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A379 CANAL BRIDGES PROPOSALS

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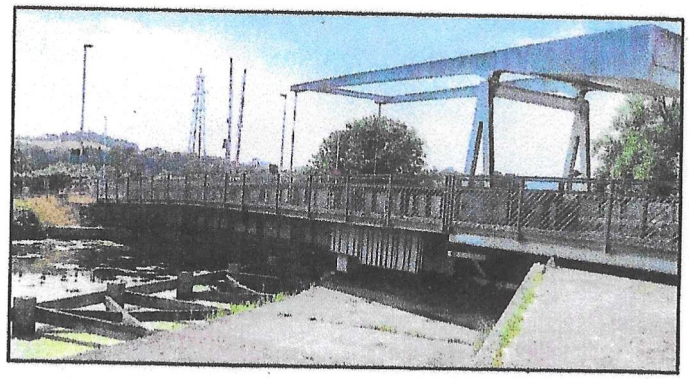
In January's *Sou'Wester* (issue 201), I referred to the five options identified by Devon County Council (DCC) for replacing the swing and lift bridges on the A379 across the Exeter Ship Canal with new bascule bridges. These included Option 4 which involves raising the road surface by 0.7m but by a greater amount if additional funding can be found.

In the spring, representations were made to the Council by a number of waterway organisations - including IWA, the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal & Heritage Harbour, Exeter Canal & Quay Trust and Exeter Harbour

Board. We called for the proposed new bridges to have an increased air draft - of 3.0 metres. This would allow, for example, yachts with their masts lowered, freight barges and stand up paddleboarders to pass directly under the new bridges without having to wait for them to be raised as at present.



A379 swing bridge in foreground, with bascule bridge immediately behind. (Photo: Ellen Stuart)

The A379 is a busy dual carriageway, so raising the bridges incurs adverse impacts on traffic and the economy of Exeter. A higher air draft would also benefit the many cyclists and pedestrians using the towpath as they would be able to pass safely under the new bridges rather than having to cross the dual carriageway.

DCC held a public consultation on the proposed new bridges between June 15 and July 27. We had been advised by Simon Hill, DCC's Group Engineer, that the public consultation related solely to active travel issues, not to canal related issues, and that he would be arranging a meeting about the latter with ourselves and other interested parties.

We were therefore shocked to discover that the public consultation proceeded to discount Option 4 on various grounds, with no detailed explanation nor evaluation of the potential benefits of raising the bridges' height. Benefits had been identified not only by ourselves but also by the Council in its own Strategic Outline Business Case, endorsed by the Department for Transport.

IWA and FESCHH submitted a joint formal response to the public consultation on July 17, with copies sent to Exeter City Council, various local organisations, the local press and waterways press. At the time of writing, no feedback has been received from Devon County Council.