

On Friday 20<sup>th</sup> June East Woodhay Parish Council (EWPC) were delighted to welcome Councillor Kirsty North from Hampshire County Council (HCC) to officially open the boardwalk between Trade Street and Fullers Lane in Woolton Hill.

As part of her role on HCC Cabinet, Kirsty is responsible for Countryside Services, who led the replacement of the boardwalk with project managers Corinne Davis-Cooke and Gemma Clinch running the installation.

More than 35 people attended the opening, including many volunteers who installed the 360metre boardwalk, members of East Woodhay Parish Council who initiated the plans, representatives from HCC, North Wessex Downs National Landscape, the manufacturer of the material, Bison Bridges, as well as many from the local community.

Councillor Paul Hurst, Chair of East Woodhay Parish Council, led the celebration welcome where he emphasised the importance of the boardwalk giving access to an important part of our natural environment for the community. In spring it is widely known for the display of wild daffodils and the boardwalk plays a key role for being an enabler for nature projects.

Paul said that the path is being used for people to get out into the wonderful natural area and experience and understand what is about locally. The Woolton Hill schools have already been excited by the new boardwalk, wanting to start to use it for regular educational trips. Paul said that the Parish Council will also be working with the Hampshire and IoW Wildlife Trust, who have already visited the boardwalk, to start to increase peoples' knowledge of the environment.

Paul then thanked all those who made work possible especially the volunteers who had spent many hours in muddy conditions during the winter before handing over to Councillor Kirsty North.

Kirsty provided background to the project, describing how East Woodhay Parish Council, Hampshire County Council and North Wessex Downs National Landscape (via the Defra Access for All scheme) had all provided money to purchase the recycled plastic supports and timber boards which will provide a cost-effective structure for the long term.

Kirsty emphasised the importance of access to all before also thanking the many volunteers and then locals for their patience as the work was completed over a six month period.

To highlight its importance to local people Kirsty mentioned that a people counter had been installed at one end of the boardwalk, which is showing that, on average, approximately 40-50 people a day walk the boardwalk, with one particularly sunny Sunday seeing 150 users. The following week the Parish Council were pleased to show our MP, Kit Malthouse, the new boardwalk and he was really interested in how the construction was made as well as the opportunity it provides for people to walk through the ancient woodland whilst enjoying variety of nature alongside the path.