

Wool Old Bridge Reconstruction

Wool Old Bridge, a 16th century Grade II* listed structure, made famous by Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, partially collapsed in January last year. Erosion of the bridge foundations caused the arch and wall to slip into the river requiring immediate action to make this well used crossing point safe.

The structure spans the fast-flowing River Frome, presenting significant access issues to the site, impeding inspecting the scale of the damage, producing and safely delivering a permanent solution.

Temporary works in the form of bagged gabion stone were lifted into position to prevent further failure while a solution was designed and the necessary consents gained from Historic England and the Environment Agency for the permanent repair work. A temporary dam was installed in July, diverting the river Frome through the undamaged section of the bridge to allow demolition, stabilisation of the damaged arches and site investigations to begin. This was carried out under an archaeological watching brief as the structure is an at-risk heritage asset

Low water levels over the summer made it possible to safely access the site and allow engineers to sympathetically repair the Grade II* listed structure.

The bridge has been significantly enhanced structurally using modern materials which have been clad in stone recovered from the watercourse and new stone sourced from the same bed used to construct the bridge 500 years ago.

A temporary footbridge was installed on the downstream side of the bridge so that a crossing remained throughout construction. The scheme generated interest from residents, businesses, military historians and the daily troop of dog walkers. In recognition of this, the local primary school were invited to tour the site to inspect the substructure normally hidden beneath the river. While stakeholder engagement is key in any project, this was an opportunity for students to see and touch civil engineering on their doorsteps. The value of this was recognised by local people who came to watch the dam being removed and hopefully went some way to inspire the civil engineers of tomorrow.

