



Bermondsey's heritage back on track

In 2013 we refurbished Abbey Street Bridge, a 177 year-old structure carrying nine modern railway tracks through to London Bridge on what was originally London's oldest passenger railway line. The structure reopened in October 2013 following extensive restoration works undertaken in partnership with the London Borough of Southwark, The Railway Heritage Trust, and even the Secretary of State.

Abbey Street Bridge off Jamaica Road in Bermondsey is a nine-track, 43 metre-wide bridge spanning nearly 25 metres of road and footways. It was first completed in 1836 as part of London's first passenger railway line, the London and Greenwich Railway, and is a Grade II-listed structure.

In 2013 we were commissioned to refurbish the bridge and deliver accompanying highways improvements to the road and footways beneath the bridge. The project was officially re-opened on 11 October by Lord McAlpine having originally been identified as a priority by the London Borough of Southwark's Community Project Bank, for which residents put forward recommendations for local works.

Funding for the £375,000 project was provided by a £150,000 grant secured by the borough from the Railway Heritage Trust. The funding marked the one millionth pound invested by Network Rail and its partners, who match the money Network Rail provides to fund heritage projects. A further £225,000 for the scheme came from developers' Section 106 contributions.

Intricate works, careful planning

"With such an old structure we had to plan our works meticulously and agree working practices that would protect the bridge" comments Kevin Brown, [project manager] for FM Conway. "The bridge pre-dates standardised specifications or materials, so it was a detailed process to decide on appropriate methods for cleaning, repainting and renovating all of the different aspects.

"For example, we had three different types of brickworks, all of which needed to be cleaned in a way that would not cause any damage. That ruled out more abrasive techniques, and we worked closely with the borough heritage officer, Network Rail and the Railway Heritage Trust to confirm how we would do it.

"It's been a comprehensive renovation. We have repainted the unique cast iron columns that support the bridge, putting up new and more effective pigeon meshing and coating the structure with anti-graffiti paint. Lighting has been installed to make the bridge more attractive and reduce the fear of crime, while we have altered the carriageways beneath the bridge to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists. The paving has also been upgraded, using Yorkstone paving, which reflects the original materials used in this area.

"Throughout the project, there has been an excellent working relationship between everyone involved. We have had to collaborate with up to five different organisations at a time, including charities, local authorities, network operators and local businesses and residents. Given Abbey Street's listed status, the team even secured permissions from the Secretary of State. We're proud to have brought such a

historic part of our network back into excellent condition, and to deliver a much-wanted improvement for the local community.”

An uplift for Bermondsey

Yvonne Sampoh, planning officer for the London Borough of Southwark, comments: “Abbey Street Bridge had been identified by the community in Bermondsey as a key renovation project. It’s a fantastic historic structure, but the area beneath had become dark, dingy – not a route people felt safe to walk through.

“We’re very happy with the end result. This was an intricate project, and we had a lot of stakeholders. Working with FM Conway, we had practical and creative input into how we could protect the bridge throughout the works and make improvements to what we were doing. It’s important to get that from a contractor, and we were delighted to unveil the completed project.”

