Douglas River Bridge, England, RIBA Design Competition 2008

The new River Douglas Bridge transcends the idea of a purely functional river crossing; it is an important event, a frozen moment in the network of foot and cycle paths in the Regional Wetland Park in Lancashire, a region famous for its extraordinary population of wildlife and birds. The Bridge will act as more than a landmark and focal point for people from the region and visitors, it will serve as an experience from which to access the Greenway.

An unexpected move in the form of a loop creates a perceptual shift, a spatial pause, and results in a new experience for pedestrians and cyclists, gracefully bringing them upwards in a gentle spiral to an expansive panorama.

This perceptual shift or ‘pause’ is an important redefinition in time – an invitation for visitors to stay and rest, meet others, and experience full history, landscape and nature of the ‘site’. The loop creates the potential for a vertical connection between the visitor and the water, between the sky and the riverbed below. The rolling, horizontal landscape has been peeled up and reveals the spirit of the place.

The main metaphor of the bridge is the elegant flight of a bird, the graceful arc and a loop. This simple gesture drawn above the landscape will intuitively greet and hold visitors in this place without prescribed viewpoints ways of interacting with the bridge and its surroundings. The span is simple, yet memorable allowing many interpretations.

The Loop creates a discreet space in time to pause, an opportunity to encounter people, encompass the landscape, and explore the nature of the Greenway. But even more importantly, the Loop will become the identity of this remarkable place.

The bridge was structurally developed with Buro Happold. It is a beam bridge with 40m span across the river.