

The Falkirk Wheel is the dramatic centrepiece of the town's millennium investments, and an essential part of the re-invigoration of the town's waterways

AT the heart of the Millennium Link, a £78 million project to reopen and reconnect the Forth and Clyde Canal and the Union Canal lay a problem. After years of neglect since their closure the series of locks which connected the two had first fallen in to disrepair, and finally been filled in.

The Falkirk Wheel is the response to that: the imposing design will be able to carry eight or more boats at a time across the link, with each trip taking 15 minutes.



Designed by Butterley Engineering in conjunction with Morrison-bachy-Soletanche and specialists from Ove-Arup Consultants, the Wheel has just reached a major construction milestone: the two 80 tonne gondolas, two 300 tonne arm sections and the 50 tonne axle have been lowered into place giving the first impression of the completed structure.

The Wheel will be the only one of its kind in

Turning full circle

the world, and is expected to become a major tourist attraction, as well as an international engineering landmark.

"There has been a definite attempt to design the Wheel for the 21st Century," said a spokesman for the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland. "This design is considered to be a form of contemporary sculpture. The combination of cultural and technical factors adds considerably to the effectiveness of the overall concept and has resulted in a truly exciting solution."

The project has therefore included considerable provision for tourists in its design. Expectations put the level of tourists at around 150,000 per year, putting the site high on Scotland's attractions, parking for up to 400 cars has been included, and a specially constructed bridge will allow access to the Wheel on foot.

A visitor centre is being constructed directly beside the Wheel. With a 330 foot angled glass roof, the design ensures that the dynamic boat lift cuts an imposing presence throughout the centre.

Energy efficiency is built into both the centre and the wheel, with the energy-efficient glass roof of the centre designed to attract natural heat, and a heat pump system attached to the Wheel reducing heating costs over the winter months and cooling costs over the summer.

Boat rides will also be included allowing day-trippers to sail along a 20 metre high aqueduct

before passing through the Antonine Wall, a Roman defence dyke.

As well as marking a significant turn-around in the impact of waterways on the local economy, the Wheel marks a new step for boat lifts in the

UK. The last boat lift to be constructed in the UK was the Anderton Boat Lift in Cheshire in 1875.

The original design for a wheel based boat lift was proposed by a German engineer at the start of the century, but was never built.

