



The new footbridge to Shakespeare Beach was reopened by Dover MP Charlie Elphick alongside Network Rail and Costain engineers, Channel swimmers and dog walkers

Picture: Paul Amos FM4721818

# Bridge reopening good for Channel swimmers

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Channel swimmers can return to their traditional launch base this summer after Aycliffe's rail footbridge was reopened.

The bridge had been destroyed along with the Dover to Folkestone line and sea wall by a storm on Christmas Eve in 2015.

The rail track and wall were restored last September and the bridge was formally reopened on Monday.

Now swimmers can use it to start from Dover's Shakespeare Beach when making the 21-mile journey to France.

Michael Read, who is president of the Channel Swimming Association (CSA) and has swum the English Channel 33 times, said: "I'm delighted that the beach is back in use because it was always the traditional starting point and Channel swimmers have such an affection for it."

"Over the years we have also been able to use Samphire Hoe."

"Now the pilots can choose a beach depending on the tides and how they will affect the swimmer."

The beach is also again available to dog walkers.

Members of the CSA joined Network Rail engineers and Dover MP Charlie Elphicke for the official opening after the mammoth task of reinstating the rail line itself.

Network Rail's director of route asset management Alan Ross said: "We knew that this was going to be a huge job."

"We not only had to rebuild and protect the railway between Dover and Folkestone, but we also had to protect the cliff itself."

"We all felt responsible for making this project as good as it could be and finally we can say we've achieved our aim and the beach is back open."



Footbridge spans the restored Dover to Folkestone rail line damaged in December 2015

Mr Elphicke, who chaired the sea wall repair task force after the storm, said: "Our fight to fix the sea wall just goes to show what can be achieved if people work together and get on with the job."

"Dedicated workers from Network Rail and Costain grafted around the clock and the rail line was back on track three months ahead of schedule."

Repairs began at Shakespeare Beach in January 2016, when the first of 90,000 tonnes of granite rock armour was shipped to Dover by barge and delivered to the site.

Since then, Network Rail engineers have been working to place the rock armour along a 375m stretch of the wall and put the new footbridge in place across the railway and down to the beach, at a cost of £39.8 million.

The railway was rebuilt on a 235m viaduct supported by 138 columns while the rock was arranged to protect both the beach and cliff face behind from the power of the sea.

At its peak, more than 1,000 people worked on the project, with about 150 on the beach works and footbridge.



MP Charlie Elphick chats to Costain's Charly Clark on the new crossing

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