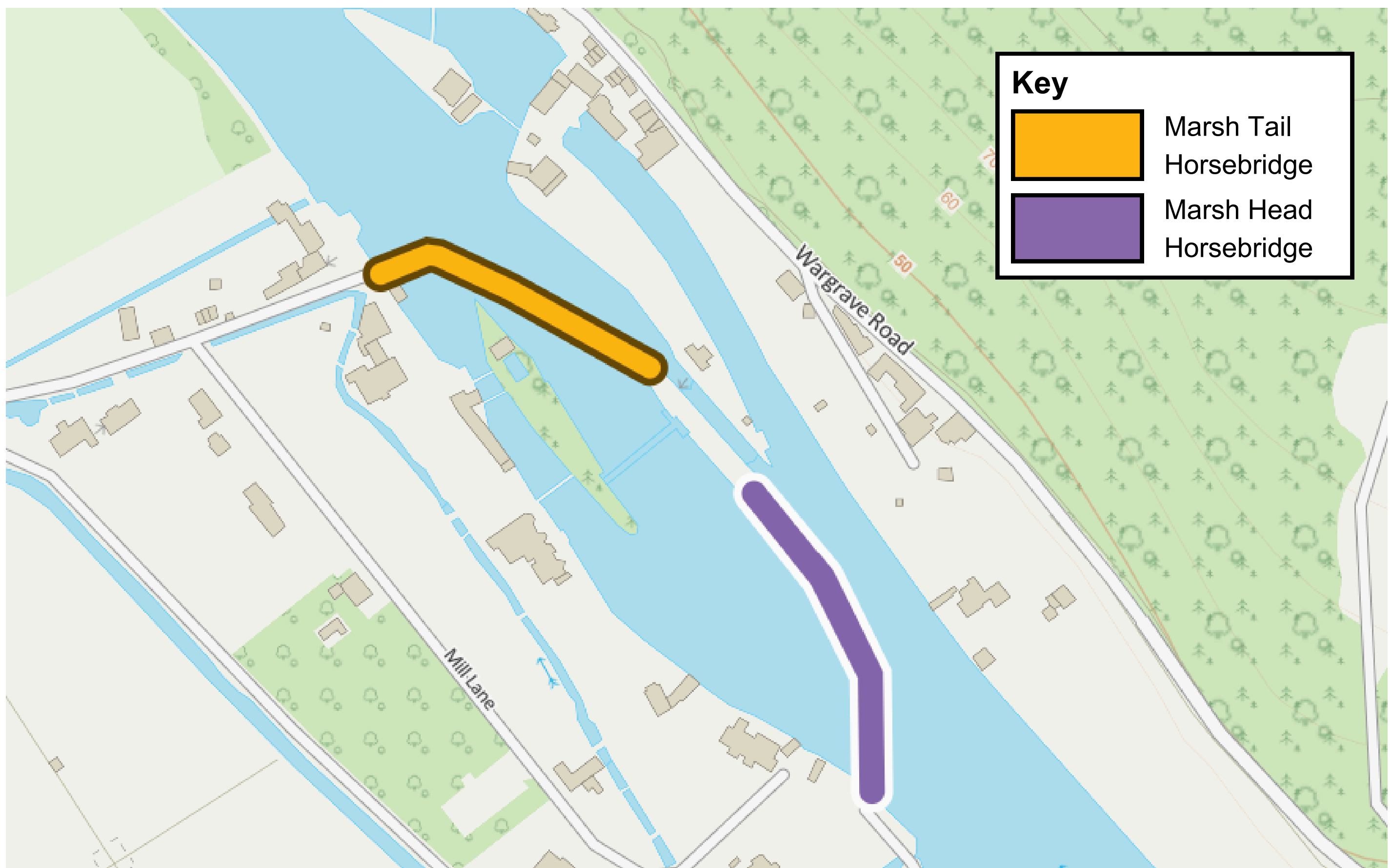


# History of the bridge

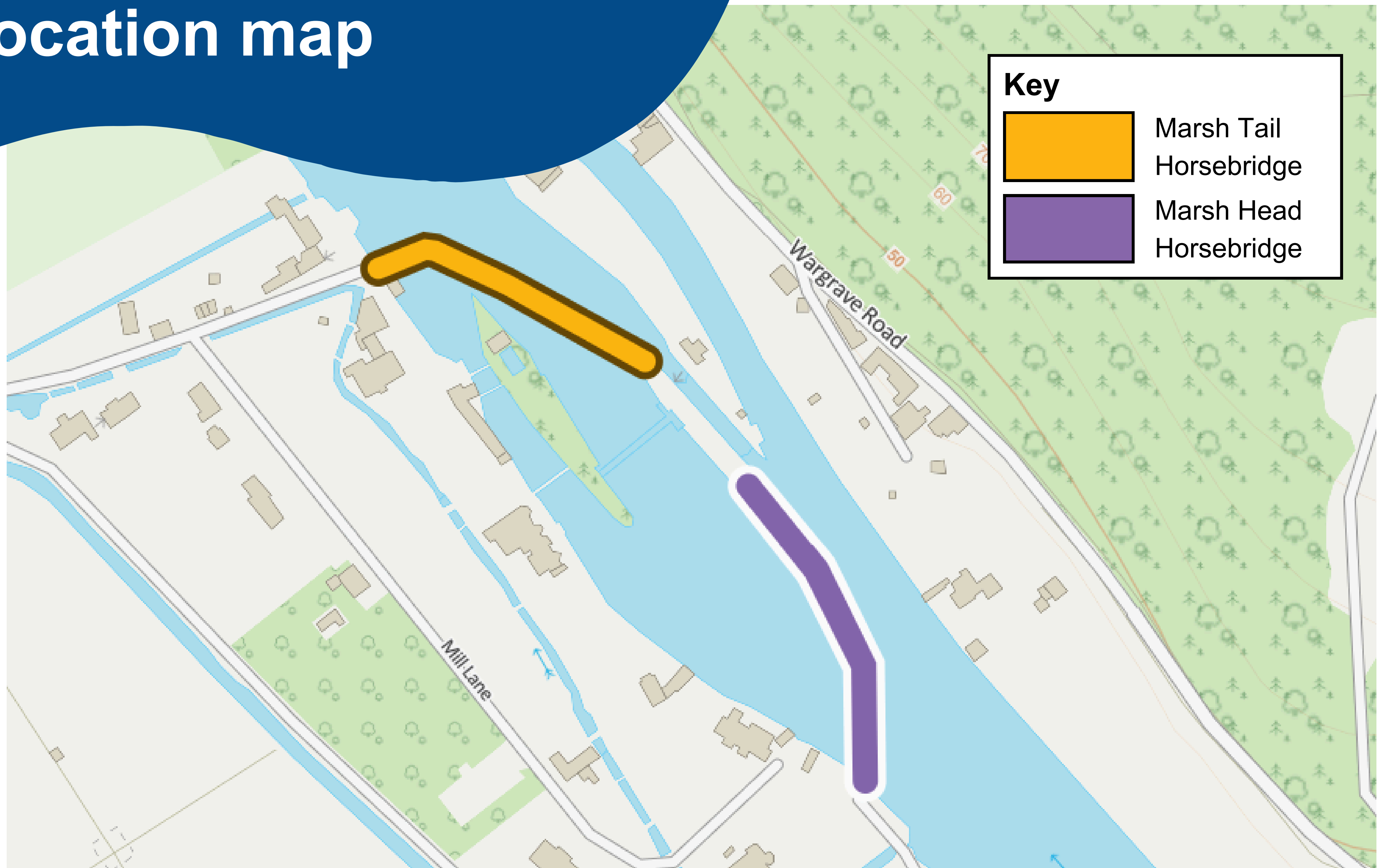


Ordnance Survey data. Crown Copyright and database right 2024.

Marsh Lock and Weir complex is situated on the River Thames 1.6km upstream of the Henley Bridge, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.

The Marsh Horsebridges link the lock island to the towpath. Because the lock is situated on the opposite side of the river to the towpath, the long wooden bridges were needed to allow horses to pull barges through the lock. The bridges take the path out to the lock island above the weir (Head), and then back again to the riverbank below the weir (Tail). This is a unique feature on the River Thames.

# Location map



**‘Henley from the Wargrave Road’ by Jan Siberecht (1698) is the first image to depict Marsh Lock.**



# History of the bridge



A crossing at this location was first constructed in 1796 for horses, allowing them to continue along the towpath and their barge counterpart to continue through the lock and along the river. The bridges cross from the Oxfordshire bank to Marsh Lock at the Wokingham bank. Records indicate that refurbishment and replacement works were carried out in 1886, 1914, 1962 and most recently in the 1990s on both bridges.



*An image of the bridge published in Timber Trades Journal, 1974*

# Marsh Head Horsebridge



The Marsh Head Horsebridge requires a significant restoration. The bridge was last restored in the 1990s, over 30 years ago. The timber used to construct the bridge has now deteriorated.

In 2022, the bridge was closed due to safety issues, including loose wooden planks on the deck, failing handrails and rotten support pillars.

Until the bridge is made safe it cannot be reopened to the public.

**Rebuilding this historic crossing will restore safe, accessible riverside travel and reconnect 20km of the iconic Thames Path.**

# Current Head Bridge condition

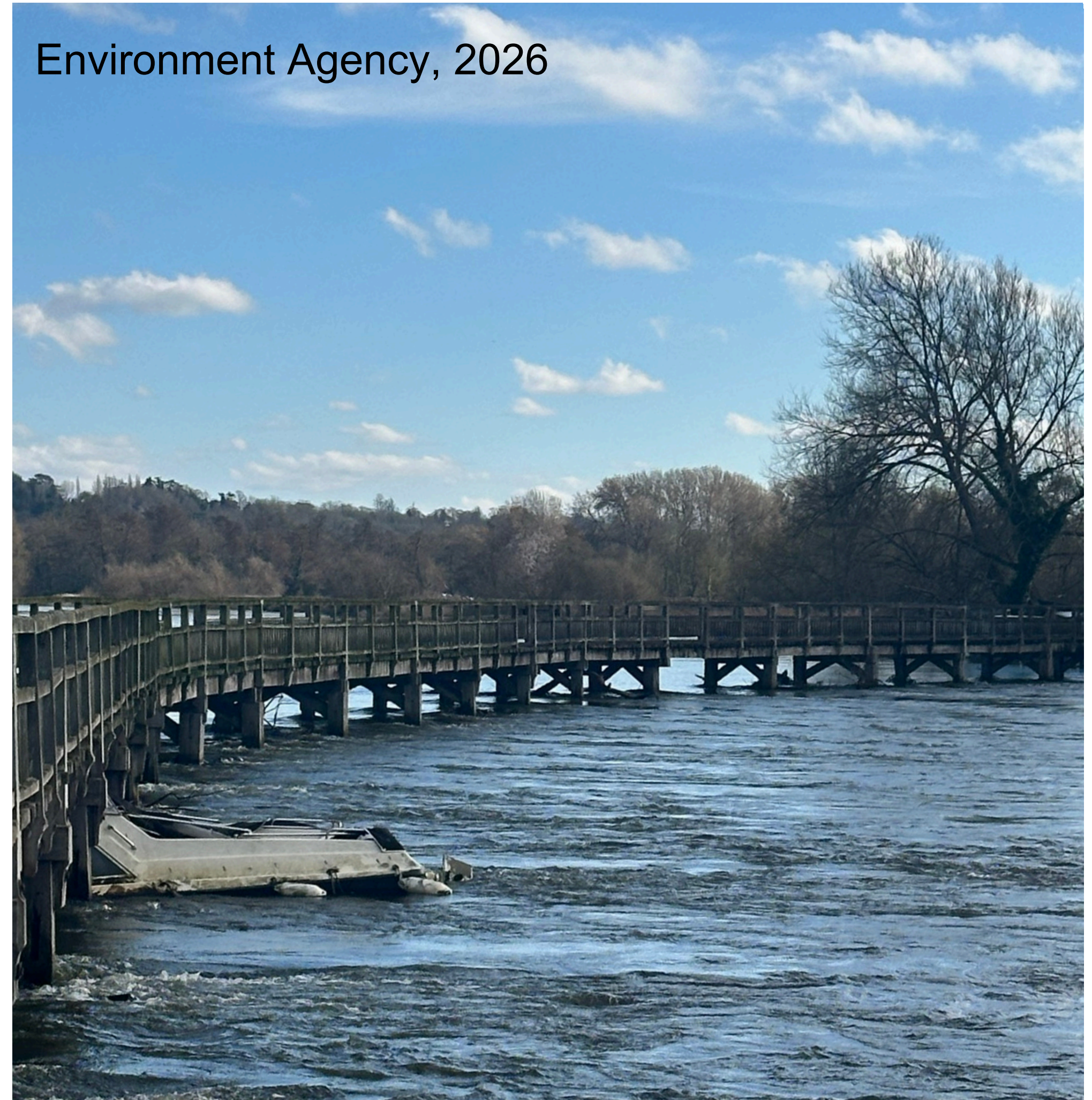


Environment Agency, 2026



Deterioration of deck boards and handrails, including the splitting and cracking of timber.

Environment Agency, 2026



Timber support pillars are showing rot and decay.

# Marsh Tail Horsebridge



We are planning to restore both the Head and Tail bridges as part of this project. The Tail section remains open as the deterioration of timber is not as advanced as in the Head section.

The Environment Agency are planning initial works to the Tail section this summer to replace timber deck boards. Further information on the dates of work and temporary closure will be fully communicated.

*Environment Agency  
archives*



The most recent refurbishment of the two bridges was completed in the early 1990s. This picture shows the scale of the work that was carried out.

# Local support



## **John Tippetts, Thames Path Walker**

I'm in support of the Marsh Horsebridge restoration project because as a Thames Path walker I see it as the quickest way to get this section reopened and the unsatisfactory diversionary route dispensed with. I love the idea of being able to say to myself 'I helped restore this unique bridge' every time I cross it.

## **Jonathan Hobbs, Managing Director, Hobbs of Henley**

I am in support of the Marsh Footbridge Restoration Project because it is a unique bridge that attracts many thousands of different types of visitors, enjoying the tranquility and beauty of a historic Henley landmark, and an important part of the Thames Path.





## Philippa Sanders, Pipsticks Walks

The Marsh Horsebridge connects us to the river and to Henley – it is a bridge between communities. Access has been denied for too long!

This unique historical structure is one of the highlights of the River Thames. It is part of our cherished public rights of way network, transporting us over the water and giving us access to the riverine environment - to the 'green and blue space' which helps to support and shape our wellbeing. It also carries the Thames Path National Trail – a national asset which draws people from far and wide (not just the locals) to walk it in awe. Restoration of the river crossing is important to the ongoing benefit of local communities, visitors to the area, and the local economy.



# Local support



## Caroline and Liz, Walk Works

Walk Works are hugely in support of the Marsh Horsebridge restoration project because it connects our walking community and the local community to one of the most beautiful stretches of the Thames. Marsh Bridge is pivotal to our Walk Works schedule and we've been really sad to give the area a miss while it's been closed. The significant detour is putting people off and it's affecting local connection to nature, which isn't being monitored in the same way. It is the most astonishingly beautiful stretch of river, especially in the autumn, and we are fully in support of it reopening as soon as possible.



# Local support



## **Greg Wilkinson, Vice Chair, Non-Tidal Thames, River Thames Society**

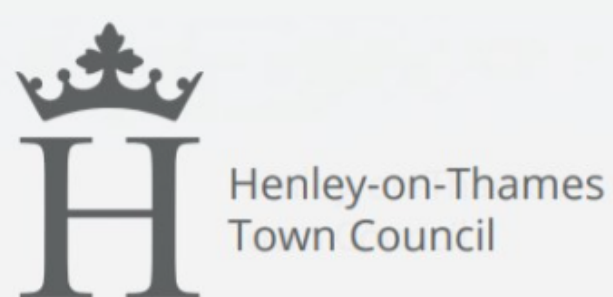
Marsh Horsebridge is an important part of Henley's river heritage and a much-valued link in the landscape of the Thames. The River Thames Society warmly supports the Environment Agency's plans to restore the bridge, safeguarding both its practical role and its historic character for future generations. Projects like this remind us how much local communities, river users, public bodies and private supporters can achieve when they work together for the benefit of the river and all who enjoy it.



# Our approach



We are working in partnership to identify the most cost effective and sustainable solution to restore the bridge for generations to come.



**Henley Town Council**  
championing local  
access and community  
wellbeing.



**Environment Agency**  
creating better places for  
people, wildlife and the  
environment.



**Thames Path Partnership**  
enhancing one of England's most important walking  
routes.



# What work has been done?



The Environment Agency, and design consultants Jacobs, have reviewed the detailed condition assessments of the bridge to understand the restoration needs.

For the Marsh Head Horsebridge, this showed that over 50% of the current structure and supporting pillars need replacing.

After review by BAM Nuttall, an Environment Agency construction partner, it has been determined that the most likely cost effective option would be to replace the bridge rather than refurbishing.



# Visual of restored bridge



This image represents the option to completely replace the deck and handrails. Sustainably sourced tropical hardwood is likely to be the material used for many parts of the bridge due to its strength and lifespan when used in/near water.

This visualisation represents standing on the river bank, looking downstream on the Head Horsebridge towards the lock island.



*Visualisation of what the Marsh Horsebridge might look like. Produced by Jacobs, 2026*

# Visual of restored bridge



The design is very similar to the old bridge, in keeping with the heritage and aesthetics in the area. Guard piles will be installed upstream of the bridge to protect it and the weir from river craft. This visualisation represents standing on the lock island, looking upstream along the Head Horsebridge towards the river bank.



*Visualisation of what the Marsh Horsebridge might look like. Produced by Jacobs, 2026*

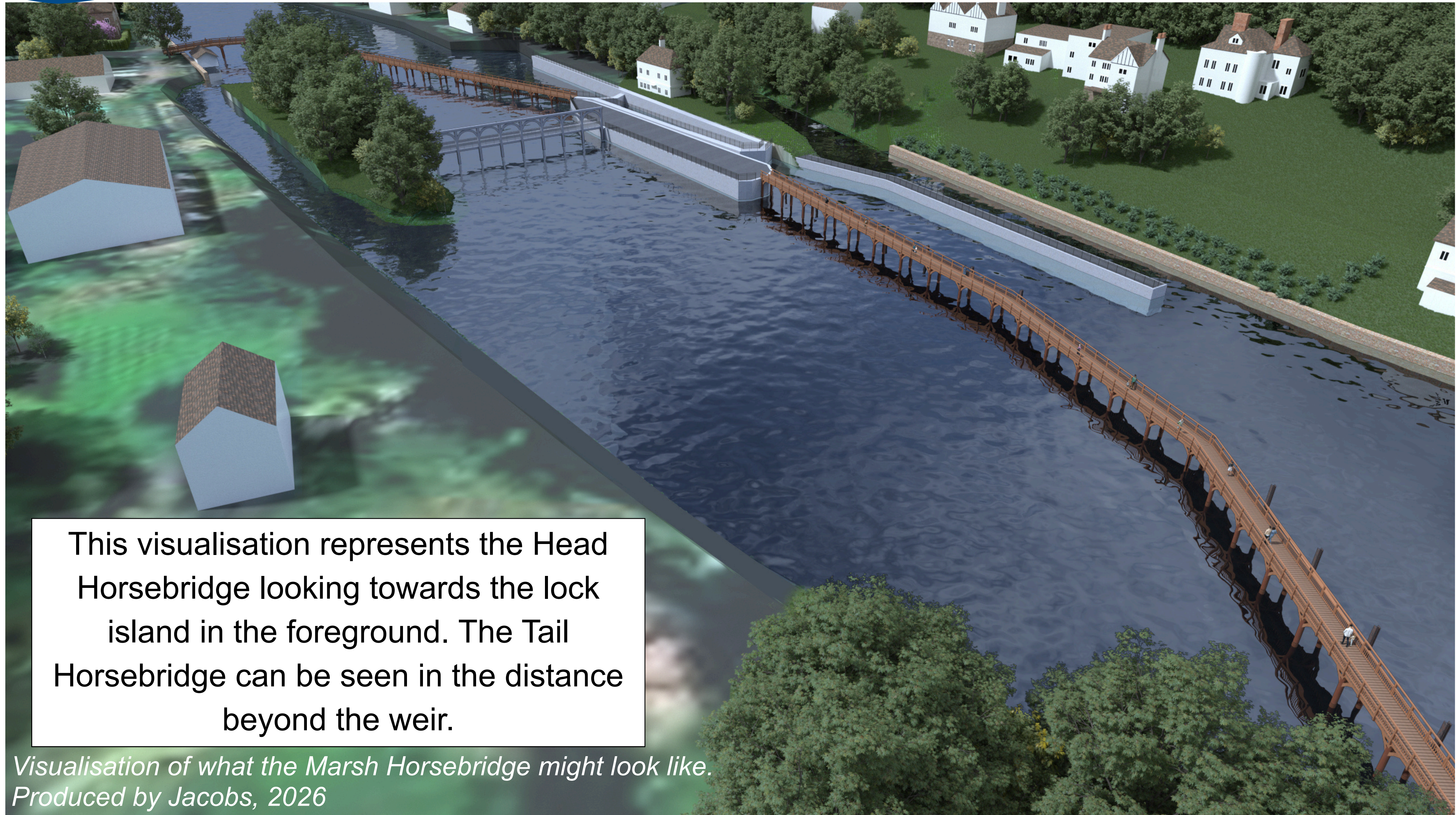
# Visual of restored bridge



*Visualisation of what the Marsh Horsebridge might look like. Produced by Jacobs, 2026*

We are exploring options to increase the resilience and structural integrity of the restored bridge such as potentially installing steel 'sleeves' over the current supporting piers. The details of these will be finalised as part of the design and planning process.

# Visual of restored bridge



This visualisation represents the Head Horsebridge looking towards the lock island in the foreground. The Tail Horsebridge can be seen in the distance beyond the weir.

*Visualisation of what the Marsh Horsebridge might look like.  
Produced by Jacobs, 2026*

# Bridge ownership and responsibility



## Who owns the bridge?

The Environment Agency owns Marsh Lock Island however some of the land on which the bridge is constructed is unregistered. There is no registered owner of the bridge.

## Who is responsible for the bridge?

Legal ownership of the bridge is uncertain, but there is a public right of way over it and pedestrian access to Marsh Lock Island. This means that there are several organisations who are stakeholders in the bridge. However, none of these organisations has been identified as legally responsible for its repair and maintenance.

This is why Henley Town Council, the Thames Path Partnership and the Environment Agency are working together to collectively find a solution to restore and reopen the bridge.



# Why can't the Environment Agency just repair the bridge?



The Environment Agency does not have a statutory responsibility to maintain, repair or restore the Thames Path. Our legal powers relate to the navigation channel and our own operational assets, such as locks, weirs and associated structures that support navigation, flood risk management and water regulation. Marsh Head Horsebridge provides a recreational benefit as part of the Thames Path.

Although the Environment Agency is a member of the Thames Path Partnership and works collaboratively with other organisations to support the trail, this does not transfer maintenance of assets or funding responsibility to us.

Government grant in aid funding is prioritised towards statutory duties and assets that provide an operational benefit. Securing all the funding needed for the works from central government budgets is therefore unlikely. Working in partnership to raise funds, we are more likely to secure the money needed to complete the repairs and reopen the bridge.



# Fundraising



The Environment Agency has secured initial funding to undertake design works and apply for planning permission for the required works. Further fundraising is needed to ensure necessary works can be completed and reopen the bridge.

Crowdfunding allows anyone with an interest in the bridge to fundraise and collectively support a solution. This approach reinforces the strong community focus to undertake the repairs.

Alongside the Crowdfunding we are looking to secure funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund, local councils and private donors. We are also considering fundraising through corporate partners and the possibility of future voluntary bridge tolls for upkeep and maintenance of the bridge.

## ***“Restoring Henley’s Historic Marsh Horsebridge”***

Through the Projects for Nature platform we can support fundraising towards this key recreational asset

The site will be live later this year but you can “Like” and “Follow” to be kept up to date.



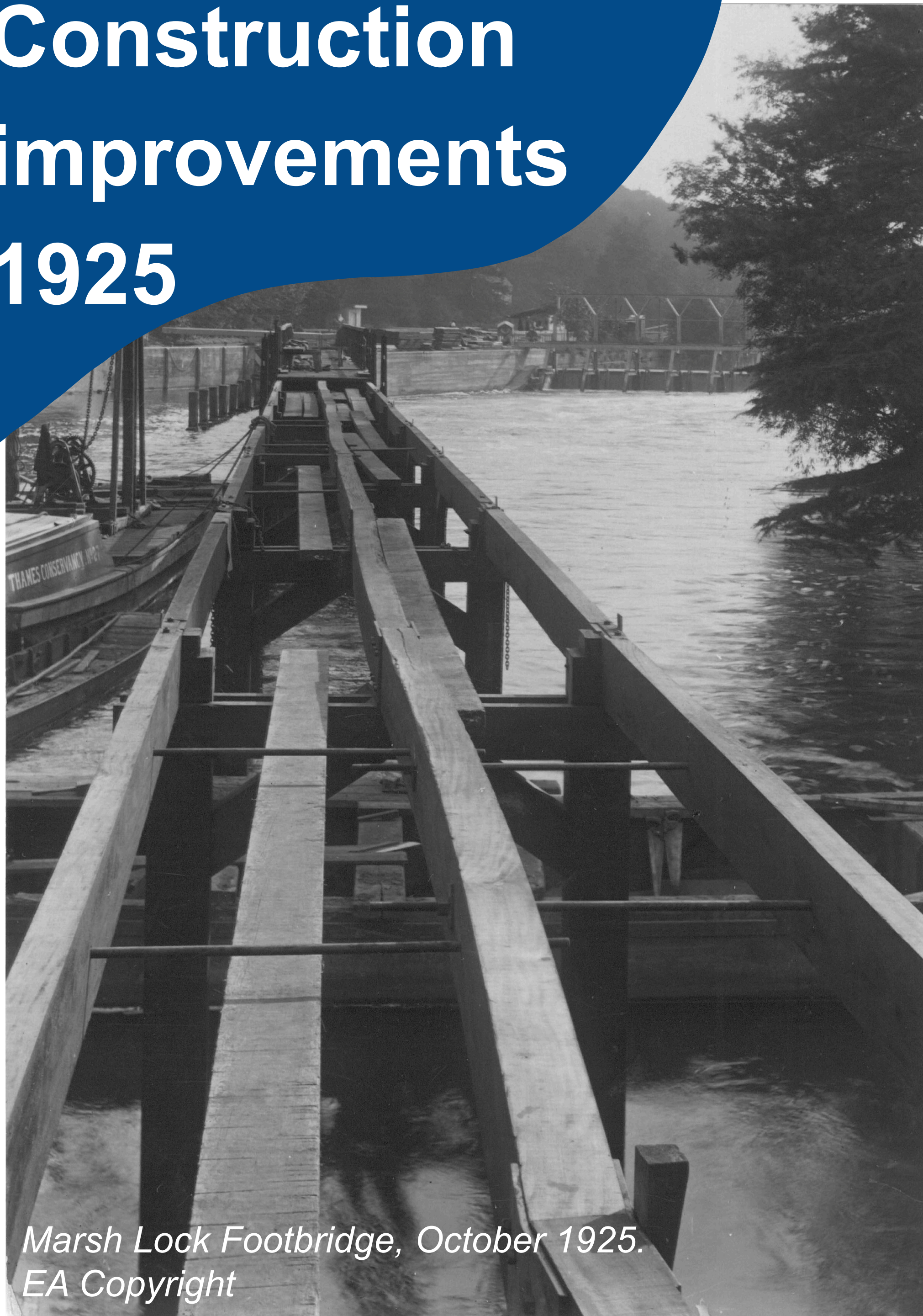
***Scan here***



# An image of the bridge published in Timber Trades Journal, 1974



# Construction improvements 1925

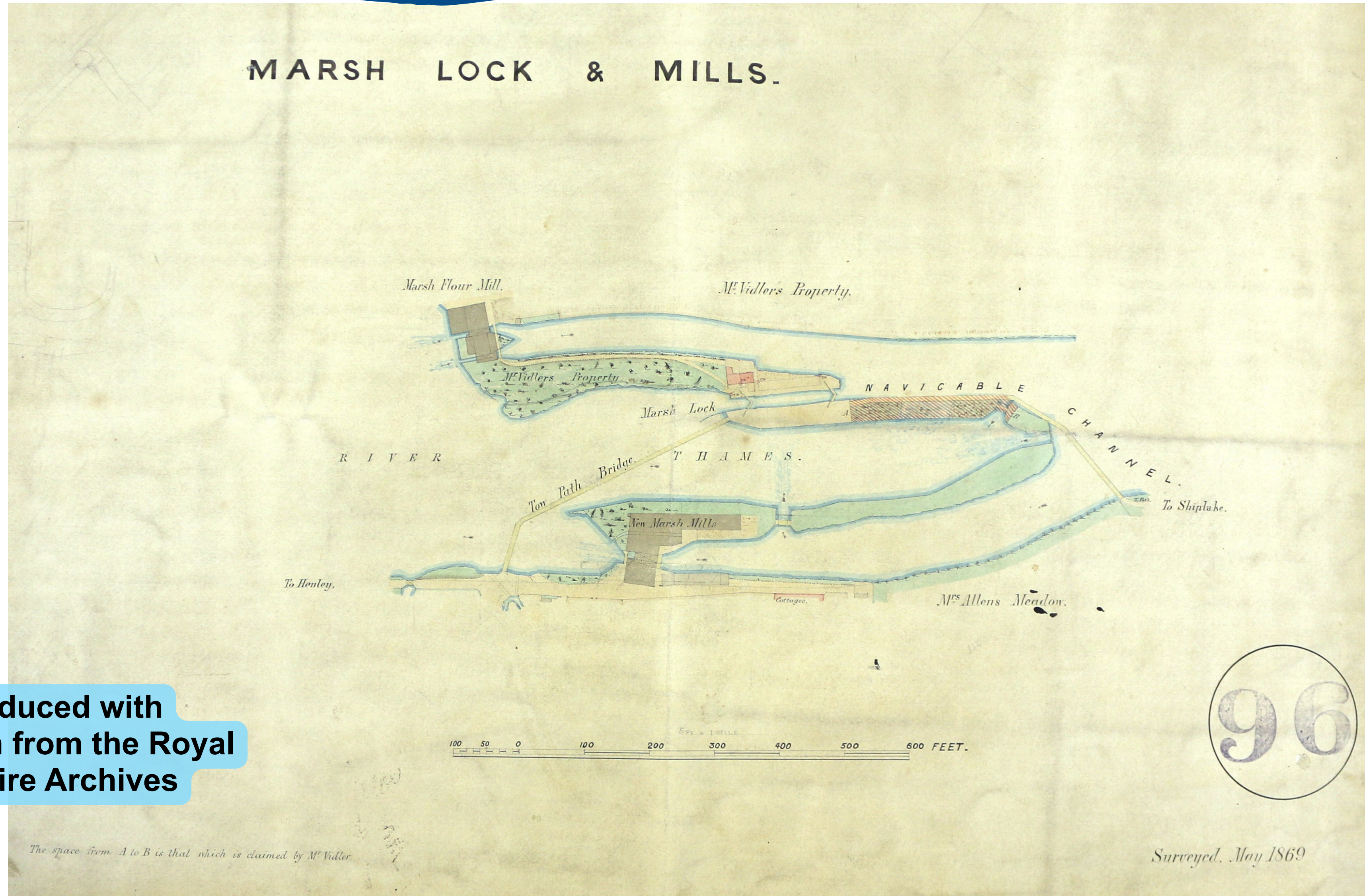


*Marsh Lock Footbridge, October 1925.  
EA Copyright*



*Marsh Lower Horsebridge, October 1925.  
EA Copyright*

# Survey map from 1869

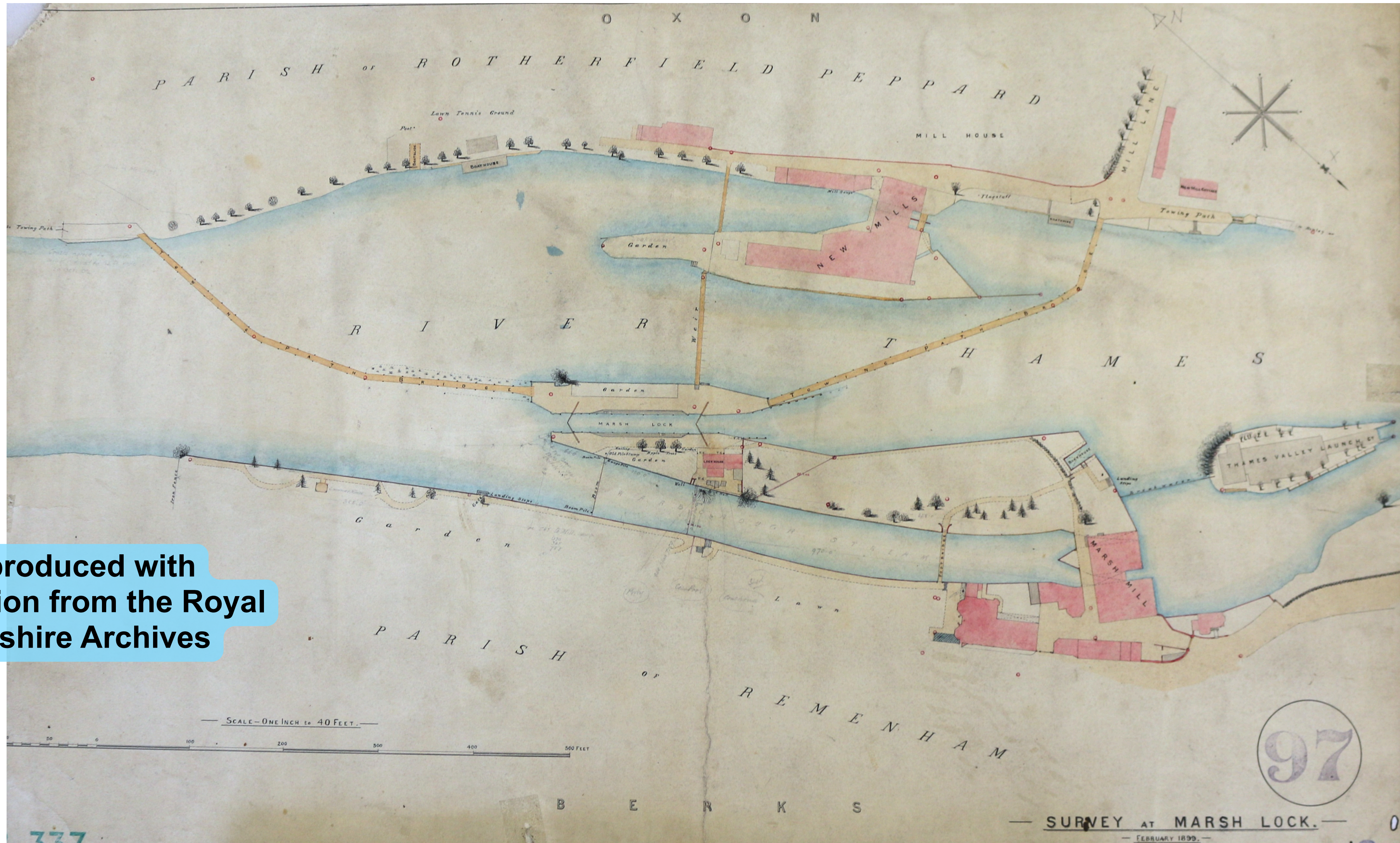


Reproduced with permission from the Royal Berkshire Archives

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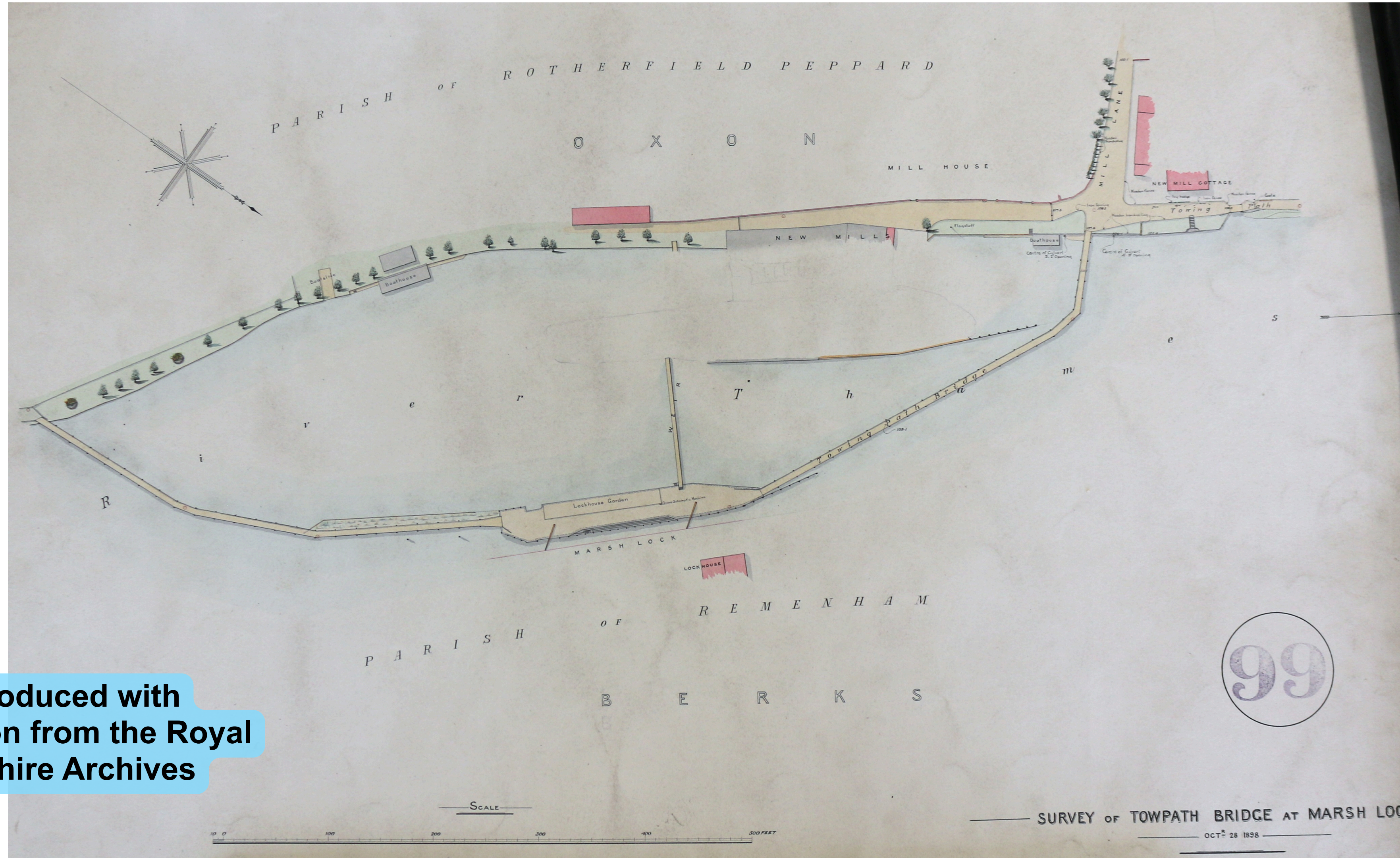
# Survey map from 1899



Reproduced with permission from the Royal Berkshire Archives



# Survey map from 1898



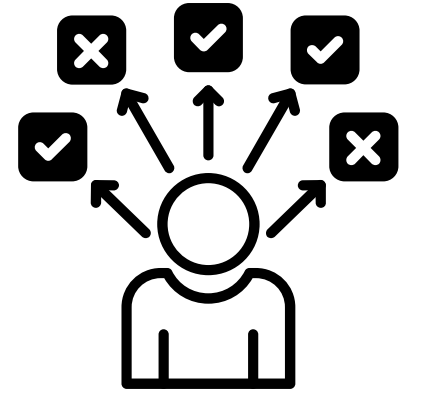
Reproduced with permission from the Royal Berkshire Archives



# What happens next?



**Conduct Options Appraisal**



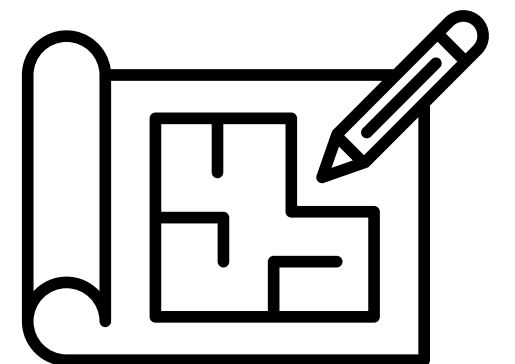
**Apply for and secure planning permission**



**Undertake environmental surveys, obtain permits and licences for working in the river**



**Secure a contractor and finalise the detailed design plans**



**Raise required funding to cover cost of works**



**Undertake works on site**



# Where are we now?

## Options appraisal stage



An options appraisal involves looking at all possible solutions to replace and restore the bridge. It brings together teams of engineers, designers and environmental professionals who consider factors such as complexity, buildability, durability, risk, programme and cost.

The options appraisal will identify the most cost effective solution which fits affordability, sustainability and statutory criteria.

## What does an options appraisal look at?



Is the option feasible and practical?



Which option provides the best value for money?



How will it impact the local natural and built environment?



Are we using the most robust, sustainable and cost effective materials?

# Engaging with nature and heritage



As part of this project, we want to share more information about the history and wildlife around Marsh Lock and Horsebridge. Below are some examples of signs and information boards. We are interested in any suggestions you may have. **Please let us know your thoughts and ideas on a post it note.**



Board created by Vivienne Greenwood



By providing opportunities to learn about nature and wildlife around the bridge, we hope to encourage all ages to engage with their surroundings, and welcome community groups to use the bridge as a real asset to learning, development, and understanding of the local environment.

# Aerial photo February 1992



HENLEY TO SANDFORD AERIAL PHOTOS  
1:3000 VERTICAL - FEBRUARY 1992  
EA Copyright



# Marsh Horsebridge improvements 1991



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# Marsh Horsebridge improvements 1991



# Marsh Horsebridge improvements 1991



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