



# **Example Park Bridge management plan for 2026 and beyond**

## **Contents**

A background to Park Bridge	2
Vision: Park Bridge 2026 – 240 years of history	4
Strategic priorities	4
How we will work to deliver on our strategic priorities	4-6
FAQs	7

# **A background to Park Bridge**

## **Location and Setting**

Park Bridge lies in the valley of the River Medlock between Ashton-under-Lyne and Oldham in Greater Manchester. The surrounding landscape is a patchwork of ancient woodland, species-rich grassland, wetland, and former industrial sites reclaimed by nature.

It sits within the wider Medlock Valley network of green spaces, linking to Hartshead Pike, Alexandra Park, Daisy Nook Country Park, and the Pennine uplands. This strategic location makes it a key stepping stone for wildlife and a gateway for visitors exploring the valley.

---

## **Industrial Heritage**

Founded in 1786 by Samuel Lees, the Park Bridge Ironworks was a powerhouse of the Industrial Revolution, operating for nearly 200 years until its closure in 1963.

- Produced components for the textile industry and engineering works across Britain
- Exported globally — rivets from Park Bridge were used on the Eiffel Tower and the Sydney Harbour Bridge
- Uniquely, it was one of the longest surviving examples of an industrial community based around engineering in the North West, with workers' housing, workshops, railway and stables all on site
- The site's industrial archaeology — including chimneys, engine beds, and ironworks remains — is regionally and nationally significant

Following closure of the ironworks, the site underwent major reclamation in the late 1970s, with the stables converted into the Park Bridge Heritage Centre in the 1990s through Heritage Lottery and Countryside Agency funding. The Centre became a hub for education, heritage interpretation, and countryside management until its closure as a visitor centre in 2010.

---

## **Environmental Importance**

Large parts of Park Bridge are designated as Sites of Biological Importance (SBI) due to the rare habitats and species present:

- Ancient woodland — mature native trees, vital for invertebrates, fungi, and nesting birds
- Species-rich grasslands — supporting pollinators and rare wildflowers

- Wetland and watercourses — the River Medlock and associated leats (industrial water channels) provide habitat for kingfishers, amphibians, and aquatic invertebrates
- Industrial-biodiversity overlap — disused structures provide nesting for protected species such as kestrels, owls, and bats

The site is a living demonstration of how industrial heritage and biodiversity can coexist, creating a unique landscape of cultural and environmental value.

---

## **Community Connection**

Park Bridge is more than just a location — it's an identity. Generations of families worked in the ironworks and lived in the village, with deep local pride in its history.

Until funding cuts in 2010, the Heritage Centre and ranger-led community programmes fostered environmental awareness and community spirit. Its closure created a gap in community provision, heritage education, and visitor engagement.

Today, the area still draws walkers, cyclists, and heritage enthusiasts, however years of decline has seen antisocial behaviour, fly-tipping and recreational drug use increase and blight the area.

With the Heritage Centre closed, its full potential as a community anchor, educational resource, and visitor attraction remains untapped. With the right investment and vision, Park Bridge could once again be the beating heart of the valley — protecting its past while shaping its future.

---

## **Vision for Park Bridge 2026 – 240 years of history**

A thriving, inclusive, and educational heritage and nature site where industrial history, biodiversity, and community spirit coexist in harmony.

Park Bridge will be a nationally recognised example of how heritage landscapes can adapt in the face of climate change, achieve net biodiversity gain, and serve as an accessible and inspiring space for all.

---

### **Strategic priorities**

- Safeguard and interpret Park Bridge’s industrial heritage while integrating modern conservation science
  - Deliver net biodiversity gain through habitat restoration, species reintroduction, and active monitoring
  - Maximise accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring facilities meet or exceed Equality Act standards
  - Position Park Bridge as a hub for community learning, volunteering, and cultural exchange
  - Embed climate adaptation and carbon reduction into all operational and development plans
- 

### **How will we will work to deliver on our strategic priorities**

#### **Creating a welcoming and accessible environment**

- Install updated and accessible informational boards with QR codes linking to audio guides and multi-language offerings
  - Maintain free year-round access with committed Heritage Centre opening hours
  - Upgrade pathways with sustainable, non-slip materials ensuring step-free access where feasible
  - Expand public transport connections through partnership with local authorities and transport providers
  - Develop a ‘digital welcome hub’ allowing virtual tours for those unable to visit in person
- 

#### **Promoting conservation and net positive biodiversity**

- Undertake baseline ecological surveys to identify current biodiversity levels and set measurable net gain targets
- Restore degraded habitats, prioritising pollinator corridors, wildflower meadows, and wetland enhancements

- Reintroduce locally extinct native species where ecologically appropriate
  - Implement sustainable land management practices: zero peat use, reduced herbicide reliance, and rotational habitat management
  - Engage local schools, universities and businesses in citizen science monitoring projects, volunteering and partnerships
- 

## **Developing community engagement and partnerships**

- Strengthen relationships with local residents groups, regional and national heritage bodies, as well as regional and national conservation and environmentally focused bodies
  - Launch an annual 'Park Bridge Festival' celebrating history, nature, and community
  - Develop targeted outreach to underrepresented groups, including ethnic minorities and people with disabilities
  - Create a voluntary ranger programme with specialist roles in biodiversity, heritage interpretation, and digital engagement
  - Partner with local artists and historians to create rotating exhibitions in the Heritage Centre
  - Work with local youth groups, such as Scouts, Brownies and Cadets etc to use the Heritage Centre as an accessible and safe space
- 

## **Securing external funding to ensure sustainability**

- Pursue external funding opportunities such as: Heritage Lottery Fund, National Trust, Arts Council, and DEFRA biodiversity net gain funding etc
  - Develop corporate sponsorship packages aligned with conservation and education aims
  - Generate revenue through eco-friendly on-site café, craft markets, and guided heritage tours
  - Introduce a 'Friends of Park Bridge' membership scheme with exclusive events and behind-the-scenes access
  - Apply for Green Flag Award annually to maintain profile and funding leverage
- 

## **Future-proofing and ensuring climate resilience**

- Establish a climate change adaptation plan with regular risk assessments
- Train staff and volunteers in climate adaptation and environmental resilience
- Run courses and workshops to educate visitors on the impact of climate change on the environment surrounding Park Bridge

- Retrofit buildings for energy efficiency and install renewable energy sources where appropriate and in keeping
  - Integrate flood management through natural solutions (e.g., wetlands, tree planting)
- 

## **Management, Monitoring, and Review**

- Maintain a rolling five-year management plan reviewed annually with public consultation
- Implement key performance indicators (KPIs) for biodiversity, visitor satisfaction, community engagement, and financial resilience
- Publish annual impact reports highlighting conservation achievements, visitor numbers, and community contributions
- Continue strong governance through transparent budgeting, external audits, and stakeholder involvement

## **FAQs**

### **Q: How will you cover running costs?**

A: We've identified multiple external funding sources – Heritage Lottery, DEFRA biodiversity net gain funding, local corporate sponsorship, and grant schemes. Additionally, income streams from events, workshops, and a café/gift shop could supplement funding.

### **Q: Why will this work when previous tenants failed?**

A: Previous tenants operated in isolation without programmed attractions. Our model integrates heritage, education, and events to create year-round footfall – similar to other successful heritage sites.

### **Q: What about access and traffic concerns?**

A: We'd work with highways and local stakeholders on managed visitor flow, scheduled events, and active travel encouragement. The isolated nature is an asset for tranquillity and biodiversity, and we can mitigate congestion through careful planning.

### **Q: What if funding bids fail?**

A: We will develop a staged plan – start small with volunteer-led activities and low-cost community events, then expand as funding comes in. This minimises risk and keeps the site active.