**PR 100**

***For immediate release***

 **People power leads to reinstatement of ‘lifeline’ Peak District bridge**

A Peak District footbridge river crossing, hailed as a lifeline to locals, walkers and climbers has been rebuilt thanks to a £190,000 fundraising effort.

Around 60 individuals from the local community contributed to the reinstatement of the popular Cressbrook Mill Bridge, which also saw substantial support from the Peak District National Park Authority and its official charity partner, the Peak District National Park Foundation along with the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) ‘Mend our Mountains’ scheme.

Almost £120,000 was also made available from Defra’s Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme, led by the National Park Authority, to support local access projects.

Representatives of all the groups involved in fundraising were among the first to cross the new bridge during an official opening event.

The original 20m (60ft) bridge –across the River Wye - was closed in 2020 after it fell into disrepair and was structurally condemned as unsafe to use.

It had been installed by the military in the 1980s and became a popular access point for the local community and visitors.

Its closure prompted local organisations to raise awareness and start fundraising for its reinstatement.

The matter was raised with the Peak District National Park Authority which did not own the bridge, but agreed to adopt it and assessed the costs needed to install a sustainable and resilient alternative, requiring minimal maintenance.

The new bridge once more connects the Monsal Trail with Cressbrook and the wider countryside and allows for circular walks along the River Wye and through the impressive scenery of Water-cum-Jolly.

The challenging nature of the site and the size of the required bridge meant a bill of £190,000 – leading to a huge fundraising effort.

The Authority covered the £20,000 removal costs of the original bridge, while £50,000 was raised by the Foundation, including £10,000 from the British Mountaineering Council and £14,000 from the general public.

West Midlands-based specialist civil engineering contractors R & C Williams secured the contract to design and install the bridge, with main spans produced from Fibre Reinforced Polymer (FRP) with hardwood handrails. Around 26,000 plastic bottles were recycled and used in the construction.

The new, state-of-the-art structure is anticipated to have a lifespan of 120 years, with relatively minimal regular maintenance.

A significant installation operation also included a 100-tonne crane to hoist the main bridge spans into place.

Phil Mulligan, chief executive of the Peak District National Park Authority said: “This is a day to celebrate for those who enjoy exploring this wonderful dale and the neighbouring Monsal Trail route. To see such an innovative and sustainable structure in place in the National Park makes it worth the wait; especially for those groups and generous individuals who contributed to the fundraising efforts. This modest but much-loved crossing will now have a remarkable, multi-generational lifespan and my thanks to all those involved for making it happen.”

Roisin Joyce, director of the Peak District National Park Foundation, said: “This project really shows what’s possible when everyone comes together – climbers, walkers, the local community and people from across the country – to donate a little but allow something much bigger to happen.”

Wendy Morrison, who owns the land containing the concessionary footpath to the bridge on the Cressbrook side of the river, remembers the original bridge being installed when she was a teenager.

She said: “When the original bridge closed, we suddenly realised how much we missed it. Now we have the new one, you can avoid roads and explore in 10 different directions – it’s brilliant. This bridge is the best Christmas present - for the next 120 years!”

Rebekah Newman, Lead Advisor for Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) in the Peak District said: “The FiPL panel approved this collaborative application owing to the significant opportunities for the public to access the high environmental quality farmland on the far side of the river, part of the Wye Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest and Peak District Dales Special Area of Conservation.”

Matt Cain, from main contractor R&C Williams said: “This isn’t the first Lifespan FRP bridge we have installed, but it is the biggest and it showcases the capabilities of this sustainable construction material.”

British Mountaineering Council (BMC) Access & Conservation Trust (ACT) Comms Officer, Claire Maxted, said: “The restoration of Cressbrook Bridge is fantastic for walkers and climbers in the area. Now climbs like Black Buttress and Moat Buttress will be accessible to climbers again and walkers can use the bridge to access the hugely popular Monsal Trail. The BMC funding comes from our Access & Conservation Trust’s Mend Our Mountains campaign, donated by generous BMC members and outdoor-lovers. We would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to all involved.”

**ENDS**

**Picture:** Representatives of all the groups involved in fundraising – and the contractors - were among the first to cross the new bridge during an official opening event

**For more information: Please contact Communications Manager Tom Marshall –** **tom.marshall@peakdistrict.gov.uk** **/ 01629 816293**

**Monday to Wednesday:** **fiona.stubbs@peakdistrict.gov.uk**

**Wednesday to Friday:** **alison.riley@peakdistrict.gov.uk**