

Rural mural makeover for railway bridge after village campaign

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A joint project by Network Rail and local people has revamped the appearance of an unpopular railway bridge rebuilt over three years ago in rural Lancashire.

A new mural has been painted on Meadow Lane bridge in Croston after its controversial upgrade in 2018.

Back then the 60-year-old concrete bridge with open steel railings had to be replaced because it had come to the end of its working life and did not meet modern safety standards.

But the newer and stronger steel bridge built as a safer railway crossing for traffic, cyclists and pedestrians was not well received.

Many people felt the bridge's enclosed shiny steel sides – or parapets – were out of keeping with the countryside, and a campaign was launched by locals for the structure to be entirely replaced.

Because the bridge met 21st century railway standards – and cost millions of pounds to install – a complete rebuild funded by the taxpayer just wasn't viable.

It led to an unknown party wrapping the new bridge in vinyl graphics, but without proper application they became unsightly and began to peel away, posing a risk to the safe running of the railway below and for road users too.

Since 2019, Network Rail has been carefully collaborating with the local action group to find a way for the community to have their say on how the bridge can better fit in with the village.

In July, Lancashire County Council gave permission to Network Rail to close the A581 road to allow its contractors Murphy's to create the mural. The painting was completed on 22 August.

The design, devised by the local campaigners, was painted onto the metal bridge parapets and became the canvas to a new piece of public art the whole of Croston can be proud of.

Helena Williams, Network Rail project manager, said: "While we have a duty to ensure the railway is safe and reliable for road and rail users, we've learned a valuable lesson that our infrastructure matters to local people and the area they live in.

"We'd like to thank the local action group and people in Croston for their patience, cooperation and ingenuity to create a new feature for their beautiful village which can enjoyed for years to come."

Kath Almond, chair of the local action group, said: "Meadow Lane Bridge is the entrance to our village from open countryside. The industrial look of the steel parapets was hideous compared to the railings we had previously. Despite our outcry, Network Rail was adamant it could not be changed due to cost. They did, however, offer to paint it a solid colour. Then some sympathetic person, put a vinyl 'wrap' on it, depicting the countryside view we had lost.

"Our action group decided this was what we wanted, and after long discussions, Network Rail agreed. The result is the steel bridge appears to have disappeared into the sky, and the countryside has come back. We still miss our railings, but now we have a feature, which will amuse people for many years to come."

Network Rail has a rolling programme to renew and maintain the railway infrastructure across Britain.

The improvement of bridges across cities, towns and villages not only helps keep passenger and freight trains running reliably, but it also protects the safety of road users, such as HGVs, buses, coaches, cars and pedestrians when the roads cross over the rail network.