

WHITE STORK MURAL - HERITAGE STATEMENT FOR STORRINGTON CONSERVATION AREA

Introduction: We present a unique proposal for a stork-themed art mural with a separate, but accompanying interpretation board at Place Villerest, Storrington RH20 4DR. The chosen site is on Old Mill Drive in the historic heart of town within the Storrington Conservation Area and hence full planning permission, accompanied by a Heritage Statement is required.

Background: Storrington's name from the Domesday Book is "Estorchetone", meaning the homestead of storks. In May 2025, a European charity "EuroNatur" approved Storrington together with Knepp Wildland to join the European Stork Villages Network – a first and only such accolade in the UK <https://www.storkvillages.net/news/detail/knepp-and-storrington-named-european-stork-village>. The first-ever White Stork and Nature Festival was hosted in Storrington by the Storrington & Sullington Parish Council to celebrate this momentous award. https://youtu.be/KEfqeKyvoMI?si=xC_VQnA0v14W_br2

In follow-up to this historic event, a striking visual artwork in a public space in the historic town centre was imagined. This would serve as a long-term, modern "plaque" to commemorate this significant award locally. Place Villerest was chosen because of its central and prominent position. At this quiet green space in an otherwise bustling business area, the village sign (unveiled in 2002) features storks as its emblem. A new stork mural artwork will complement the existing historic features. Together with the interpretation board, it will offer a unique opportunity to commemorate Storrington's close connection with the reintroduction of white storks at Knepp, less than 10 miles away. This is a conservation story that has become a source of local pride and national attention.

Detail: Place Villerest is owned by Horsham District Council. The exterior wall in question is at the eastern side of a property, wholly owned by a long-established Estate Agent, Guy Leonard & Co.

The exterior wall for the artwork is currently painted a deep blue with a space about 5x2m for an eye-catching artwork above the River Stor. An accomplished local artist, Daryl Bennett was chosen for his previous stork art mural in Brighton. He is a Youth and Community Arts Facilitator so has an ethos that fits with this Storrington community project. The proposed designs with its distinctive, nature-led style provides a vibrant, accessible and visually uplifting medium that captures the movement, grace and symbolism of the storks. The detail of the design will be agreed once the formal planning process has been completed.

The interpretation board proposed is around 1x1m to be made in the same style as HDC has recently used i.e. a sealed glass unit (to protect the wording against the elements) with an attractive wooden frame. This will be erected vertically on an existing stone pillar directly in front of the wall to draw pedestrians in and tell the story. It will offer residents and visitors essential context about the reintroduction of white storks, the ecological significance of their comeback, and the wider connections with Knepp and the European Stork Villages Network.

If approved, the project aims to engage the villagers through some form of crowdfunding in 2026.

Proposer: I am a long-term Storrington resident, having lived in the area for around 25 years. I volunteer my time and became closely involved with the organising of the inaugural stork and nature festival earlier this year. I am thrilled at the possibility of seeing this art project come to fruition. Many of us believe a stork mural will be a local community asset to be proud of.

Consents: The following parties are involved in this project and have all given their in-principle agreement for such a prominent artwork and interpretation board: the Knepp Estate and their White Stork Project, the Storrington & Sullington Parish Council, HDC Parks and Countryside Manager, the co-owners of the wall in question - Cathy and Neil Moore of Guy Leonard & Co Estate Agents plus the freelance artist, Daryl Bennett. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/daryl-bennett-3a382a31/?originalSubdomain=uk>

Impact: The quiet nature of the conservation area around Place Villerest will not be affected by the proposal. No heritage structures will be defaced, damaged or otherwise compromised. Surface spray-paint and installation of an appropriate interpretation board will not detract from the existing historic features at site with its village sign and Villerest twinning wall plaques.

The proposal will pose only minor interruption at site whilst being worked on. No traffic calming measures are needed. A temporary scaffold may be erected for the artist to safely execute the mural. Should the artwork or interpretation board become damaged, through vandalism or otherwise, there is a commitment to repair and make good.

Overall, this proposal is intended as a long-lasting and semi-permanent fixture in town. The two items proposed will only enhance Storrington's existing historic core. It is essential to maintain energy and life in our village centre whilst preserving its historic status and links to the past. Especially the eye-catching stork mural will impact the visual aesthetics for both pedestrians and those driving past. It is considered a positive aspect which could become an additional visitor attraction for this village.

Conclusion: Together, the stork mural and interpretation board forms a thoughtful, cohesive and educational feature. It will be an extra historic feature, adding to the sense of place already evident at Place Villerest in the heart of Storrington, a village at the foot of the South Downs. The White Stork Project continues to be successful in its aims of re-establishing a wild, breeding population of white storks in the UK. This will draw these large enigmatic birds to the surrounding area – a symbol of regeneration and hope. The proposal is a unique opportunity to strengthen Storrington's existing identity while honouring a landmark conservation success. Storrington's link with the Knepp branding as a new European Stork Village has the potential to become its Unique Selling Point.

Written by: Viviane Doussy, December 2025

