# Restoration begins for Birnbeck Pier as historic project faces funding hurdles



Birnbeck Pier, once a celebrated Victorian masterpiece linking the mainland to Birnbeck Island across the Bristol Channel, today stands as a haunting relic of decay and neglect after nearly four decades of abandonment. Established in 1867 and designed by the renowned engineer Eugenius Birch, the pier was a thriving hub of leisure and maritime activity, featuring a promenade, pleasure pier, and a pivotal lifeboat station integral to coastal rescue efforts. Over time, the pier weathered numerous challenges, including a damaging fire in 1897 and a World War II mine explosion, symbolising its resilience amid adversity. However, the decline of British seaside tourism post-World War II, coupled with rising maintenance costs and private ownership struggles, led to the gradual deterioration and closure of the pier by 1994.

Now listed on Historic England’s Heritage at Risk Register since 1998, Birnbeck Pier’s dilapidation is showcased vividly in poignant photographs revealing rusted ironwork, collapsed decking, and warning signs deterring public access. The pier's significance remains undeniable, being the only UK structure uniquely connecting a mainland to an island, yet the ravages of storms, vandalism, and financial hurdles have stymied earlier restoration plans. The disappearance of scheduled steamship services in the late 1970s marked the end of the pier’s transportation era, and further physical damage in the 21st century, including significant collapses and theft attempts, highlighted the urgent need for intervention.

In a hopeful development, North Somerset Council purchased Birnbeck Pier for £400,000 in January 2022, with ambitions to revive this Grade II\*-listed landmark. The council’s acquisition was supported by Historic England and other funding bodies, setting a multi-year restoration programme into motion. This plan includes re-establishing the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) station, which had operated on the island from 1882 until forced to relocate in 2014 due to unsafe conditions. The RNLI’s intention to return to Birnbeck Island was publicly affirmed in 2020, underscoring the community and navigational safety importance of their presence.

The restoration project formally commenced in October 2024, beginning with stabilisation of buildings, sea wall repairs, and restoration of utilities like electricity. Funded by a £4.47 million UK government grant, the overall restoration is projected for completion by autumn 2027. In alignment with this, North Somerset Council has aimed to restore historic features such as the Pier Master's Cottage and bell tower while creating visitor facilities that celebrate the pier’s unique heritage and Victorian charm.

However, the project faced a significant funding challenge in mid-2025 when the RNLI unexpectedly withdrew from the scheme, resulting in a £5 million shortfall. Despite this setback, the council has managed to secure over £20 million from other external sources including the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England. Efforts are ongoing to appoint a specialist contractor capable of delivering the complex restoration, with a persistent focus on ensuring the revived lifeboat station's return to the island. The project remains a landmark endeavour to rescue a rare and historic structure from further decline.

Thus, while Birnbeck Pier’s current condition evokes a profound sense of loss for what once was, these concerted restoration efforts embody a strong commitment to preserving its legacy. The blend of heritage conservation, community safety, and cultural revival promises to write a new chapter for the pier that once formed a vital artery of British seaside life. Yet overcoming over 40 years of neglect is no small feat, and the visual imagery of rust and ruin serves as a stark reminder of both the passage of time and the enduring value of heritage preservation.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2109866/heartbreaking-images-birnbeck-pier-abandoned), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-59234300), [[3]](https://rnli.org/news-and-media/2020/august/04/weston-super-mare-rnli-announce-hopes-to-return-to-birnbeck-island)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2109866/heartbreaking-images-birnbeck-pier-abandoned), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-59234300), [[3]](https://rnli.org/news-and-media/2020/august/04/weston-super-mare-rnli-announce-hopes-to-return-to-birnbeck-island), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czrl4n8ejlzo)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2109866/heartbreaking-images-birnbeck-pier-abandoned), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-59234300), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cq64q86916ro), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn0l2ereljpo)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2109866/heartbreaking-images-birnbeck-pier-abandoned), [[3]](https://rnli.org/news-and-media/2020/august/04/weston-super-mare-rnli-announce-hopes-to-return-to-birnbeck-island), [[5]](https://n-somerset.gov.uk/news/rnli-pull-out-birnbeck-pier-project-putting-historic-restoration-risk), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czrl4n8ejlzo)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2109866/heartbreaking-images-birnbeck-pier-abandoned), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-59234300), [[5]](https://n-somerset.gov.uk/news/rnli-pull-out-birnbeck-pier-project-putting-historic-restoration-risk), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn0l2ereljpo)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2109866/heartbreaking-images-birnbeck-pier-abandoned), [[5]](https://n-somerset.gov.uk/news/rnli-pull-out-birnbeck-pier-project-putting-historic-restoration-risk), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn0l2ereljpo)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2109866/heartbreaking-images-birnbeck-pier-abandoned> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-59234300> - In January 2022, North Somerset Council acquired Birnbeck Pier in Weston-super-Mare for £400,000, aiming to restore the Grade II-listed structure and re-establish the RNLI lifeboat station. The council plans to fund the restoration over several years, with support from Historic England and other grants. Birnbeck Pier, designed by Eugenius Birch and built between 1862 and 1867, is unique in the UK for connecting the mainland to an island. It was placed on Historic England's national at-risk register in 1999 due to its deteriorating condition.
3. <https://rnli.org/news-and-media/2020/august/04/weston-super-mare-rnli-announce-hopes-to-return-to-birnbeck-island> - In August 2020, the RNLI announced plans to return to Birnbeck Island, aiming to re-establish a lifeboat station there. The RNLI had been based on the island since 1882 but was forced to leave in 2014 due to the pier's deteriorating condition. The council's efforts to acquire the pier and restore it were seen as a significant step towards bringing the RNLI back to the island, ensuring the safety of the community and visitors.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cq64q86916ro> - In October 2024, work began on the restoration of Birnbeck Pier, a Grade II-listed structure in Weston-super-Mare. The first phase involves stabilising buildings on the island, repairing sea walls, and restoring electricity. Funded by £4.47 million from the UK government, the entire project is expected to be completed by autumn 2027. Birnbeck Pier is unique in the UK for connecting the mainland to an island, and its restoration aims to revitalise this historic landmark.
5. <https://n-somerset.gov.uk/news/rnli-pull-out-birnbeck-pier-project-putting-historic-restoration-risk> - In June 2025, the RNLI withdrew from the Birnbeck Pier restoration project, creating a £5 million shortfall in funding. Despite this setback, North Somerset Council secured over £20 million in external funding from sources including The National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England. The council continues to seek a contractor to restore the pier structure, aiming to complete the project by late 2026, ensuring the lifeboat station can return to the island.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czrl4n8ejlzo> - In February 2025, North Somerset Council sought a specialist contractor for the restoration of Birnbeck Pier, the only UK pier connecting to an island. The council had acquired the pier in 2023 and planned to restore it in phases, with the first phase focusing on repairing the pier structure. A planning application submitted by the RNLI in September 2024 was under consideration, aiming to re-establish the lifeboat station on the island.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn0l2ereljpo> - In August 2024, North Somerset Council approved plans to restore Birnbeck Pier, a Grade II-listed structure in Weston-super-Mare. The first phase includes restoring the Pier Master's Cottage, reinstating the bell tower, and creating visitor facilities. The council aims to complete the restoration by autumn 2027, with funding from the UK government and other grants. Birnbeck Pier is unique in the UK for connecting the mainland to an island and has been closed to the public since 1994.