

HEART OF ENGLAND COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP



ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 2020



CHAIR'S REPORT

I am delighted to introduce the first Annual Report of the Heart of England Community Rail Partnership (HoE CRP). Whilst the HoE CRP was formed back in 2019, 2020 marked our first full year with our Community Rail Partnership officer, Julia Singleton-Tasker, in post. When Julia was appointed back in 2019, no-one could have envisaged how the events of 2020 would unfold and the 'new normal' that we'd have to navigate.

The events of 2020 provided a perfect storm which could have so easily de-railed the ambitions of the CRP. National lockdowns and the restriction of rail use for essential travel only posed a huge challenge when trying to get initiatives off the ground. However, I have been impressed at how the HoE CRP has thrived over this time. The positives of 2020 – an increased sense of community and a willingness to help others – have been witnessed in abundance across our network. Existing volunteer groups have continued their efforts and new groups have been established, a remarkable achievement given the backdrop of national and local restrictions. New technology has brought volunteer groups together and allowed a sharing of ideas. Julia has worked with partners to deliver a number of projects, which are showcased in this Annual Report, and work has continued in the background for delivery of a number of exciting projects in 2021.

A first within the HoE CRP is the newly established 'Community Station Partnership' (CSP) by the Friends of Shakespeare Line. The Friends of Shakespeare Line CSP is a an umbrella, volunteer led group that brings together and supports volunteer groups across the Shakespeare Line. I am excited to see how this new community model can bring benefits across an entire line and whether there is scope to expand this model to other lines within the CRP.

Looking forward to 2021, I am confident that momentum can be maintained to deliver projects aimed at encouraging the safe return of people back to rail travel. Coventry's City of Culture status, which launches in Spring 2021 and runs throughout the year, will be a key catalyst for this, along with other events across the CRP network.



MARGARET SMITH

Heart of England Community Rail Partnership Chair

ABOUT US



Community Rail is about integrating stations into their communities and finding out how the railways can best socially and economically support the areas they serve. The Heart of England CRP covers 36 stations over 3 lines and serves a diverse range of stations, from rural request stops to larger urban stations. The partnership launched in 2019 with the first CRP Officer coming into role at the start of 2020.



The partnership is formed of 11 principal partners and funders:

- Coventry City Council
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- Stratford-on-Avon District Council
- Warwickshire County Council
- Warwick District Council
- Avanti West Coast
- Chiltern Railways
- CrossCountry
- West Midlands Railways
- Vintage Trains
- West Midlands Rail Executive

The CRP Officer is Julia Singleton-Tasker.

Network Rail and the Community Rail Network support the work of the partnership

The CRP would like to thank all its partners for their contributions and continued support in 2020 to make this partnership a success.





To identify suitable projects, and where agreed by the Heart of England CRP, develop them and prepare funding bids to relevant bodies.

To work with the franchise companies West Midlands Railways, Chiltern, Avanti West Coast, CrossCountry, Vintage 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.

To identify areas that are high suicide risks and develop a programme for prevention.

To involve the community in the work of local user groups, station partnerships, arts initiatives and improving links with local schools and colleges.

To raise awareness of, and to promote, the rail services of the Heart of England CRP as a sustainable way to access the towns and cities within the Heart of England CRP for employment, education, leisure and tourism and as an access point onto the wider UK rail network.

To encourage and promote integration of the rail service with local bus services and links to the stations for walking and cycling, working in partnership with relevant providers and local authorities.

To actively involve children and young people by promoting rail as a safe environment through work in schools and the community.

Meet the objectives set out in the Department for Transport Community Rail Development Strategy 2018.

FINANCIAL REPORT



Income for 2020

Core funding: £74,663.20
Grants: £16,743.75

Carried over from 2019: £47,150

Total Income: £139,556.95

Expenditure for 2020

Partnership Officer: £11,764.02
Delivered Projects: £17,546.03
Other Expenses: £850

Total Expenditure: £30,160.05

Balance: £108,396.90

Planned Projects 2021: £78,100



STATION ADOPTION



Despite volunteer activity being halted for several months in the early part of the year, there has still been a tremendous amount of work put into our stations by our amazing volunteers. The newly established "Friends of the Shakespeare Line" Community Station Partnership, with support from the Heart of England CRP and Worcestershire CRP, arranged the adoption of eleven stations at Henley-in-Arden, Wootton Waven, Stratford Parkway, Wilmcote, Bearley, Danzey, The Lakes, Earlswood, Wood End, Wythall and Whitlocks End. The CSP works with all eighteen stations along the line to Birmingham, developing community & enterprise plans for 2021 and beyond. Tile Hill and Canley stations are also now adopted and there are just eight unadopted stations remaining in the Heart of England CRP's area. We will continue to work with all our station adoption groups and actively look for volunteers to adopt the remaining 8 stations.

We have launched our Small Projects Fund for all our station adoption groups. Volunteers have a huge social value and the Heart of England CRP wants to ensure that their work is supported. The Small Projects Fund allows each station adoption group to bid for up to £175 per year to be spent on essential items, such as tools, seeds, CRN membership etc...

On behalf of the partners of the Heart of England CRP, we want to take this opportunity to thank all volunteers for the amazing work they do for the stations and for their communities.

The Friends of Henley-in-Arden Station held a special event for children to come and plant their own Kids Corner



The Friends of Dorridge supplied the plans for Chiltern to refurbish the waiting room on Platform 2/3.



The Friends of Marston Green ran a competition with local schools and, thanks to Network Rail, this artwork is now on display at the station.



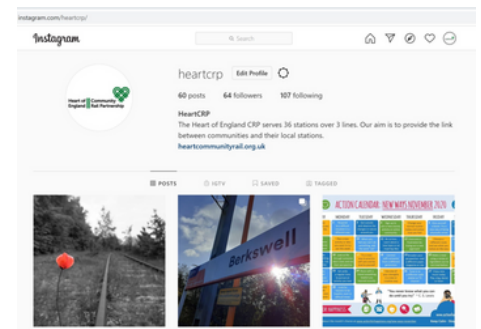
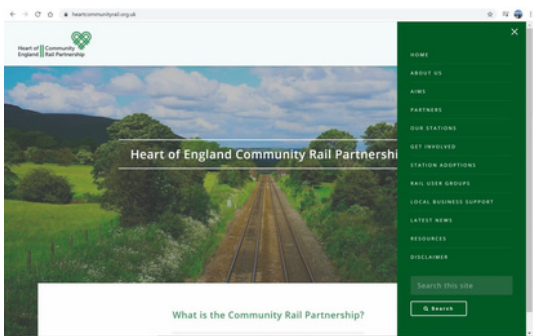
The Friends of Kenilworth Station have dramatically increased the biodiversity in the gardens surrounding the car park.

KEY PROJECTS



Website and social media accounts

As the rail industry has been heavily affected by COVID-19, we've had to re-evaluate how we engage and support our local communities. Where ordinarily, we'd be looking to hold events on trains and at stations, a lot of our work has had to be virtual. We have launched our website and social media accounts and we continue to highlight the work of our volunteers and the local businesses, events and attractions through both.



Welcome Back Packs

Our first funded project aimed to show our appreciation to the fantastic work that volunteers do in our area. During lockdown, all volunteer activity had to stop. With part funding generously provided by the Community Rail Network, the Heart of England CRP put together Welcome Back packs for each of its volunteers. Every pack contained hand sanitiser from the Warwickshire Gin Company, a reusable fabric face mask, a bottle of Warwick-based lyoki Chapman's Original drink, chocolate from Henley Chocolates and a pen donated by the Samaritans. Each station group also received a gift card for a garden centre local to their stations and a card donated by local artists Bryan B Kelly and Janet Watson.



KEY PROJECTS



Coventry Acts of Kindness



In September, leading up to World Suicide Prevention Day on the 19th we launched our Coventry Acts of Kindness. Thanks to funding from Avanti West Coast, we partnered with The Kaleidoscope Plus Group to make people feel welcome into stations and to encourage them to not view train travel as something to be intimidated by. Coventry Acts of Kindness focussed on the mental well-being of our rail users. For many people, travelling by train and going into train stations may feel overwhelming for many reasons. People will have concerns about their health whilst travelling or may be worrying about the economic or the social impact that COVID-19 has had on them. Over the course of 4 days, we offered passengers free locally sourced items such as cupcakes and flowers and The Kaleidoscope Plus Group were on hand to talk to people with any concerns and signpost them to services that could help them. We handed out 1500 baked goods, 1500 single stem flowers as well as keyrings, postcards and toys for children and the response we had was fantastic.

Thanks for listening to me, it felt like you genuinely care.



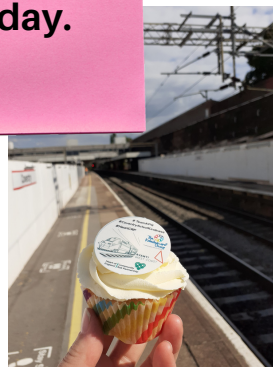
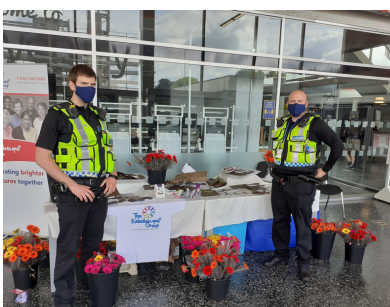
Great start to the day.



I was dreading today, I've been up all night but you've made me feel at ease.



You inspired us on Friday to go home, bake cakes and deliver them to our friends.

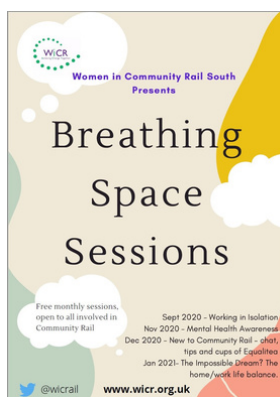
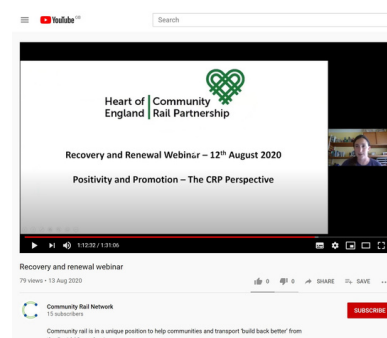


PROJECTS SUPPORTED



The Heart of England Community Rail Partnership has been a proud supporter of the Backtrack Anti-Trespass Campaign that ran over the Summer of 2020. This was a competition aimed at 11-18 year olds to inform people of the dangers of trespassing on rail tracks. Entrants were asked to create a storyboard, song, script or film and to share it with their peers. The Heart of England CRP provided the prize for the best film and had the pleasure of judging one of the categories.

As more of our work moved online, we were pleased to be asked to be a panellist on the Community Rail Network's Recovery and Renewal Webinar to talk about Positivity and Promotion through Social Media. It was also an honour to be asked to present at the Chiltern Railways Stakeholder Conference in November.



The newly formed Women in Community Rail South group have hosted a series of sessions for all members of community rail. These sessions focussed on topics from working in isolation, to advice and support for those new to community rail.

We have also supported numerous local events through our social media channels such as, Kenilworth Arts Festival, Art in the Car Park, Stratford Literary Festival's Winter Weekend, Warwick Words Digital Festival, National Bookshop Day, Creative Leamington's Paint The Yard, Love Your Bike, The Maker's Market at FarGo, Leamington's Art In The Park's Virtual Festival, Tyseley Virtual Open Day.

LOOKING FORWARD



We have developing numerous exciting projects that will assist with safely welcoming back passengers to rail in 2021 and provide a boost to the local economy and to the many tourism destinations in the Heart of England.

Nuneaton Community Hub

Working with London North Western, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and Warwickshire Solihull Community and Voluntary Action (CAVA) to transform a disused room on Platform 5 at Nuneaton Station, into a thriving community hub. This project would fully support the 4 pillars of Community Rail and it would have significant benefit to the local area. A multi-purpose Community Hub would allow various community groups the space and facilities to conduct meetings, mount exhibitions and host events to support and promote the work that they do. We are working closely with Warwickshire CAVA and Nuneaton and Bedworth Council to ensure that the Community Hub has longevity, is inclusive and truly responds to the needs of the local community.

Coventry Community Hub

We are working with Avanti West Coast and Coventry City Council to bring a Community Hub to Coventry Station in 2021. This will be a multi-purpose space that can be used by community groups and for educational purposes.



Henley-in-Arden Shakespeare Garden

The Bee Friendly Trust, Beaudesert & Henley-In-Arden Joint Parish Council, and The Heart of England Community Rail Partnership are working together to create a dedicated Shakespeare Garden at Henley-in-Arden station. This project will bring together all the plants mentioned in the plays and poems of Shakespeare in and around a series of raised beds and planters on the empty railway track at Henley-in Arden station.



LOOKING FORWARD



NUCKLE Rebrand

One of the major projects for the next year, is a collaboration between the CRP, Chiltern Railways, Avanti West Coast, West Midlands Railway and CrossCountry to rebrand the NUCKLE Line. This is a line that runs between Nuneaton and Leamington via Coventry and Kenilworth, hence NUCKLE. The name is practical, but it doesn't inspire people to go for a day trip on the 'NUCKLE' Line, yet the towns it serves have a huge array of events and things to see and do.

Over the next couple of years, we'll have the Coventry City of Culture and the Commonwealth Games and we want to encourage people to travel to these events by train (COVID permitting of course). However, rather than us deciding on how to rebrand the line, we wanted to use it as an opportunity to encourage youth involvement with the railways. We are looking at which groups we would be able to deliver this with and, with guidance from the CRP and the Train Operating Companies, this group will be the one who come up with the name for the line and how each station would reflect and relate to that name. We want to encourage the next generation of rail enthusiasts to take ownership of the lines that serve them and voice what needs they have from the railway industry.



Rail Careers

The Heart of England CRP, Chiltern and CrossCountry have been developing how we engage with young people and give them access to information about careers in the railway, when access into schools is limited. We are looking at producing a series of mini pre-recorded videos about the different roles within the railway industry and the various routes to get to them, followed with a live Q & A with the people featured in the video. We're working with the Smallpeice Trust, who specialise in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education, to host a Connect day for students on the prestigious Arkwright Engineering Scholarship programme. Connect Days link Scholars with real-world engineering organisations and the event will allow students to learn more about careers within the railway sector.



LOOKING FORWARD



Sail, Rail, Ramble

We are working with the Canal and River Trust and Visit Warwickshire to explore ways to link waterways, walking routes and the railway along the Shakespeare Line, to encourage tourism to local attractions and businesses through sustainable travel.

Highly Sprung at Coventry Station

With Coventry being the City of Culture for 2021, we will be working with Highly Sprung Performance Co. to develop and produce a community led performance piece.

Rail Education

Our rail education project will focus on rail safety lessons for KS1 and KS2, with the option of online lessons should physical school visits be limited. Chiltern and the CRP also have plans to produce a Rail Safety video to enable us to engage safely with schools on our routes and have a greater impact in communities.

All these projects are only possible due to the commitment of all our partners to working together to improve customer experience and engage the wider community. The benefits of Community Rail for Train Operating Companies is increased patronage, positive media and the enhancement of stations that adoption groups bring. For local authorities, community rail is a way to engage with a wide range of audiences and provide focussed projects that respond to the individual needs of where they are. Volunteers at stations have cited physical and mental health benefits to working at stations and it is well documented that fresh air and gardening are good for us.

There are many uncertainties going into 2021, but for us, community and collaboration will continue to be at the heart of everything we do.



USEFUL LINKS



Heart of England CRP website: www.heartcommunityrail.org.uk

Avanti West Coast: www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk/where-we-go/community-hub

Chiltern Railways: www.chilternrailways.co.uk

CrossCountry: www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/xc-community-hub

West Midlands Railway: www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk/adopt-station

Vintage Trains: www.vintage trains.co.uk

West Midlands Railway Executive: www.wmre.org.uk

Coventry City Council: www.coventry.gov.uk

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council: www.solihull.gov.uk

Stratford District Council: www.stratford.gov.uk

Warwick District Council: www.warwickdc.gov.uk

Warwickshire County Council: www.warwickshire.gov.uk

Community Rail Network: www.communityrail.org.uk

Network Rail: www.networkrail.co.uk

Department for Transport: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport

Scenic Rail Britain: www.scenicrailbritain.com



**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:
juliasingletontasker@warwickshire.gov.uk**

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