



Charity Number - 1187044

Bridging the Gap

A project funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Hot on the heels of the long-anticipated restoration of the Grade II* listed Bennerley Viaduct and its opening as a walking and cycle way, the Friends of Bennerley Viaduct (FoBV) have been awarded funding to help to secure the future of the “Iron Giant”. The FoBV’s project, **Bridging the Gap**, is due start in March 2022, and has been made possible by a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The Bennerley Viaduct opens to the public

54 years after closing to freight traffic and 58 years since the last passenger travelled across it the Bennerley Viaduct has been re-opened as a route for walkers and cyclists. The Grade II* listed wrought iron viaduct in the Erewash Valley has been repaired, restored and re-purposed by its owners, Railway Paths Ltd (RPL) in partnership with the FoBV. The viaduct was declared open to the public on Wednesday 14th January 2022.

RPL were responsible for planning issues, raising the main project funding and securing and overseeing contractors for the works. The FoBV, formed in 2015, have spent the last seven years engaging local communities and the wider public with the scheme and became a registered charity in 2019 (no. 1187044). During the course of the project the viaduct achieved international recognition from its inclusion on the World Monuments Fund Watch List in 2020. The “Iron Giant” was the only British site included in a list of 25 worldwide (including Notre Dame de Paris!).

Starting in 2017 the project has included repair and restoration work on the Victorian structure, the installation of a new full length deck and the creation of access for users. At the western (Ilkeston) end a fully accessible ramp leads from the Erewash Canal towpath to the new deck. For the time being access to the deck from the eastern (Awsorth) side is by steps.

Now that RPL has discharged its commitment to open the viaduct to the public the FoBV wants to develop it as a community asset and heritage attraction and to explore ways of creating an eastern ramp and a visitor facility. To this end the group submitted a bid to The National Lottery Heritage Fund for a grant to support a new project: **Bridging the Gap**. That bid has now been approved, coinciding almost exactly with the opening of the viaduct.

Bridging the Gap

The grant of nearly £250,000 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund will support a project to connect a wider range of people from local communities and further afield to the industrial and transport heritage of the Erewash Valley with the Bennerley Viaduct as its focus. The project will also include training and learning opportunities offered through volunteering schemes and in partnership with local schools and community groups. According to Jeff Wynch, Chair of the FoBV Committee, the project has the potential to bring multiple benefits. “The newly opened viaduct gives us the chance to make a real difference to people’s wellbeing. As well as engaging more people with heritage our project will provide opportunities for exercise, exposure to the outdoors and nature and for social interaction. We know how beneficial these activities can be for mental and physical health.” There will be a particular focus on communities close to the viaduct, such as Cotmanhay to the west and Awsorth at the eastern end.

John Scruton, Chair of the charity’s trustees, says that the grant will also build the capacity of the group and make it more resilient. “We will identify and address our training needs and make changes to the way our organisation is run to meet our longer term goals of managing the viaduct and making further improvements. The grant will allow us to employ three staff, a Project Manager, a Heritage Engagement Officer and a Site Ranger. At the end of the two years we expect to be well equipped to safeguard, celebrate and improve the viaduct and its heritage for future generations.”

A key element of **Bridging the Gap** will be a close link with the Erewash Museum in Ilkeston which will act as a “visitor hub”, offering an exhibition and illustrated talks about the viaduct and its history. “We want visitors to come to the museum and Ilkeston town centre as part of their trip to see the viaduct”, says Jeff Wynch. “We’re also encouraging people to use sustainable travel such as public transport, cycling and walking to get to the viaduct, not only for the health benefits but also to help combat climate change and minimise negative environmental impact.”

“We decided quite early that we did not want the opening of the viaduct to be the end of the story. An application to The National Lottery Heritage Fund was a logical course of action for a project of this nature,” says John Scruton. “We are delighted to receive the grant and look forward to working with NLHF over the next two years.”

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we inspire, lead and resource the UK’s heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities, now and in the future. www.heritagefund.org.uk

Follow @HeritageFundUK on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and use #NationalLotteryHeritageFund

Bridging the Gap will run from March 2022 to February 2024 and will be managed from the Friends of Bennerley Viaduct office at Castledine House, Ilkeston.