

# The Silver Bridge



Picture taken in 1970's

## BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Silver bridge also known as the Guinness or Farmleigh Bridge spanning the river Liffey from the south side fields of Waterstown Park in Palmerstown to Farmleigh estate in Castleknock. It is a single ironclad span of roughly 52 metres also known as a box truss bridge. It is a listed protected structure RPS: 754. It was built between 1872 and 1880. Edward Cecil Guinness built the bridge in order to supply electricity for his new home in Farmleigh house which was brightly lit and he was an electricity loving pioneer. The Guinness family were one of the first families to generate their own electricity. The Guinness Family lived on the Farmleigh estate, but many of their workers lived on the south side of the Liffey in Palmerstown. The bridge served many functions from bringing water to Farmleigh Clock tower and hydro-electricity generated from the 17 mills based along the river Liffey and access for workers on the estate. It was most likely constructed by Engineers from the Guinness Brewery. The Granite structure on one end serves as an entrance to the tunnel connecting to Farmleigh estate. Originally it was only used by the Guinness family but later it was opened to the servants and public after the drowning of an estate worker Mr Joe Williams. Today the bridge is in disrepair and rusting and in need of maintenance to bring it back to its original grandeur. The bridge borders the boundaries of both Fingal County Council and South Dublin County Council.

## **CURRENT STATUS OF THE BRIDGE**

In 2017 South Dublin County Council started a new initiative called 300K- Have Your Say Participatory Budgeting Initiative. 300K have you say was a local voting competition to support 300 K for selected projects. The Guinness bridge came second second with 1,146 votes. People were voting for a “Feasibility Study for the Restoration of Silver Bridge” Mayor of South Dublin Council, Cllr. Guss O’Connell announced the winning projects for this year’s 300K – Have Your Say campaign at a results ceremony in the Clarion Hotel, Liffey Valley on the 1st of June 2017. Speaking at the event Mayor Guss O’Connell said

“This is a truly historic moment. For the very first time in Ireland the people have decided on how a Local Authority spends its budget. In thanking the Chief Executive and Council staff for all their Trojan work, I also want to compliment the people of the Lucan, Palmerstown and Adamstown areas, both those who submitted ideas and those who voted for the various projects. It has been a wonderful exercise in community building. Everyone wins, the items that were not successful this time are banked for future consideration. I look forward to the next stage which will include further participation by the public. Participative Budgeting has been a learning curve for all of us involved in the process. That learning will be captured by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) who are engaged in an independent evaluation of the Pilot which, when concluded, will enable South Dublin County Council to plan the next step.”

The 300K funding went out to tender in collaboration with Fingal County Council to CORA engineering consultants. They completed their feasibility study in 2019. Their report on the feasibility of restoration of the bridge was presented to both councils in the summer of 2020. The full report is attached.



**The Silver bridge today.**

## PRESERVATION

Fingal County Council has approved 1.44 million to be spent during the next current Capital spend programme for 2021-2023 based on the report from CORA consultants. This will preserve the listed structure in its current form and prevent catastrophic deterioration. It will also provide the opportunity for further investment in re-opening the bridge to cycling and walking. They have mentioned what is required to make this a reality in their report.



## Guinness 'Silver' Bridge Conservation Works

Lower Road, Strawberry Beds, Lucan, Co Dublin

Presentation to South Dublin County Council  
Lucan, Palmerstown, Fonthill Area Committee Meeting

26<sup>th</sup> May 2020  
15.00 hours

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Photo taken on the inside of the structure.

## RESTORATION – SWOT Analysis

**Strengths-** History, protected structure, heritage trails, Guinness, walking, cycling, permeability, linking to Phoenix park, Air quality

- The OPW recently engaged in a public consultation on the future direction of the Phoenix park. Many submissions were made requesting access to the Phoenix park from Waterstown park via the Silver bridge. The OPW have published their findings on increasing connectivity and permeability to reduce vehicle movements arriving to the park. The fact that there is a 9km gap in ability to cross the river Liffey from Chapelizod to Lucan creates a needless barrier for people to cross the Liffey river towards the Phoenix park. We have the OPW reports attached.
- Another strength to the restoration of the bridge is to connect to the old Harris house on the south of the Liffey beside the bridge situated in Waterstown park. This house is currently boarded up but it could provide the perfect opportunity to restore the house in combination with the Silver bridge to a coffee shop/Museum and tourist site to showcase the heritage of the area.
- Fingal County Council is also planning to open up and restore the Shakelton mills in Lucan. All these sites would create a cycling and walking trail along the Liffey valley region to bring people to the area and open it up to the local economy. Plans are at an advanced stage to create a cycling route from the 12th Lock along the Royal Canal to the Grand canal and back into the city center. The Silver bridge restored could create a

shorter loop option for tourists. The cycling tourist trade is currently worth 44 billion to the European economy and is a major growth sector of the tourist industry. . This is more than the current cruise industry spent across the same area. Ireland is lagging its European partners in investment in these opportunities. Tourists travelling to Dublin would be interested in visiting these locations due to the obvious links to the Guinness family and it would also link into the Phoenix Park which is one of the most visited tourist attractions in Dublin.  
<https://ecf.com/news-and-events/news/cycling-tourism-europe%E2%80%99s-44-billion-euro-gold-mine>

- As referenced in the **National Policy Framework Project 2040** :National Policy **Objective 62** Identify and strengthen the value of greenbelts and green spaces at a regional and city scale, to enable enhanced connectivity to wider strategic networks, prevent coalescence of settlements and to allow for the long-term strategic expansion of urban areas.
- As referenced in the **National Policy Framework Project 2040** National Policy **Objective 64** Air Quality Ireland benefits from prevailing weather patterns which typically bring relatively clean south-westerly Atlantic air over the country. Pollutants can be produced depending on how we travel, consume goods and heat our homes. In our largest urban areas, air pollution levels can be higher, primarily as a result of exhaust emissions from vehicles and from residential heating emissions. In some rural areas, particularly where. Air pollution can have negative implications for the health of our citizens and the attractiveness of cities and towns. Measures which seek a reduction in fossil fuel based energy sources will further reduce air pollution. Implementation of this Framework will assist in reducing emissions and help prevent people being exposed to unacceptable levels of pollution by **supporting public transport, walking and cycling as more favourable modes of transport to the private car**. The careful planning of green spaces and vegetation are also important for air quality in urban areas, as trees naturally remove pollutants from the air and help better manage urban micro-climates.

**Weaknesses-** Cost, access for less well able bodied, road safety along the strawberry beds road beside Anglers rest for cycling and walking.

- Cost: The total cost to restore the bridge is undetermined but a collaboration between Fingal County Council and SDCC and the OPW would reduce the expenditure burden on each Council, Dept.

**Opportunities-** COVID-19, Climate change, Pollution, Obesity, Mental health, Biodiversity crisis  
Sustainable development goals.

- COVID 19. As we have seen during the recent lockdowns the ability of people to get out to local parks and green spaces was a priority. The Phoenix park would have been a vital link to many people in Palmerstown which they could have accessed via the Silver bridge if it was open for cycling and walking.
- As referenced in the **National Policy Framework Project 2040 :Key future growth enablers for Dublin include:** Delivery of the metropolitan cycle network set out in the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan inclusive of key commuter routes and urban greenways on the canal, river and coastal corridors;

**Threats-** Climate change,

## CONCLUSION

In order for the bridge to be restored it will require collaboration between Fingal County Council, South Dublin County Council and the Office of Public works due to the scale of the restoration. The bridge is currently in the ownership of Fingal County Council. The strip of land on the south side is in private ownership but one thing that could be done, as suggested by Cllr Guss O'Connell, is for SDCC to take ownership of where it lands on our side to integrate it in with other land under Council management.

Why rebuild/repair the bridge?

There are a number of reasons why it should be repaired. It's part of Irish heritage and it would be a shame to let it fall into the Liffey one day as the rivets on the lattice structure will need to be replaced as is practice in these structures around the world. It could serve as an access point for pedestrians to the Phoenix Park from Lucan and Palmerstown residents. It could also be used as an alternative or additional route as part of the The Liffey valley greenway which is part of the government's commitment to National transport plan on greenways development. Recent successful greenway projects include the development of a greenway from Mullingar to Athlone and based on the success of tourism and cycling on the western Greenway in Co Mayo it would be important to take this into account.

Definition of a greenway:

European Greenway concept "Greenways are transport corridors, developed along independent routes following past or disused communication pathways and tracks that are available for non-motorised soft traffic. They provide a series of common characteristics" Ease of Passage, Safety, continuity and encourage a more human and closer relationship among citizens"

It would open access to both parks along the Liffey and increase community usage via cycling, walking and running and combat the growing problem of obesity and improve mental health by building resilience via positive pursuits. These are the many challenges covered in the Healthy Ireland framework document from the Dept. of Health. It could also combat the traffic congestion and pollution and provide a commuter access point along the Liffey valley region from as far as

Lexlip for cyclists to cycle along the Liffey valley away from major roads and commute into the city and cross over at Waterstown park over the silver bridge into the Phoenix park and cycle along chesterfield avenue into Parkgate street. This would also be addressing Irelands commitment to sustainable transport systems and Carbon energy reduction. During the day it could act as a tourist route and bring money into local business in the Palmerstown and Lucan areas. Tourism provides an obvious focus and opportunity to the area to develop a sustainable economic environment. There is a vast history ranging from megalithic tombs to medieval churches and the Guinness Family estate at Farmleigh and the beautiful scenery. There are already a large number of amenities along the river such as Canoeing, Rowing and Angling. It would create better community interaction in the area and make Waterstown park a vibrant place. The idea being that it's a "Walkable, cyclable and livable place

## **FURTHER READING**

<https://www.engineersireland.ie/News/south-dublin-county-council-announces-feasibility-study-to-restore-farmleigh-bridge>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/campaigners-to-hand-in-petition-to-save-guinness-bridge-1.2952916>

<https://irishcycle.com/2013/09/16/greenways-proposed-greater-dublin-strategic-greenways/>

<http://www.bridgesofdublin.ie/bridges/farmleigh-bridge>

<http://www.sdublincoco.ie/Media/Item/37365>