so is our heritage. A small amount of money each year could have helped to ensure that this piece of history was not lost."

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*Local MP Angela Rayner examines the remains of the bridge on a long-planned visit to see the canal's heritage. (Photo: Ian Bradbury)*

[www.hollinwoodcanal.co.uk](http://www.hollinwoodcanal.co.uk)