

People see what they were missing as footbridge linking area to Aycliffe reopens 'It's so great to have our Shakespeare Beach back'

By **Joyeeta Basu**
joy.basu@kentlive.news

SHAKESPEARE Beach and a footbridge linking it with Aycliffe reopened on Monday after more than a year of work.

Network Rail's Steve Kilby, Dover and Deal MP Charlie Elphicke, Channel Swimming Association president Michael Read and Dover District Council's head of inward investment, Tim Ingleton, attended the opening at 11am.

Some people from the area also waited "excitedly to finally access the beach".

The beach, footbridge and a stretch of rail track between Folkestone and Dover were severely damaged in a fierce storm on Christmas Eve 2015.

The rail line reopened in September last year, but residents were told the beach would not open until May 2017.

Mr Elphicke, who chaired the seawall repair task force, said it was fantastic that the project had been completed ahead of schedule.

He said: "When the railway seawall failed over a year ago, it concerned so many residents and commuters who found it hard to commute.

"Our fight to fix the seawall 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 round the clock - and

the rail line was back on track three months ahead of schedule."

Channel swimmers were also delighted at the opening, as the popular spot marks the shortest distance between the country and France.

Mr Read, who has swum the Channel 33 times, said: "It was always the traditional starting point for swims and Channel swimmers have an affection for it."

The project to rebuild the railway and part of the seawall at Shakespeare Beach began immediately after Christmas 2015 and cost £39.8 million.

And Network Rail's director of route asset management, Alan Ross, knew it was going to be a "huge job" the moment his team saw the damage in 2015.

Rebuild

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

"It's great news for the community that the beach is back open and I'd like to thank them for their support and understanding while we carried out work."

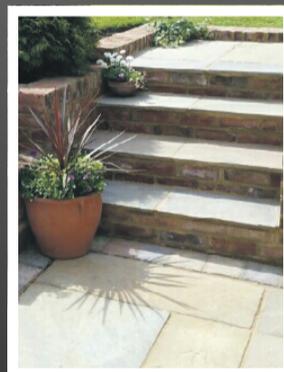
Mr Ingleton added: "We are very pleased to hear this news from Network Rail, and welcome the completion of this important work, which will reconnect Shakespeare Beach with the community."



OPEN AT LAST: The opening party, with the beach and footbridge in the background



BACK ON THE SAND: The beach was closed after the Christmas storm



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