LIFTING STANDARDS

IWA seeks higher clearance for new Exeter Ship Canal bridges

IWA is campaigning for increased air-draught clearance as Devon County Council plans to replace two ageing moveable bridges across the Exeter Ship Canal, to improve access for paddlers and boaters.

Devon County Council held workshops for stakeholders on 22nd October 2025, at which it presented the emerging proposals for two new replacement bridges across the Exeter Ship Canal on the A379 dual carriageway. This followed from an announcement by the Department for Transport in July 2025 of a number of local authority road-improvement schemes that were to be taken forward.

The new bridges will be bascule bridges, similar in concept to the existing bascule bridge on the eastbound carriageway but of modern design. They will replace the existing westbound steel swing-bridge, built in the 1930s, and the eastbound bascule bridge, installed in the early 1970s, both of which are becoming life-expired.

The air draught of the existing bascule bridge is larger than that of the existing swing-bridge and IWA is keen for advantage to be taken of the rebuilding to increase the air draught of both bridges. IWA argues that the new bridges should provide sufficient air draught to permit a good number of leisure craft, including yachts with their masts lowered, to pass through without raising the bridges. Opening moveable bridges is not only time consuming but also holds up the traffic using the busy A379 dual carriageway.

Devon County Council has identified five options for replacing the existing bridges. Option 3 provides for the road surface to be raised by 1.7m and Option 4 provides for the road surface to be raised by 0.7m with an opportunity for incremental increases above this. IWA has a preference for Option 3 but Option 4 could also be supported if it results in leisure craft with an air draught of up to 3m being able to pass under the bridges.

The council is currently assessing the comments made at the workshops, with a view to holding a public consultation in spring 2026.

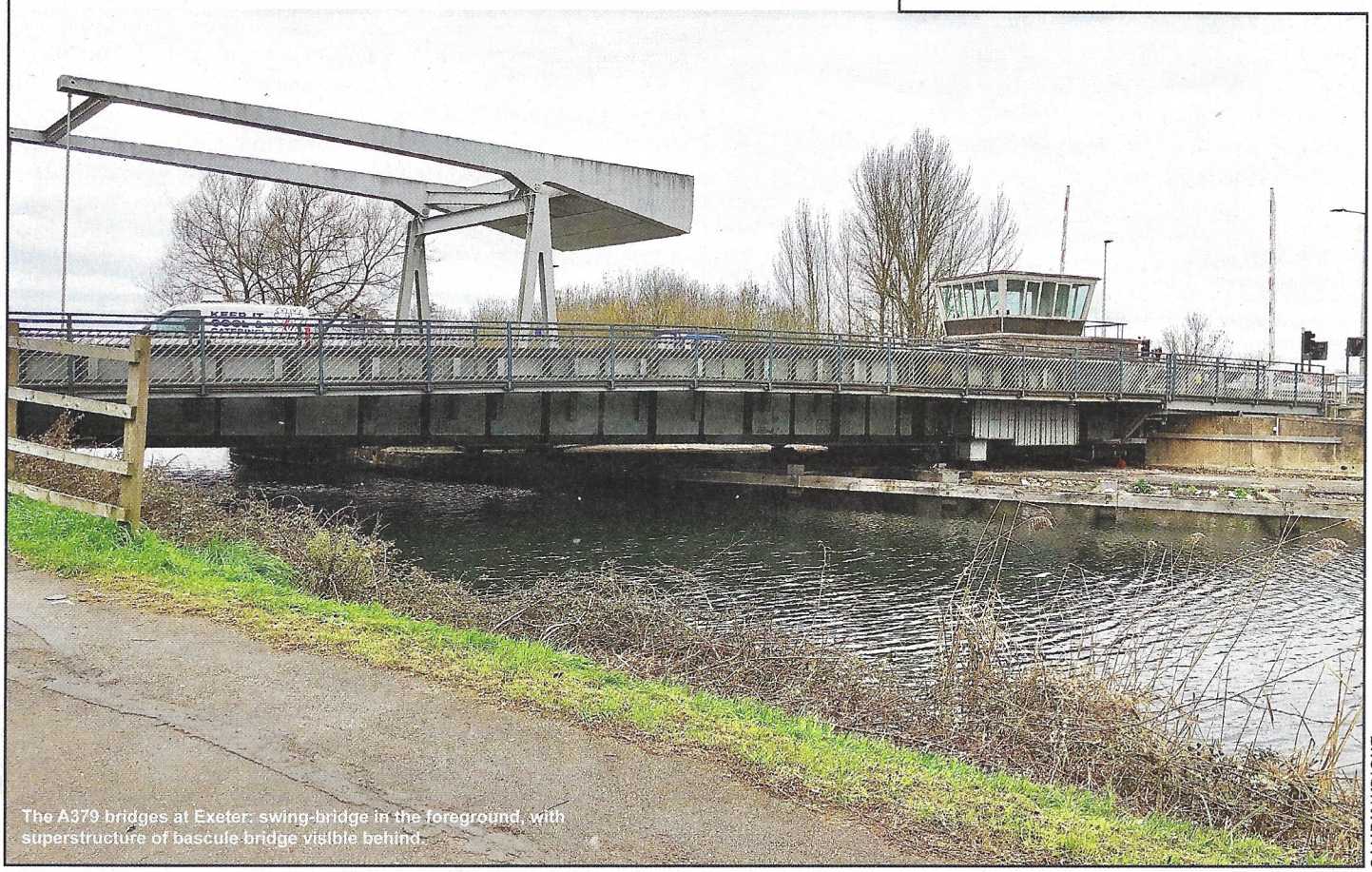
NEIL EDWARDS

A FRESH MOORING

Inland Waterways Association finds a new HQ

The Association has vacated its former head office building in Chesham and moved to new premises beside the Grand Union Canal in Berkhamsted. IWA's head office and registered office address are now at Hardy House, Northbridge Road, Berkhamsted HP4 1EF.

The existing telephone number (01494 783453) remains unchanged.



SANDY WRIGHT

The A379 bridges at Exeter: swing-bridge in the foreground, with superstructure of bascule bridge visible behind.