

Good morning and welcome to the official opening of the White Bridge and the re-surfaced surround pathways. It is a magnificent structure, fits well with its surrounding environment and is the darkest shade of White I have ever seen. But more on that later.

My name is Roger Potter and 3 years ago having served my 15ish year sentence on Bramber Parish Council, my wife Cathy told me that my golf wasn't getting me out of the house for long enough and suggested I should find something else to occupy my time! At that time The Steyning & District Community Partnership (SDCP), under the leaderships of Ian Alexander, Reina Alston and Russell Barnes identified a need to improve the overland access between Steyning, Upper Beeding and Bramber, a project was formed and I was asked to be its Chairman. Cathy was delighted.

12 unsuspecting yet enthusiastic volunteers stepped forward and Working Party 9 was formed under the auspices of the Sustainable Travel Committee. At the first meeting we thought it would be a good idea to decide what we were trying to achieve and the following Vision Statement was agreed:-

“Encourage and enhance sustainable, safe, active travel connecting the communities within the Adur Valley area of Bramber, Steyning and Upper Beeding. To advance community **connectivity, encourage healthy lifestyles and help improve physical and mental health for all ages and abilities.”**

A bit of a mouth-full but you get the idea.

Our first initiative was to use existing footpaths, improve the surfaces, and make it easier to use them between the 3 conurbations in most weather conditions. We invited experienced personnel from West Sussex County Council (WSCC) with appropriate responsibilities to join us and developed close and effective working relationships to help meet our objectives. This, of course, required access over the White Bridge hence our project was called The White Bridge Link.

Further potential projects have been identified in a recent Local Cycling and Walking Plan and moves are afoot to determine the best way forward to address these.

Good progress was made on the White Bridge Link, landowners contacted for their agreement to the improvements, Environment Agency brought on board to agree changes to the River Bank, Technical Specifications produced, funding sought, 3 successful open morning sessions were held where residents came along and gave their views, Landbuild were selected as the preferred contractor, etc. Feedback from the public was very positive so everything in the garden looked rosy.

Having worked on projects for most of my working life I can say with some certainty that the only constant on them is change. Our first major change, or should I say bombshell, happened 18 months in when our beloved White Bridge was inspected, condemned and closed. Speechless doesn't cover it but we were comforted by updates back from WSCC that they would do all they could, in these times of austerity, to ensure a suitable replacement would be installed. And they did and the proof stands before you today.

Once the necessary budget was agreed within WSCC a project was initiated to build and install a new bridge. A contractor was appointed to carry out the work and the White Bridge Link project team worked closely with WSCC in ensuring that the replacement bridge and footpaths project were successfully completed. Pleased to report that both were completed to time and budget and you see before the results of our joint efforts.

We are approximately 3 years on from the start of project and I want to finish by thanking those who have contributed to it's success.

First Reina, Ian and Russell from the Partnership for getting it off the ground.

Working Party 9 for their enthusiasm and staying power:-

Russell Barnes, Ian Alexander, Geoff Barnard, Frank Bull, Sarah Collins, Mike Croker, Ann Blakelock, Bob Harber, Ray Powell, Michael Owen and Steve Keogh,

WSCC:- Nick Scott (Footpaths) Steve Elliott (WSCC Structures) Elio and team from Structures for their determination and professionalism in getting the bridge replaced. Councillor Paul Linehan for his strong support for the project in particular to fight for the budget approval and interfacing with external bodies to ensure project delivery. Councillor Joy Dennis for backing the project during WSCC Budgetary process.

Environment Agency:- Glynn Wells at the Environment Agency for ensuring our river banks were kept in order.

Landbuild who carried out the construction. Thanks go to Richard Finn and Joe and the rest of the team for their professionalism and working co-operation.

Non WSCC Funding

The Wilson Memorial Trust played a key role by funding the resurfacing of the footpath on the Upper Beeding eastern side of the bridge. Their support of about £125,000 allowed the early environmental and route related work to progress with certainty. The community is grateful to them and to Simon Robinson in particular.

The South Downs National Park Authority contributed £35,000, managed by Stephen Keogh in his Upper Beeding Parish Council role.

Horsham District Council also supported the project through the Rural England Prosperity Fund, with £58,000 secured. In particular, thanks go to Russell Barnes, Councillor Ruth Fletcher and to Ray Powell for their work in bringing this forward.

Thanks are due to all the landowners along the route. Permissions are still being finalised but their cooperation has been critical.

Many others have supported the project in practical ways, including work involving utilities and related infrastructure.

This new bridge stands as a major community achievement. More than £1 million invested, countless hours of effort and a shared commitment to improving our local area. This is something everyone involved can be proud of.

And if you fancy getting involved in future projects like this please contact your Parish Council, SDGP or Greening Steyning.