

May 2026

Stakeholder Newsletter



THE TRAIN IS THE MODE OF TRANSPORT OF THE FUTURE AND YOUTH IS THE FUTURE OF RAIL." (OSCAR VERMEIJ, PROJECT DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, RAIL INNOVATORS GROUP)

It is always a pleasure to introduce this newsletter, particularly when it reflects such a broad and positive range of activity taking place across our railway communities. As I read through this edition, one theme particularly struck me: looking to the future. Railways have always been about connection, opportunity and progress, and many of the projects featured here are ultimately about inspiring and supporting the next generation of rail users, rail professionals and community leaders.

That spirit was perhaps best captured by the recent visit of the Railway 200 Inspiration Train to Long Marston. Seeing young people engaging with railway technology, engineering, heritage and innovation in such an immersive way was genuinely encouraging. For many of those students, it may simply have been an enjoyable day out. For some, however, it may well have sparked the beginning of a lifelong interest or even a future career in transport, engineering or sustainability. That matters enormously.

Education and opportunity continue to sit at the heart of what we do as a Community Rail Partnership. Whether through STEM visits, rail safety work, biodiversity projects, accessibility initiatives or creative partnerships with schools and community organisations, our aim is always to make the railway feel welcoming, relevant and accessible to everyone.

Alongside all of this, we continue to strengthen our partnerships with train operators, local authorities, businesses, charities and educational organisations. These relationships are vital. Community rail succeeds because it brings people together around shared goals, and I would like to thank all of our partners, supporters and volunteers for the commitment and enthusiasm they continue to bring.

Finally, I hope many of you will be able to join us at our upcoming AGM on Monday 29 June. It will provide an opportunity not only to reflect on the progress made over the past year, but also to look ahead to the opportunities and challenges still to come.

Malcolm Holmes, Chair of Heart of England CRP

NEWS & STORIES FOR THIS ISSUE:

- The Inspiration Train in Warwickshire
- Education
- Station & Neighbourhood Improvements
- Inclusivity & Community Links
- Sustainability
- Partner Updates



A student from Lapworth Primary experiencing the Exhibition Train

The Inspiration Train Visits Warwickshire!



The Railway 200 Inspiration Train has travelled a whopping 6000+ miles over the UK since it first set out in June 2025, and it finally made a visit to Warwickshire at Long Marston rail Innovation Centre (LMRIC)!



We arranged and supported 82 students from local schools to attend, with financial support for transportation from Porterbrook and West Midlands Trains. It was really interesting to see the train in a very different environment to the heritage setting of Birmingham Moor Street last year.



LMRIC being a well respected testing facility and the home of the UK's first hydrogen train, students were amazed at the size of the site.

Alongside all the fantastic activities from before, this time the group were also treated to VR headsets of driving a train.

As an organisation with education as a core priority, the Inspiration Train has been a hugely valuable asset for us to tap into to provide exceptional STEM and heritage experiences to local school children.

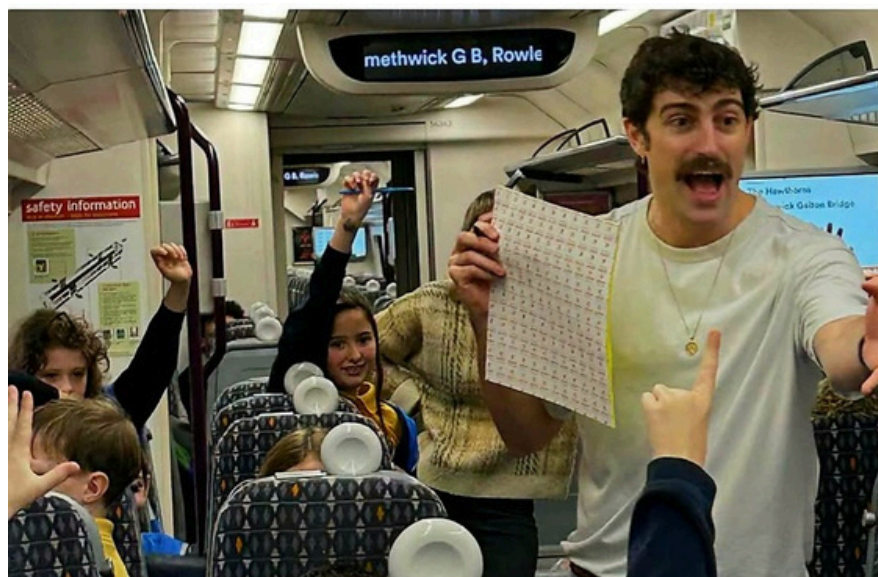
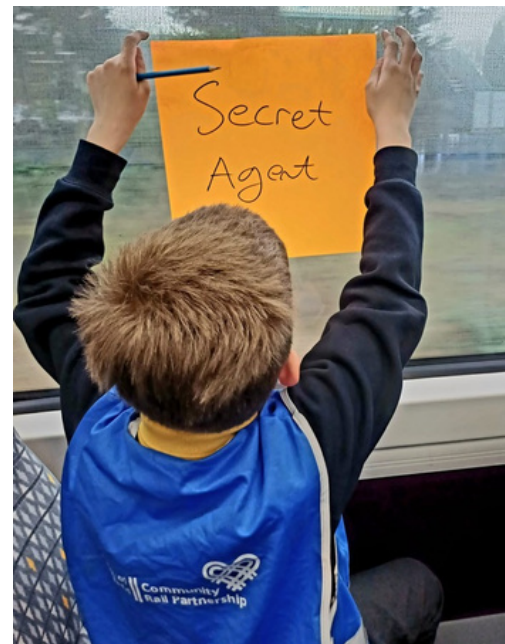


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Education

Author Workshops on the Train Surprise Fellow Passengers!

It was hard not to get caught up in the excitement of a tongue in cheek Murder mystery writing workshop on a train, with the wonderful award winning author Sam Sedgman & our partners Stratford Literary Festival.



There were some confused but very entertained passengers on journeys between Stratford upon Avon & Birmingham Moor Street, so a big thank you to West Midlands Railway & Chiltern Railways for your support too.

Olton Station Develops Biodiversity Project

The Wild Rails project working with Olton Primary School students, voted to install bird boxes opposite the station to try and assist biodiversity in the area. With our partners Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, students had examined current biodiversity levels already at the station to how they might improve this with a future project. We are now collaborating with West Midlands Trains and the Station Adopters to get this plan in action.



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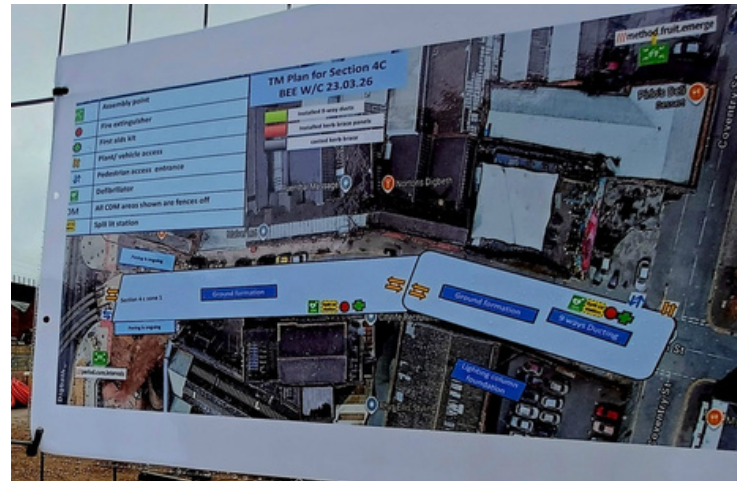
Education

STEM Trip to Midlands Metro Connect

We partnered with Midlands Metro Connect (MMC) to offer a STEM Visit for sixth form Architecture, Engineering & Construction students. After arriving into Birmingham Moor Street on the train, Midlands Metro Connect staff walked students around the construction sites in Digbeth where the tram network is being expanded, in close proximity to Curzon Street station (artist impression photo below left) which will be the final departure point for HS2.



Staff explained about how MMC was approaching these huge infrastructure projects and how Curzon Street would become a significant transport hub. Students got to ride the tram network while being told about how MMC had been tripling Birmingham's metro system over the last five years.



Apprenticeship recruitment is central to MMC's student outreach programme, and Stratford High sixth formers really benefited from chatting to the Apprentices who came along.

Rose led a really engaging session with them and clearly shares our passion for helping more students discover and consider well supported engineering options.

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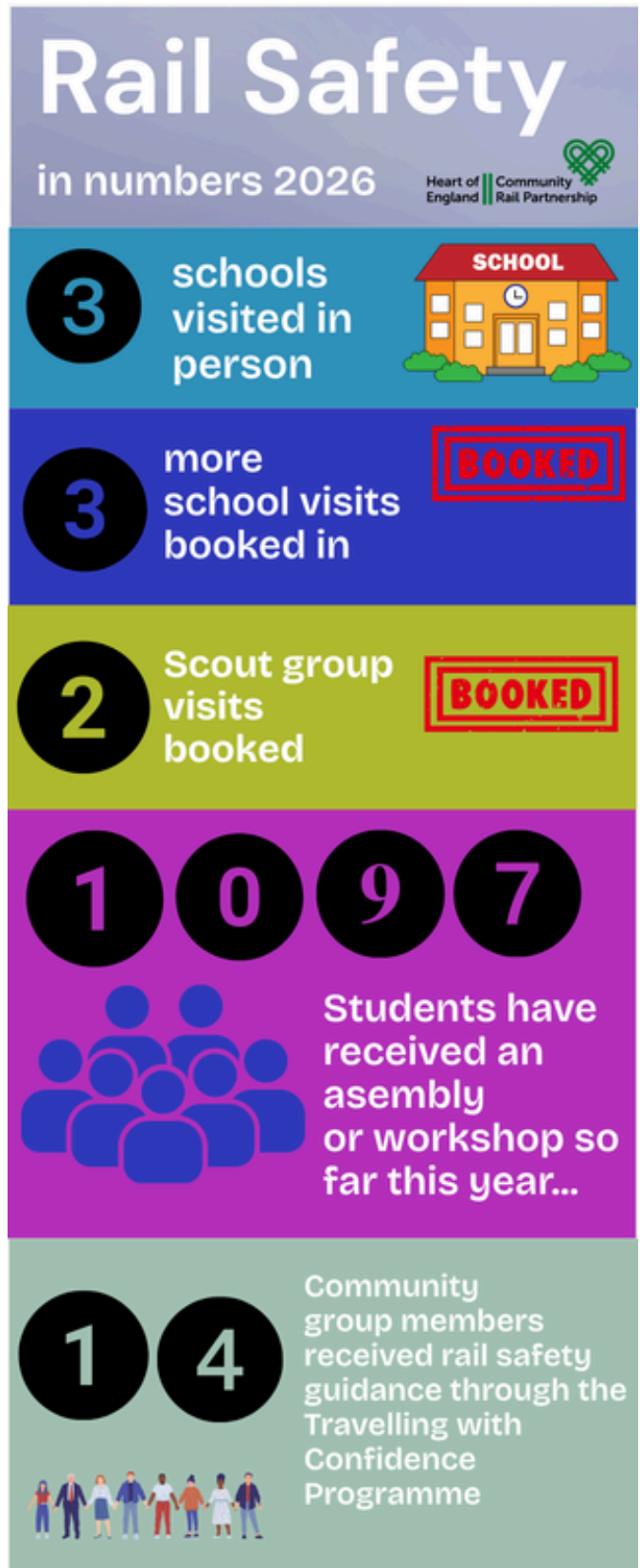
Education

Rail Safety

This year rail safety education has been given a huge push as our infographic (right) shows numbers reached in person in schools and community groups since January 2026.

This is addition to our contract with Learn Live Rail Safe Friendly programme where over the last 2 years they have helped us reach 68 schools. Since our last contractual renewal in October 2025 they have engaged another 19 schools.

We are geared up to support **Rail Safety Week 15th-21st June** with a busy week of more rail safety talks and activities!



WE'RE SUPPORTING

RAIL SAFETY WEEK
Building Safety Together

#RSW26

15th - 21st June | 2026

Headline Sponsor: **Carlisle SUPPORT SERVICES**

Organised by: **Rail Forum**

railsafetyweek.org

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Station & Neighbourhood Enhancements

White Ribbon

At the start of April, we unveiled a new piece of art at Rugby Station raising awareness of the campaign to end men's violence against women and girls.

Created in partnership with Avanti West Coast, White Ribbon UK and local artist Emily Marlowe, the large-scale artwork on Platform 2 highlights the message that everyone has a role to play.

It features people from diverse backgrounds alongside the slogan "It takes all of us," reinforcing a shared responsibility to challenge harmful behaviours and attitudes.

The design incorporates Rugby's three signature colour palettes—reflecting the town's heritage, creativity and industry—and includes a QR code inviting passengers to make the White Ribbon promise.

Funded through Avanti West Coast's CRP Fund, the initiative builds on previous collaboration between the partners and reflects the CRP's ongoing commitment to using stations as spaces for positive community engagement and social awareness.



John Slinger, MP for Rugby, who attended the unveiling, said: "Thank you very much to Avanti, Heart of England CRP for giving space for this important mural themed on the White Ribbon charity campaign #ItTakesAllOfUs, in the prominent location of Rugby train station. The mural highlights the need for men and boys challenge misogynistic and aggressive behaviour towards women and girls wherever it happens and now visitors or people transiting our station can see the artwork and hopefully be inspired by its vital message.

"It was great to meet the artist, Emily Marlowe, whose creative talent has created a positive image encouraging everyone to take action on this important issue. She's even used the Rugby palette colours!"

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Station & Neighbourhood Enhancements

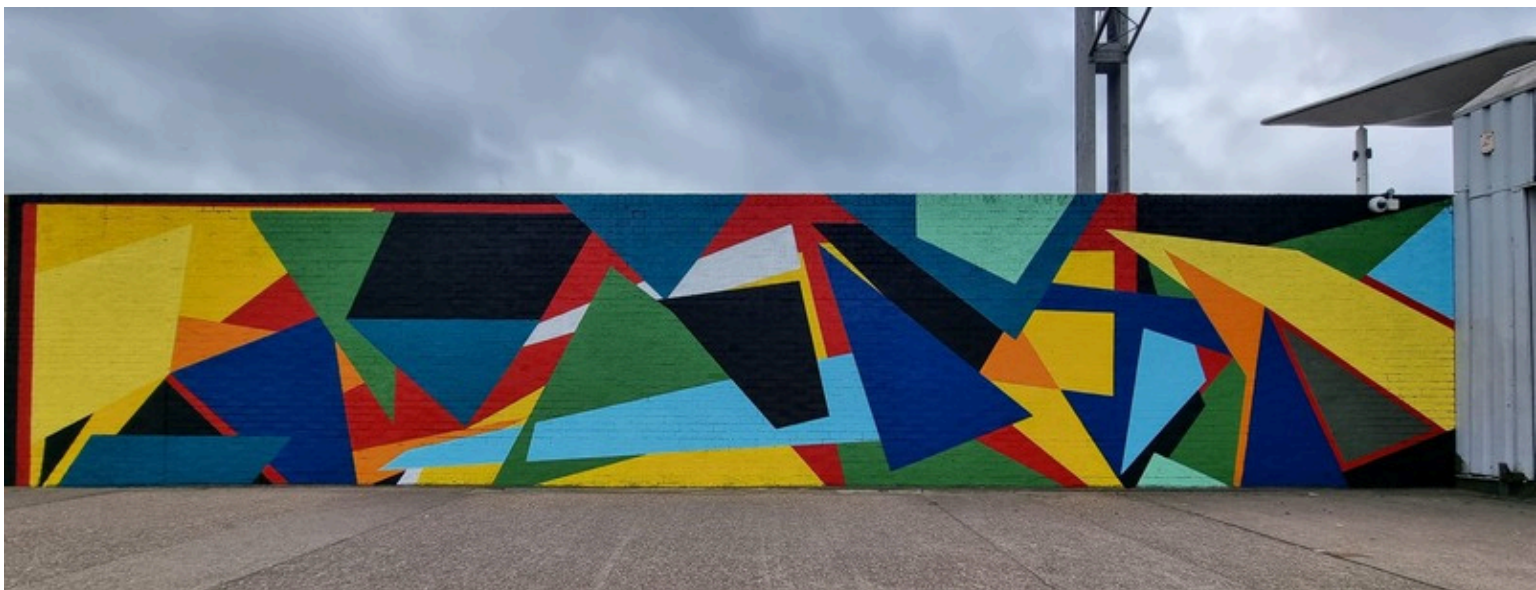
Birmingham International Mural Refresh



In 2021, as part of the Avanti West Coast-funded Careers, Creativity and the Commonwealth project, we commissioned an eye-catching mural at Birmingham International Station to welcome passengers travelling by train to the Commonwealth Games, while improving the station environment, supporting local artists and highlighting how the railway connects communities.

Over time the mural faded, and following discussions with the station manager, Brink Contemporary Arts was commissioned to refresh the artwork so it could continue to provide a strong visual impact for passengers arriving at and passing through the station. The refreshed mural, Movement, reflects successful collaboration between Avanti West Coast, Heart of England CRP and Brink, and has restored an engaging and distinctive feature that enhances the passenger experience.

Craig Mortiboys, Regional Growth Manager – West Midlands at Avanti West Coast, said it was great to refresh ‘... a stunning eye-catching mural that has proved popular with passengers travelling through Birmingham International station over the last few years’.



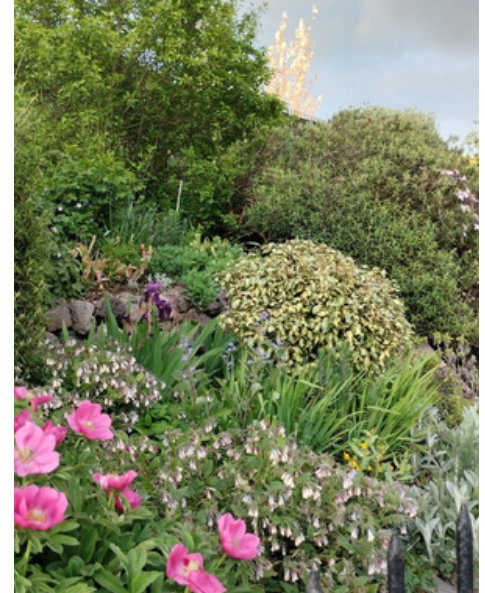
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Station & Neighbourhood Enhancements

Stations Spring into Life

Spring is often one of the most celebrated seasons as emerge into longer and lighter days, so and we felt it only right to showcase some fantastic images shared by our station adopters reflecting these changes in all their glory.

Top middle: The Lakes Volunteers
Top right: The Lower Terrace in full bloom at Leamington Spa Station



Middle left: William peeping out from the daffodils at Stratford Parkway Station

Above right and bottom left: Solihull Station is a hive of activity with new planters being constructed and installed.

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Inclusivity and Community Links

Travelling with Confidence Programme Update

We were fortunate to receive a grant from the Community Rail Network via The Motability Foundation, to deliver a Travelling with Confidence (TwC) Training programme starting in February 2026. The initiative is aimed at empowering disabled people to travel more confidently using the railways and connected modes of transport.



The programme was developed after evidence showed a large proportion of disabled people faced barriers using rail.

It aims to provide targeted assistance to small groups of disabled adults, to help them build skills around journey planning, using multiple forms of travel and gradually increasing their resilience if things don't go to plan.

We worked with 14 adults from the Life Path Trust, developing bespoke SEN resources to help them plan days out involving some rail travel. Topics such as rail safety, passenger assistance, understanding departure boards and finding safe people to help if needed, are just a few of the topics covered.



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Inclusivity and Community Links

Group A decided to travel to the Sea Life Centre in Birmingham via train and changing onto the tram from Grand Central to Brindley Place.

Group B decided to travel to the MAD Museum in Stratford upon Avon by bus and return on the train via Leamington Spa to Coventry.

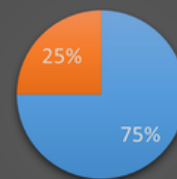
The emphasis of the course is the trip planning is co-created by those participating. At the end they received a certificate and hopefully will be inspired to do more rail travel in the future.



Survey results showed that 100% of participants found the course useful, and it improved their confidence travelling on trains by varying amounts shown below.

We are really delighted with the survey results and hope we can expand this project with further partners in the future.

Do you feel more confident to make a journey on a train?



- Yes, I feel more confident (or happier)
- Yes, I feel a little more confident
- Not sure, maybe

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Active Travel Roadshows Looking to Help Rail Passengers

Our Warwickshire County Council Active Travel colleagues hold a series of sessions over the Summer, offering rail passengers the opportunity for free bike health checks, security marking, bike accessories (such as lights and reflectors) plus active travel maps and resources.

Upcoming events:

Atherstone Big Weekender Sunday 7th June & Leamington Food Festival 12-13th September

If interested in services in your area the weblink below is regularly updated with new events

https://www.lovetoride.net/warwickshire/pages/info?locale=en-GB&page=2_events



EVENTS

Stay up to date with great events in Warwickshire, including free bike health checks and other walking, wheeling and cycling initiatives!

Warwickshire County Council's Active Travel Roadshow is on the move in 2026! The team will be travelling up and down the County offering a number of free services that aim to start or increase the number of trips you make by riding, walking and wheeling.

ROLL & STROLL - WARWICKSHIRE

1st May - 31st May 2026

Ends in 24 days

You're registered!

Warwickshire County Council is registered 🇬🇧

Thanks for being a promoter 🙌



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Upcoming Events

Our Upcoming AGM on 29th June - All are Welcome

MONDAY 29TH JUNE 2026 10:30 - 13:00

The Heart of England CRP AGM/Stakeholder Event

STONELEIGH ARMS, 31 CLEMENS ST, LEAMINGTON SPA CV31 2DP

Dear colleagues and community partners,

We are pleased to invite you to our Annual General Meeting, where we'll reflect on our shared achievements and look ahead to future opportunities.

A complimentary lunch will be provided, and we hope this will offer a relaxed chance to catch up and continue discussions informally.

Your insights and support are invaluable to us, and we hope you are about to join us.

Please RSVP by 1st June 2026.



Scan QR or click link below to register



We are excited to be holding our AGM at the Stoneleigh Arms in Leamington Spa on 29th June. This fantastic new arts venue will hopefully be a excellent backdrop for great community discussions and a review of projects.



Heart of Community

We would love for you to join us but request you RSVP through this form by 1st June so we can cater for any dietary requirements with the networking lunch.

Community Rail Week (1st - 7th June 2027)

Community Rail Week celebrates the value of community rail and the positive difference it makes to people and places across Britain.



This year the theme is 'Journeys for all' as well as coinciding with National Volunteers Week.

We are excited to be championing the fabulous work being done by volunteers throughout the Heart of England CRP area.



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Upcoming Partner Updates, Events & Funding Schemes

CrossCountry's Social Value report highlights £184m contribution to communities and the environment

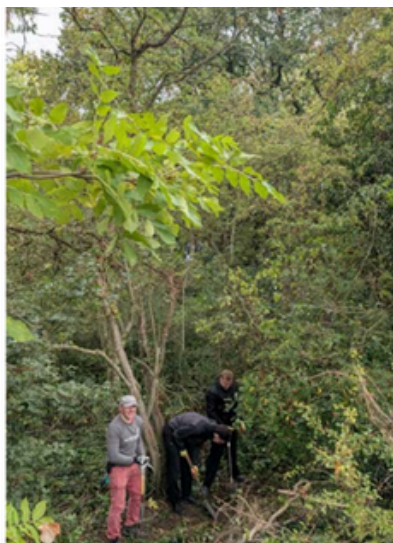
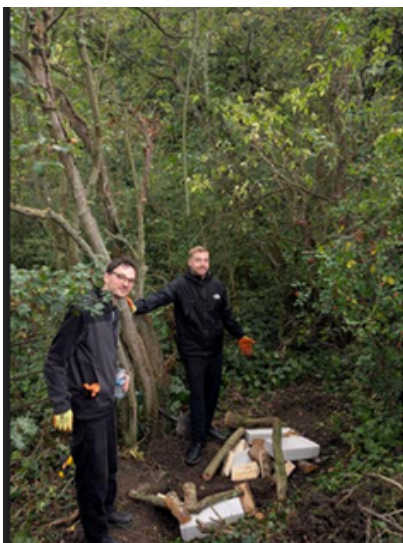


CrossCountry has launched its 2026 Social Value report, outlining the positive impact of the business on people, places and the planet - and can be viewed here

<https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/community-hub/social-value>

The report demonstrates how CrossCountry embeds social value into everyday work - from improving rail accessibility and creating inclusive employment opportunities, to supporting communities and enabling lower carbon travel. In the last year, CrossCountry's reported Social Value has risen to £184 million*. This increase reflects more transparent reporting and improved social value monitoring across community, social and environmental activity.

It is great to see in the report the work XC achieved locally by sponsoring one mile of biodiversity enhancement along the Lias Line National Cycle Network.



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