

Heart of England CRP Annual Report 2025/26



Contents

01

Chair's Report

03

Aims

04

Education

10

Station & Neighbourhood
Improvements

14

Inclusivity &
Community Links

20

Upcoming Projects

21

The Year in Numbers

22

Our Area

23

Our Steering Group

Chair's Report

It is a pleasure to introduce this Annual Report for the Heart of England Community Rail Partnership, reflecting on another year of creativity, collaboration and community impact.

This has, of course, been a special year for Britain's railways as we celebrated Railway 200, marking two centuries since the birth of the modern railway. Nationally, the anniversary provided an opportunity to celebrate an industry that has shaped our towns, cities and communities. Locally, it gave us an even greater opportunity: to inspire the next generation through education, creativity and community engagement. As you'll see throughout this report, Railway 200 has been woven through many of our projects, helping people of all ages discover not only our railway heritage but also the exciting future of rail.



Whilst celebrating the past, we have remained firmly focused on the future. Community Rail Partnerships must continually evolve to reflect the changing needs of the communities they serve. Our Steering Group regularly challenges itself to consider whether our priorities remain the right ones, where we can make the greatest impact and how we can strengthen the partnerships that sit at the heart of everything we do. That willingness to reflect and adapt is one of our greatest strengths. Good governance is not about standing still; it is about continually asking ourselves whether we are delivering the greatest possible benefit for the communities we serve and having the confidence to adapt when the answer is "not yet"

Chair's Report

Amongst the many achievements featured in this report, two particularly stand out to me. Supporting hundreds of young people to experience the Railway 200 Inspiration Train demonstrated the power of rail to educate, inspire and broaden horizons. Equally, the beautiful Railway 200 mural at Leamington Spa has transformed an everyday station environment into a lasting community asset, celebrating both local identity and our shared railway story. Together, they perfectly illustrate the breadth of what community rail can achieve.

I am also particularly proud that our work continues to extend beyond the railway itself. Initiatives such as our White Ribbon partnership show how stations can become places that promote inclusion, encourage conversation and support positive change within our communities. None of this would be possible without the commitment and generosity of our partners. I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to our local authority partners, our train operating companies, Network Rail, station adopters, community organisations, schools, volunteers and everyone who has contributed their time, expertise and enthusiasm throughout the year. Community Rail Partnerships succeed because they bring people together around a common purpose, and I am continually inspired by what we achieve when we work collaboratively.

I hope you enjoy reading this report and feel as proud as I do of everything that has been accomplished. As we look ahead, I am excited by the opportunities before us and confident that, together, we will continue to make our railway an even greater asset for the communities we serve.



Malcolm Holmes
Chair
Heart of England Community Rail Partnership

Aims

As well as ensuring that our activities cover the 4 pillars of community rail, we have also identified the following CRP aims:

1. To maximise the potential of the Heart of England CRP by working positively with local communities, local authorities, businesses, train operators, Network Rail and all other relevant stakeholders set out by the HoE Partnership.
 2. To identify suitable projects, develop them, and prepare funding bids to relevant bodies as well as seeking ways to diversify sources of funding.
 3. To encourage and promote integrated and active travel opportunities and improve connections with more geographically separated communities by working in partnership with relevant providers and local authorities.
 4. To raise awareness of environmental issues and the need to move towards a more sustainable future among partners and other stakeholders and to encourage sustainability research and education, through workshops, education programmes and collaborative work with community and industry partners.
 5. To raise awareness of, and to promote, the rail services of the HoE CRP as a sustainable way to access the towns and cities within the HoE CRP for employment, education, leisure, health care, and tourism and as an access point onto the wider UK rail network.
 6. To involve the community in the work of station adoption groups, arts initiatives and project partners and improve links with local schools, colleges and community groups.
 7. To actively involve underrepresented groups, multi-generational communities, and young people by promoting rail as a safe environment, encouraging rail use and rail confidence, and supporting the work of NR, TOCs and charities leading suicide prevention programmes, through work in schools and the wider community.
 8. To work with and support Train Operating Companies and Network Rail to maximise utilisation of their property portfolios and explore new and appropriate uses for railway buildings as well as improving existing facilities at stations, including bicycle storage, passenger information and waiting facilities.
 9. Meet the objectives set out in the Department for Transport Community Rail Development Strategy 2018.
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Education

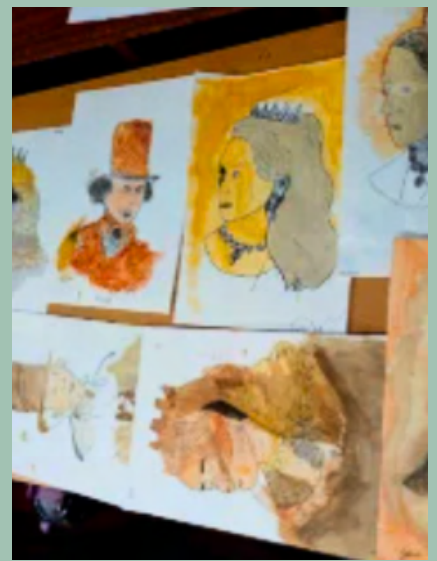
Railway 200

As 2025 drew to a close, we took a retrospective look at a fantastic year that really put railway heritage in the spotlight. The infographic (right) shows how the Heart of England Community Rail Partnership engaged with the campaign, and we couldn't be prouder of our efforts.

From assisting with school trips and activity packs, creating content for the partner zone on the Exhibition Train: The Inspiration, facilitating workshops, railway school choirs celebrating station birthdays and co-creating banners and murals - it was an exciting year and we have tried to keep things creative!

Railway 200 has been a brilliant chance to bring the magic of history back to life for all generations. It's given us a platform to celebrate past achievements while inspiring young people to see the possibilities of the future. Through our work with schools on rail careers and STEM workshops, we're proud to highlight the scale of innovation that's shaped the last 200 years.





Education

The Inspiration Train

The Heart of England Community Rail Partnership were honoured to be invited to host a stand in the partner carriage on the Inspiration Train at Birmingham Moor Street. This was a wonderful occasion to celebrate our achievements and bring our projects and videos to a much larger audience.



One of the highlight trips of the year was supporting 90 students, and 11 community group members, to experience the Inspiration Train at the heritage location of Birmingham Moor Street.

As an organisation with education at it's core, we really valued this STEM and history 'once in a lifetime' opportunity for local students. We were delighted when we got the chance to support another 82 students a second time round at Long Marston Rail Innovation Centre, through our wonderful corporate partners Porterbrook.



Education

Wild Rails

The Wild Rails project have joined forces with Olton Primary to try and improve biodiversity at Olton railway station. With our partners Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, students examined current biodiversity levels already at the station to see how they might improve this with a future project. We were fortunate to have Libby Pollard, West Midlands Railway's Environmental and Sustainability Project Manager and the fabulous Olton Station Adopters join us for the session!



We were impressed with the students enthusiasm, but in a really safety conscious way after their rail safety training.



The class voted to pick bird boxes being installed opposite the railway station, as their biodiversity project to help support the local bird population.

Cyanotype nature inspired art workshops are scheduled in for the summer.

The hope is that the Wild Rails project will continue to strengthen the relationships between Heart CRP, local schools, station adopter groups and the Train Operating Companies.

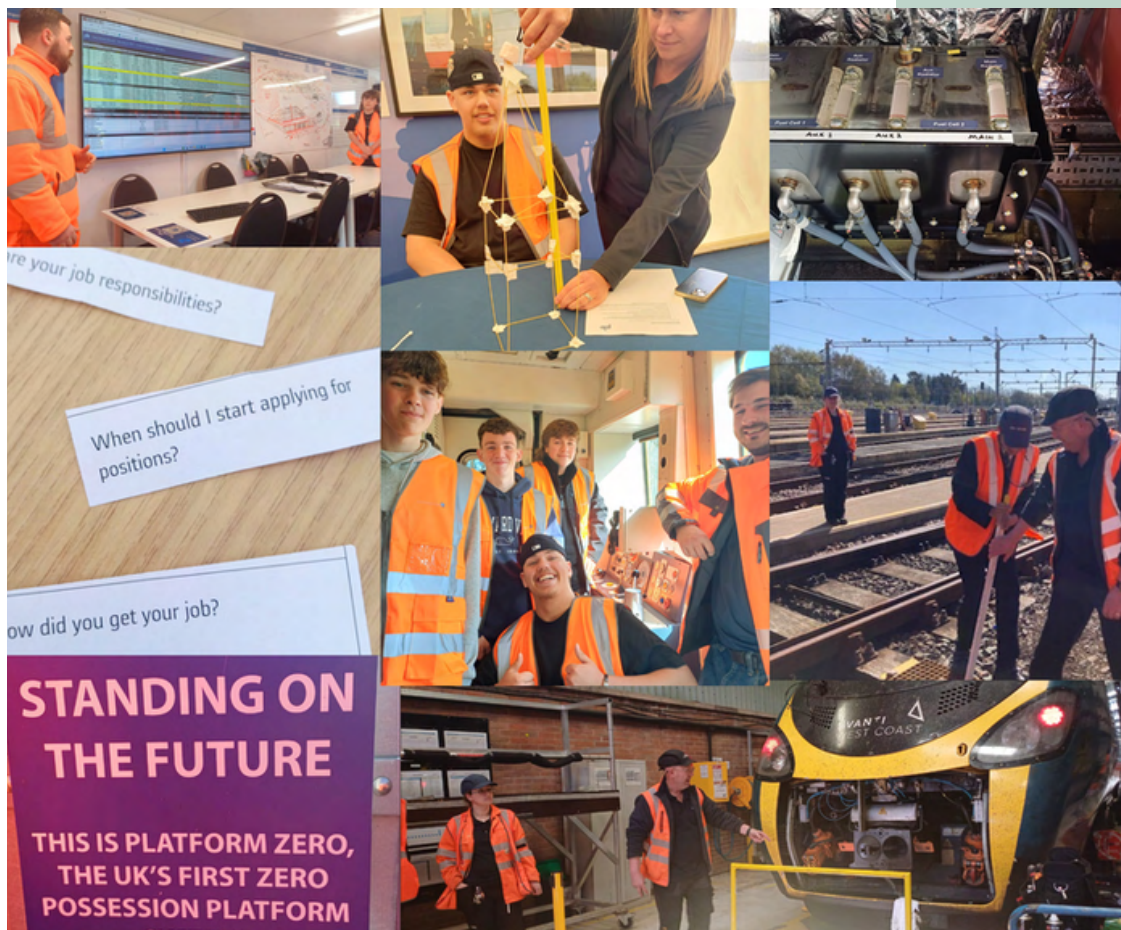
Education

STEM

In Spring 2025 we organised two STEM Year 10 trips with corporate partners Alstom at Oxley Train Depot and Porterbrook at Long Marston Rail Innovation Centre.

Students got to meet a range of engineers and apprentices talking through their varied job roles and career paths. Seeing the engines and drivers cabs from both the UK's first hydrogen train and an Avanti Pendolino, amongst a wealth of other activities was a fantastic insight into what STEM roles the industry can offer.

During Tomorrow's Engineer Week we partnered with Community Rail Lancashire and Avanti Feel Good Futures project to offer another school the opportunity for a free STEM Engineering Day through Transport for London (TfL). Their inspiring staff curated a fantastic day challenging their science and project management skills through interactive games, and students even got the opportunity to interview three TfL Engineers in a TfL train carriage.



Education

LearnLive

In October 2025, we renewed our partnership with LearnLive to deliver the Rail Safe Friendly programme in the Midlands, with funding provided for engagement with 45 further schools. During October 2024 - October 2025, 35 schools were engaged in the programme, adding to the 35 schools engaged the previous year. This in addition to our own in-person rail safety pre-trip briefings and rail assembly workshops.



Visit 200

The Heart of England CRP gave support to some trips under the 200 Journey's project, which aspired to take 200 groups of Coventry and Warwickshire school children to visit 200 stations on the UK rail network during 2025. One particularly memorable trip was where 60 students headed to Harry Potter World from Coventry station, where we produced Railway 200 and Harry Potter themed activity books for entertainment on the journey.



The aim was simple, to give as many children an opportunity to travel by rail to destinations during the Railway 200 year, and open their eyes to trains as being a great mode of transport.

Other supported destinations included Jephson's Gardens with St Osburg's school with a picnic in Leamington Spa Station gardens and Lapworth Primary visiting the Inspiration Train at Birmingham Moor Street.



Station & Neighbourhood Enhancements

Leamington Spa R200 Mural

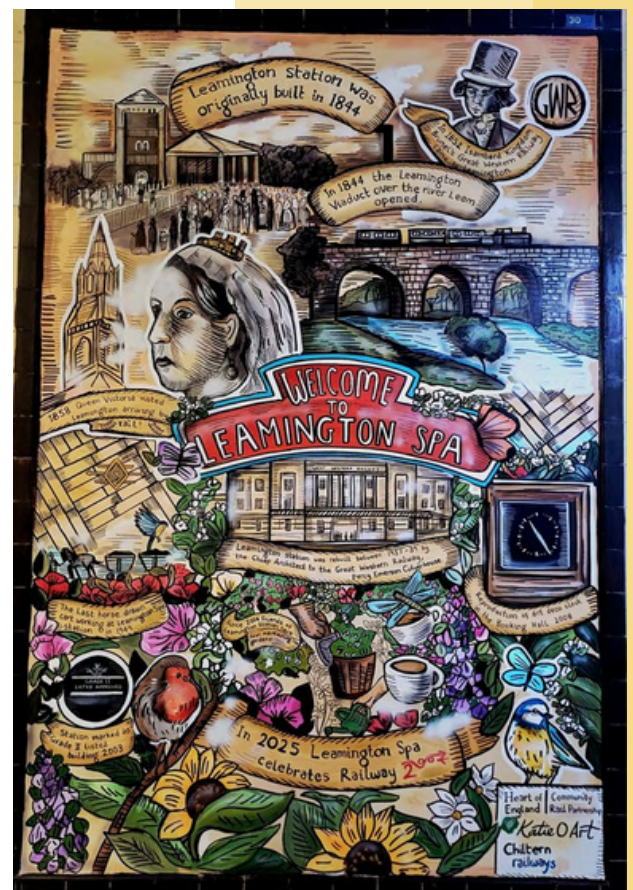
As part of our 5th birthday celebration in November 2024, we worked with local artist Katie O'Sullivan (@KatieOArt), Westgate & Earlsdon Primary schools to create a Railway 200 banner, so we could be flying the flag from the beginning of 2025.

The banner was then adopted by Chiltern Railways for display at London Marylebone, and the idea grew for this to be adapted and expanded into a permanent mural at Leamington Spa station.

This lasting legacy for Railway 200 celebrations, through generous support from the Chiltern Community Fund, has brightened a dark underpass, sparked a lot of passenger attention and hopefully improved their commuter experience whilst learning some local (and national) railway history!

The project engaged with local schools offering free art and history workshops to help student learn about their local station. A video documenting the murals and workshops can be found at

tinyurl.com/Railway200Murals



Station & Neighbourhood Enhancements

Blank Canvas

Blank Canvas is a community art programme funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and delivered by Warwickshire County Council with CRP support, creating ten murals across the county. Five artists co-designed works with local communities, with 85 participants contributing through workshops and feedback sessions.



Eight murals are now complete, with strong community response—participants reported increased pride and connection, while residents praised the artworks for brightening spaces and enhancing local identity.

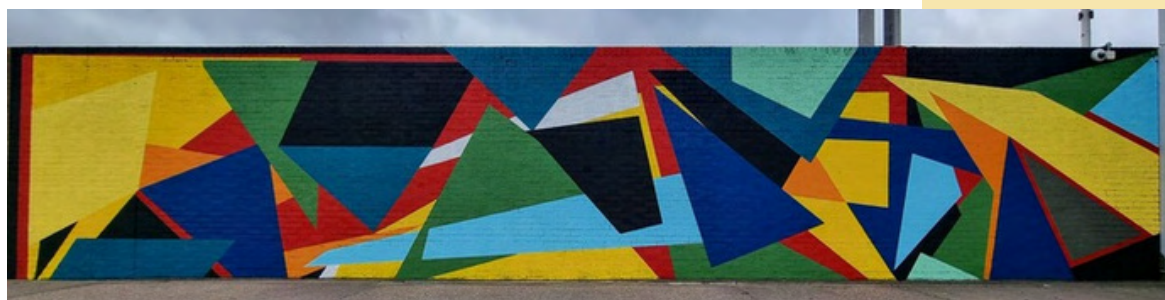


The project has been widely promoted via press, WCC social media, and a dedicated [website](#), and demonstrates clear success in engagement, placemaking and demand for future initiatives.

Birmingham Station Mural Refresh

In 2021, Heart of England CRP commissioned a striking mural at Birmingham International Station, funded by Avanti West Coast, to welcome Commonwealth Games visitors, support local artists and showcase rail's role in connecting communities. After fading over time, Brink Contemporary Arts was commissioned to refresh the artwork, now titled Movement. The updated mural reflects strong collaboration and continues to enhance the passenger experience.

Craig Mortiboys, Avanti West Coast's Regional Growth Manager – West Midlands, said it was great to refresh “a stunning, eye-catching mural that has proved popular with passengers.”



Station & Neighbourhood Enhancements

Station Adopters

Station Adoption Groups play a vital role as the heart of the railway. From creating and maintaining attractive gardens to restoring waiting rooms, their contributions are invaluable. These are just a few of the highlights from volunteer groups in the CRP area over the past year.



Lapworth's New Community Leased Land

Friends of Lapworth Station have secured a lease for community land adjacent to the station from Network Rail. Previously overgrown with brambles and littered with rubbish, the site is being transformed into a biodiversity area. Volunteers have worked extensively to clear the land and prepare it for planting.

Network Rail supported the project by funding site safety features, including steps and fencing, and assisting with waste removal, enabling future community use such as a school bug hotel.

Bringing Shakespeare to the Shakespeare Line

More than 40 volunteers across the Shakespeare Line (Birmingham Moor Street to Stratford-upon-Avon) supported the installation of life-size William Shakespeare statues at 18 stations in a project led by the Friends of the Shakespeare Line. Each station has adopted a Shakespeare play—for example, Wythall features Macbeth. Volunteers will develop themed displays around their chosen play, supporting arts engagement and the National Curriculum. Backed by Network Rail, West Midlands Trains and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the project enhances the character of the route and enriches the visitor experience.



Station & Neighbourhood Enhancements

Claverdon Station Improvements

A new oak running-in board has been installed on Platform 1 at Claverdon, crafted by a local carpenter and inspired by Great Western Railway designs. A large wooden planter has been added beneath it. The project was made possible through funding from Claverdon Parish Council and the Friends of the Shakespeare Line.



Community and Biodiversity Initiatives at Canley

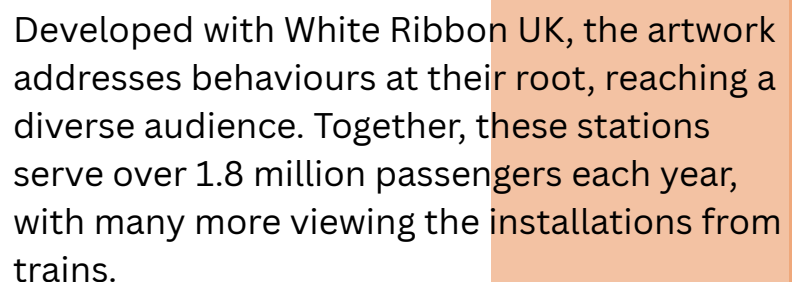
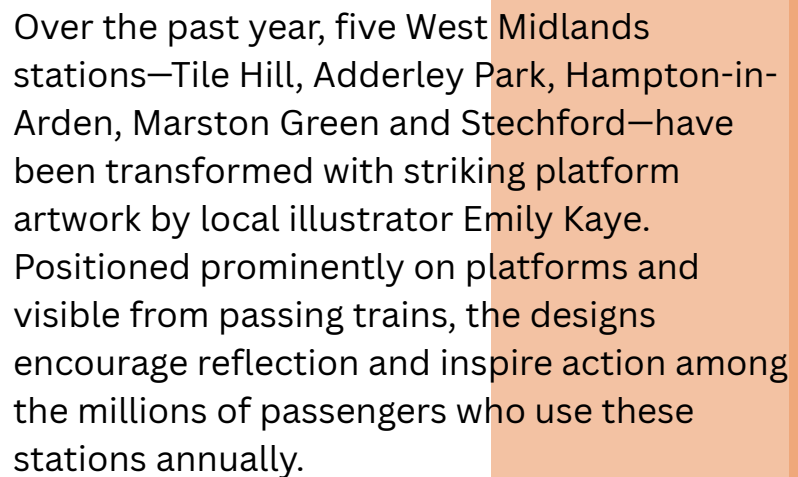
Canley Station volunteers marked Railway 200 and the station's 85th anniversary with a display in the ticket hall. The station gardens have flourished with a variety of plants, even attracting wildlife such as an elephant hawk moth. Plans are underway to enhance biodiversity with the local Wildlife Trust in 2026. A bookshare has also been introduced in the waiting room to support the charity Underground Lights.



Geranium Train and Station Enhancements

The Friends of Leamington Station (FOLS) have revitalised the “Geranium Train” display at Leamington Spa after it was discontinued due to resource constraints. The feature will return in summer 2026, planted with geraniums, and will again contribute to the town’s Britain in Bloom entry. At the request of Chiltern Railways, FOLS have also refreshed planters at Warwick and Warwick Parkway stations while these sites are without adoption groups.

Since 2022, the Heart of England CRP has partnered with White Ribbon UK to support its mission to end men's violence against women and girls. This collaboration has reached a major milestone with three projects delivering impactful artwork across seven railway stations.



Jonny Wiseman, Customer Experience Director at West Midlands Railway said:

Lynne Elliott, Chief Executive of White Ribbon UK, added:

“By placing these artworks where thousands pass daily, we’re encouraging people—especially men—to pause, reflect, and consider how they can help change the story.”

Inclusivity & Community Links

This work has been complemented by two further installations at Rugby and Birmingham International stations, in partnership with Avanti West Coast. Emily Kaye created a mural at Birmingham International featuring messaging that encourages men to challenge behaviours such as catcalling and sexist remarks. Installed for White Ribbon Day on 25 November, the mural reinforces the national #ItTakesAllOfUs message—that everyone has a role to play.



The Rugby mural reflects the town's identity through its colour palette and depicts people of different backgrounds alongside the message: "It takes all of us—let's work together to end violence against women and girls." The mural was welcomed by local MP John Slinger, who highlighted its strong message encouraging men and boys to challenge harmful behaviour.

Both murals include QR codes inviting viewers to make the White Ribbon Promise and were funded through Avanti's Community Rail Project Fund.

For Emily, the projects highlight the power of public art: "It's rewarding to use illustration to spread important messages. I hope the artwork inspires people to learn more about White Ribbon."

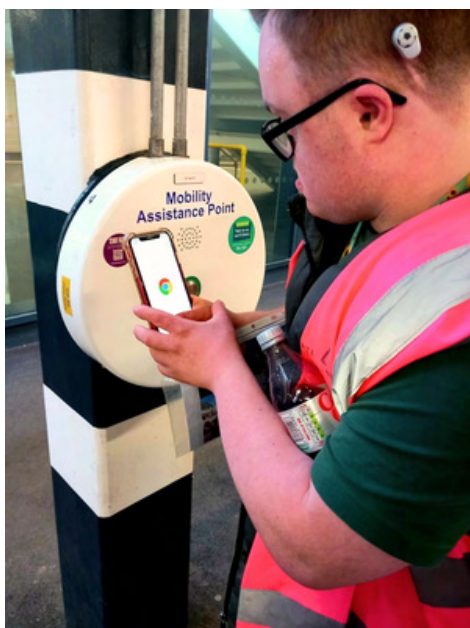
Together, these seven installations go beyond visual improvements—they spark conversation, challenge attitudes and promote collective responsibility, helping to build safer, more respectful communities.



Inclusivity & Community Links

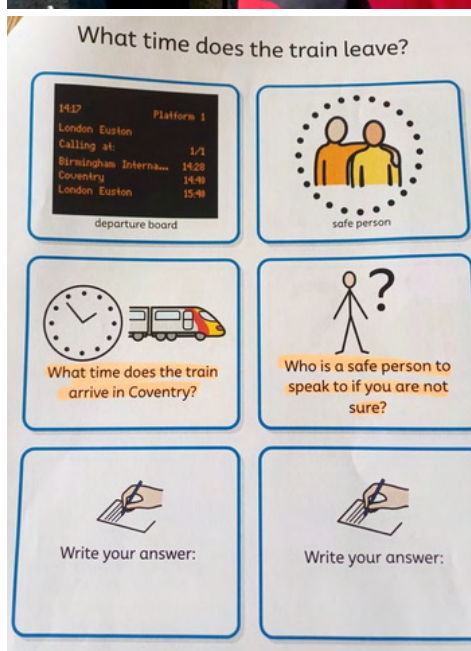
Travelling with Confidence Programme Update

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 with partners the Life Path Trust. 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 developing bespoke Special Educational Needs resources to help them plan days out involving some rail travel.



Topics such as rail safety, passenger assist, understanding departure boards and finding safe people to help if needed, are just a few of the topics covered. The emphasis on the course was the trip planning was co-created by those participating.



Survey results showed that 100% of participants found the course useful, and it improved their confidence travelling on trains by varying amounts, as well as a desire to plan more future trips!

Inclusivity & Community Links

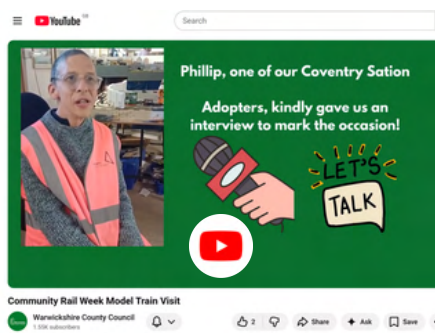
Community Rail Week 2025

We were thrilled to take our Coventry Station Adopters group for a special visit to Coventry Model Railway Club, during Community Rail Week 2025.

The wonderfully helpful volunteer team there ran a private bespoke session for us, so the group got to ask questions about the models and see all the train layouts in full operation, without the crowds of an open day.

We were bowled over with their generosity and spirit of inclusivity, and felt this trip really celebrated the Community Rail Week 2025 theme of Railway 200.

We made a short video of our trip which can be found here tinyurl.com/CoventryModelRailway

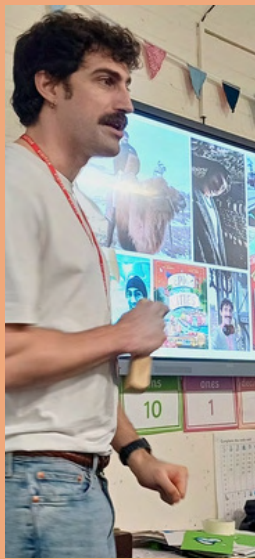


Sam Sedgeman

In February, children from Stratford Primary School were treated to a murder mystery workshop on a train with the wonderful author Sam Sedgeman and Stratford Literary Festival.

With travel provided by West Midlands Railway, the school travelled from Stratford-upon-Avon to Birmingham Moor Street, students used the train journey to inspire their own writings at a workshop back at their school.







RAIL Trails



Discover The Heart of England by Rail



Fancy stretching your legs?

Discover fantastic countryside and a wealth of heritage on walks, trails and days out from railway stations across Warwickshire, Solihull & Coventry

www.heartcommunityrail.org.uk/railtrails



Upcoming Projects

Rail safety education remains an important area of our activity. Sessions will continue to be delivered in schools, alongside ongoing support for **LearnLive's Rail Safe Friendly** programme, helping to promote safe behaviours around the railway.

There are plans to further develop the **Wild Rails Project**, building on its previous success. Schools are encouraged to express interest in participating, as the project seeks to engage young people with the railway in a creative and educational way.

The CRP continues to work closely with Rugby Town Council and local artists to deliver a **mural at Rugby Station** as part of a scheme to improve wayfinding to the station and to enhance the station environment.

Our **Travelling with Confidence** will continue to run, with the groups taking part in art workshops.

Engagement with **refugee and asylum seeker communities** remains a key priority, with a focus on supporting individuals to confidently navigate the rail network. This includes delivering guided tours of Coventry Station in partnership with the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre. In addition, work is underway with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to utilise our Guides to the Railways resource with newly arrived families and individuals.

We will host our **Annual General Meeting** at the end of June and will continue to participate in a range of conferences and events throughout the year to share best practice and strengthen partnerships.

Finally, towards the end of the year, families from the local Barnardo's Family Centre in Rugby will be visiting the station to take part in some **festive activities**. There may also be a special guest coming to pay a visit!





THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

36

STATIONS

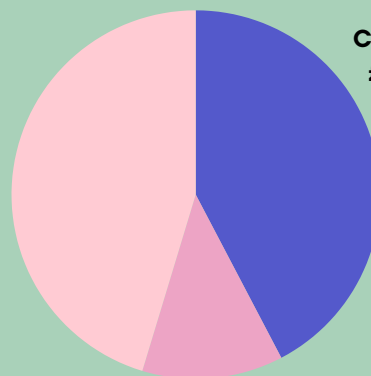
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FUNDING PARTNERS

Income

TOTAL £260,824.62

Carry forward
£118,201.99



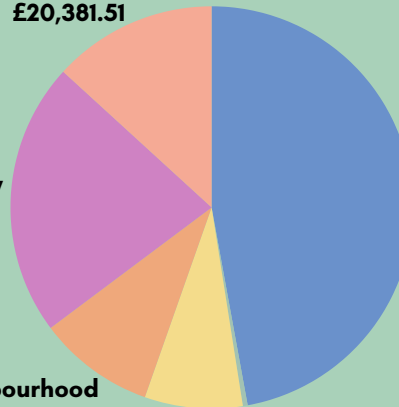
Core Funding
£110,363.32

Project Grants
£32,259.31

Expenditure

TOTAL £163,760.11

Other, incl. reserves
£20,381.51



Inclusivity & Community
£33,956.52

Staffing
£72,698.76

Station & Neighbourhood
£14,481.31

Education
£12,150.97

Sustainability
£591.04

CARRY FORWARD TO FY
26/27: £97,064.51



Our area



Heart of England || Community Rail Partnership



Our Officers



Julia Singleton-Tasker
Lead CRP Officer

Julia has worked for the CRP since January 2020 and is the lead officer for the CRP.



Sarah Davison
CRP Officer

Sarah has worked for the CRP since June 2024 and leads on the Education stream of work.

Our Steering Group

The Heart of England CRP has core funding provided by the following organisations, who make up the foundation of our steering group:



The steering group is also supported by:



Thank you

Thank you to our steering group members for providing not only the financial support that enables us to deliver our projects, but also for the unwavering support of the CRP and it's officers.



**If you have been inspired by the
work of the CRP and your
organisation would like to get
involved with ideas or as a
supporter then please contact us.**

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