



FIRM FOUNDATIONS



Annual Report of the Friends of the Shakespeare Line
2020—2021

Foreword

THE LORD DIGBY JONES OF BIRMINGHAM



Welcome to our First Annual Report!

I am sure that as you read and learn about the commitment, dedication, and activities in this first Report of the Friends of the Shakespeare Line (FOSL), you will be as heartened as I have been by the positive and tangible outcomes that have been achieved so far.

It's an impressive story that's only just begun, and I am confident it has an exciting future. Volunteers with diverse business and commercial experience are freely giving of their time and commitment to manage and support a larger team of volunteers across some 18 railway stations; this has been established by FOSL. Called a Community Station Partnership, it's excitingly innovative; a lean, efficient, responsive, and above all, value for money model that concentrates on supporting volunteers by heading off bureaucracy and cost, enabling volunteers to get on with what they want to do & what they do best for the benefit of all. Liberating the talent, the energy & the goodwill of the Volunteers is a joy to behold.

As the country faces challenging times, not least when it comes to public finances, it is inspiring to see the innovation throughout this Annual Report. I am particularly impressed with the efforts to engage proactively and embrace local people, their communities, and the use of local businesses, crucial to our economy as we bring life improvements at all the stations on the Line.

The spectrum of economic diversity along the Shakespeare Line could not be broader. With so much effort directed by central and local government to "levelling up" and also reducing carbon emissions, it is also pleasing to see how FOSL is active and working with local communities at both ends of the social deprivation index. It would be all too easy to leave behind those areas where the most work is needed. As a Birmingham-born lad myself, I find it particularly heartening to see the effort that's been put into successfully engaging and involving communities left behind for too long.

The effort and tenacity of those involved in FoSL were palpable when I joined them in the summer to go through their exciting plans to completely restore Henley in Arden's original station building and bring it back into use as a community hub and improved facility for passengers.

With the advent of the Williams/Shapps report, there is a crucial opportunity to build a railway that serves our country with a spirit of customer focus and well-being. It's fantastic to see that the Friends of the Shakespeare Line are providing such public benefit to so many by bringing well-being to people, their communities and to the future Great British Railways.

Keep in touch with our work; exciting times lie ahead with local communities being the real winners &, in these worrying times, such a ray of sunshine, that is a fabulous initiative with which I am so very proud to be associated.

18

**Railway stations are
all formally adopted**
(between Birmingham Snow Hill
and Stratford upon Avon)

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THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC HAS LED TO LOSS AND DEVASTATING PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES FOR MANY ACROSS OUR COUNTRY, AND OUR HEART GOES OUT TO ALL THOSE AFFECTED AND WHO FOR LIFE CAN NEVER BE THE SAME

However, the pandemic did have some unintended consequences; it has brought people closer together, which provides hope for our future.

In early 2020 the Shakespeare Line Rail Passenger Group (SLRPG) set out to get the 18 railway stations between Birmingham Snow Hill and Stratford upon Avon adopted by local volunteers.

By mid-2020, over 70 volunteers had come forward, and with lockdown restrictions eased, these individuals started working and enhancing each of the stations along the line.

It became clear an overarching organisation was needed to support the volunteers and manage the overall funding, supplies acquisition and group formalities along the whole route between Birmingham and Stratford upon Avon. The organisation's aim is to efficiently and effectively support volunteering at the stations, bringing the groups together for mutual support and sparing the volunteers the tasks, formalities and expense of fund-finding and administration.

Consequently, the Friends of the Shakespeare Line (FOSL), the first Community Station Partnership in the country, was established.

FOSL is also wholly independent of the local Rail Passenger Groups, a not-for-profit organisation operated by volunteers for volunteers. Five trustees manage the not-for-profit social enterprise and are jointly responsible for delivering its object being:

To provide public benefit, support and to sustain the voluntary activities of those engaged in adopting the railway stations along the railway route between Stratford upon Avon and Birmingham, known as the Shakespeare Line.

Our purpose is to positively contribute to the local community's economic and social well-being by creating social value through a range of community activities and enhancements at the railway stations along the 'Shakespeare Line' route.

The Patron of Friends of the Shakespeare Line is Lord Digby Jones of Birmingham.

The Trustees are Martin Lambert, Fraser Pithie, Neil Williamson, Angela Okey and Howard Hemmings.



1%

Rail is the cleanest public transport service producing around 1% of transport emissions

ABOUT US



Martin Lambert

Educated at Bordesley Green Technical School and Aston University, Birmingham Martin has held several positions in the automotive industry in the UK, South Africa and Europe including at Jaguar Land Rover, GKN, British Leyland, Chrysler, and Nissan. A committed family man and keen Birmingham City Football Club supporter, Martin has been involved in Dorridge Local Residents Association and is Chair of the Solihull and Leamington Spa Rail Users Association.



Howard Hemmings

Born in Birmingham Howard has lived in the city all his life. Leaving school he joined Lucas Girling as an apprentice and enjoyed a career of some 34 years initially as Factory Planning Engineer and then as Patents Engineer. A keen DIY person Howard is very much involved in community works including Friends of Hall Green Library, Sarehole Mill, Sarehole Environmental Action Team (SEAT) and he is also a keen bowler with Solihull Bowling Club where he is also Treasurer.



Neil Williamson

Neil is a lifelong rail traveller, supporter and indeed enthusiast. Now retired he worked for Severn Trent Water in the West Midlands before transferring to a print and document solutions provider in Tewkesbury. He enjoys hill walking, nature conservation, gardening and watching cricket.



Angela Okey

After a 21-year career in banking, Angela took early retirement and now spends her time supporting several charitable trusts, including Chair of FOHRS. An avid golfer, who when not on the golf course can be found walking her three dogs or spending quality time with her family & friends.



Fraser Pithie

With over 33 years in the water industry Fraser was Severn Trent's Senior Operations Manager before retirement in 2011. He was involved in the successful campaign to prevent the second attempt to close the railway line between Birmingham and Stratford upon Avon in 1984. A previous County Councillor and Chair of Warwickshire Police Authority, Fraser was born at Stratford upon Avon and volunteers his time by managing the day to day activities of FOSL.

Birmingham Snow Hill



Birmingham Moor Street



Bordesley



UNLOCKING POTENTIAL AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Engaging with people is the most fundamental and rewarding tenet in developing social value and public benefit. We have uncovered a resource of diverse talent, enterprise, and commitment by going out into local neighbourhoods and promoting the concept of 'station adoption'.



Impact at Small Heath & Sparkbrook

The benefits of volunteering at my train station is, that the station has been neglected and no one was caring for the station. Since volunteering at the station, it has improved. It's brighter and more welcoming. The local community feel safer using the station and now are more interested in volunteering to making this station better and inclusive for all. There is still a lot to do but it's a step in the right direction.

Councillor Shabrana Hussain
Small Heath & Sparkbrook

FOSL has demonstrated in its first year that people are keen to become involved with activities that provide fulfilment and local engagement and to those undertaking tasks, they can see how such personal commitment can make a real contribution to society.

The Shakespeare Railway Line travels through a divergent set of neighbourhoods ranging from rural to urban areas. Some of the stations are within the 10% of the most deprived areas in the UK while others along the line are within the least 10% deprived.

One of the things that FOSL has demonstrated is its ability to attract people from all these local communities along the line, whatever their background.

Small Heath & Sparkbrook station within the City of Birmingham, is an area that has lacked investment for decades. FoSL has initiated and

gained the involvement of members from the local community leading to immediate improvements to the condition and appearance of the station. Further, such locally based engagement enabled a dialogue to commence with the key stakeholders in the transport sector about the need to address accessibility, unlock latent demand and truly engage with the 'left behind' communities.

At Wythall Station it's Woodrush Academy that forms the adopter group and working with FoSL, the joint development of rail-connected technology and vocational qualifications is proceeding as students develop biodiversity at the station along with landscaping and arts enhancements.

The original Great Western Railway station building at Henley in Arden, derelict and boarded up for some thirty years, is being brought back to its former glory. Henley's townspeople



• Small Heath



Tyseley



have ambitious plans to deliver a community hub and a great new facility for those travelling by train and using Henley in Arden station.

At every other station along the line, local volunteers who have adopted their station have been and continue to be, busy adding value by enhancing their station's environment and making train travel more enjoyable for all. They have produced great floral displays, tidied up previously unkempt borders and areas and started exploring what other projects they can work on to enhance their station. With heritage boards now installed at each station unique to each location, visitors and passengers can learn more about the station and the community it serves.

Our volunteer base is diverse in all forms, with retired aerospace engineers, banking executives and FTSE 100 operations managers, taxi drivers, administrators, IT

analysts, university professors, scouts, secondary school students and councillors. They all have one thing in common and that is a passion for volunteering and giving their time to benefit the public by enhancing their local station and making travelling by train even more enjoyable.

Local community commitment, value for money and a true focus on the passenger are inherent within this volunteer-managed Community Station Partnership.

We believe FOSL provides a perfect model to focus on rail customers and communities to add value and success for the new Great British Railway model that is waiting down the line.

Impact at Tyseley

We have appreciated the support and help of Friends of The Shakespeare Line and West Midland Railways. In these difficult times it is vital groups work together with the common aim of improving local transport.

Neil, Tyseley



Impact at Spring Road

The benefits we bring to others by volunteering at Spring Road is a feel-good factor by the Station looking colourful and not looking neglected and strewn with bottles and cans. Making the station look as though it is cared for reduces the don't care factor of the minority, makes passengers feel happier. As we know it hasn't been plain sailing, but we will put the Spring back into Spring Road Station.

Sue, Yardley Wood



Impact at Hall Green

Volunteering at Hall Green Station has been a pleasure to be part of a team bringing life and TLC to the station gardens that were neglected and overgrown. Introduction of the poetry boards has been a bonus for the benefit of our travelling public and it's always pleasing to receive compliments from the passengers for the work the team do. A recent added benefit, since the involvement of Friends of the Shakespeare Line, is the community spirit with other station adopters along the line.

Howard and Sandra, Hall Green

CREATING A NEW APPEAL FOR TRAVELLING BY TRAIN

By enhancing and developing the stations along our line, we create more visibility, value and crucially heighten greater awareness of rail and public transport options for people. With rail accounting for just 1.8% of Nitrogen Dioxide emissions compared to roads contributing around 80%, we believe we should do all things possible to encourage greater use of the railways as a sustainable form of public transport.

Our volunteers concentrate on a diverse range of activities and work to enhance their stations and therefore the passenger experience. FOSL also engages with all its volunteers regularly and liaises with Train Operators, Network Rail and British Transport Police. We see this relationship as providing a circle of care that is a template model for the future with Great British Railways.

The liaison we have established at local, regional, and national levels has proved successful and invaluable to our line and those who use the train service.

We contributed to the success of the CCTV security scheme for all the stations along our line being reinstated through discussions with the partner organisations mentioned above. Such heightened security at stations will support British Transport Police in terms of both deterrent and detection of crime while reassuring passengers that they can safely use train services. We feel this also contributes towards issues such as the protection of lone females in public places.

By engaging with local communities and enabling people to make the railway station 'theirs', the railways become closer to those they serve and with the greater visibility and activity that volunteers can bring, it follows more people notice the railway and the train service that operates from it. We want to encourage the volunteers to develop 'their' station to reflect what is important to them and their local community.

• Spring Road



We firmly believe that the outputs from volunteering on the railway should contribute to more people using the train and enabling as many people as possible to contribute to a better, more sustainable environment while enjoying the social value and public benefit that station adopters bring to their own local communities.

Post pandemic travel patterns and train usage are showing an increase in leisure-related services. Station adoption and volunteering along our line have focused on this, and we have called it a "Destination Station" approach. The Train Operating Company are focussed on the principles of 'Destination Stations' and in support, we have provided at each station and on our website, heritage information and background unique to each of the railway stations enabling both visitors and locals to explore and enjoy the many local attractions and environments on offer.

As we move towards a carbon-neutral country, the future will increasingly rely upon public forms of transport. We believe volunteering through adopting and enhancing local railway stations can make travel by train more attractive and appealing. It can give people a much greater sense of well-being as they go about their life and by doing all these things, we can help make a tangible contribution towards accelerating modal shift.

Hall Green



DELIVERING THROUGH VOLUNTEERING AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

A central part of our approach has been to support our volunteers and at the same time build the local economy by using local businesses. Our experience using neighbourhood businesses has paid handsome dividends to date both in terms of sponsorship and developing goodwill. We will build on this element of our work as we approach 2022 and beyond.

A ground-breaking deal between ourselves and Earlswood Garden & Landscape Centre (EG&LC) helped us get off to a flying start. Situated adjacent to Earlswood station EG&LC have adopted the station but crucially, the company also agreed to supply all plants and horticultural resources at a preferential rate to adopters along the entire route.

Within our first year, the support from EG&LC has enabled us to secure significant station adoption infrastructure installed at 14 stations and a much-valued service of landscaping expertise, a range of plants and materials for adopters to select and either pick up or have delivered to their stations. Innovative arts designs have been conceived, produced, and installed at stations along our route using Art Attack and Creative Touch Design, local businesses from Henley in Arden. Creative Touch Design has shown how a local business can tailor its expertise to produce individual outputs for the railway, stations, customers, volunteers, and communities.

Design One has designed and produced our new online presence so that we can, promote our stations, share our experience and highlight this new model for community rail. www.friendsl.org.uk is a fascinating storyboard of the progress of our group and www.communitystationpartnership.co.uk provides freely shared information for other groups looking to set up a similar model in their own areas. Design One was recommended to us by one of the station adopters at Wootton Wawen. Based at Lapworth, near to Henley in Arden, the creative company have produced both excellent websites and continue to support us.



Impact at Yardley Wood

Volunteering at the station keeps me active and helps to make the station a pleasant place for passengers and I enjoy the positive comments from travellers using the trains at the station.

Vivienne, Yardley Wood



Impact at Whitlocks End

Developing, planting the flower beds and keeping the planters fresh and up to date with seasonal plants shows Staff and Commuters who use the station that the area is cared for and looked after regularly to enhance the station environment and to encourage wildlife. The voluntary work has encouraged communication with many people of different ages about what we are trying to do.

John and Christine, Whitlocks End

Whitlocks End



Working with the Transport Museum at Wythall, we have successfully launched a vintage bus service for spring and summer weekends and holidays that enables train passengers to be met for a free ride up to and back from the transport museum. This helps our local train service, gives train passengers added value through free vintage bus rides to and from the station and supports the museum, a popular local charity.

Yardley Wood



We have supported the local press, the Stratford upon Avon Herald, who have carried news of our developments and activities and with whom we have advertised our aims and objectives in the early stages of our story.

Some, not all, of the stations on our line are within the Heart of England Community Rail Partnership's area (the CRP only covers between Stratford and Shirley) so we co-operate with the CRP and are grateful for their small grants scheme that the stations south of Shirley can access each year. This helps top up our funding and we apply on behalf of all of the volunteers at the stations that are eligible.

Shirley



With the 260th Birmingham Scouts adopting Spring Road station and Woodrush Academy adopting Wythall station, we have ensured a sound and practical input and contribution from younger members of society, and we hope to encourage and build upon this.

Due to the local nature of all those engaged with the volunteering at all the stations, we are confident of ongoing success simply because local communities know what is important to them and how they can play a part locally and benefit a wider area.

The route between Birmingham and Stratford upon Avon is also popular destination for charter and special trains. Consequently, the work of our volunteers significantly contributes towards ensuring that visitors enjoy their journey along our railway line. We have a good relationship with Vintage Trains at Tyseley who operate the steam hauled Shakespeare Express along the route and we are supportive of their plans to develop their services along the route.

An entirely voluntary organisation, we are well-placed to support the volunteers. We obtain funding for their projects, spread their good news, share best practice amongst us all and importantly, gain maximum return for the funds invested in this partnership, with no employee costs and all funds invested in volunteering.

Our Value for Money credentials are robustly underpinned by our all-volunteer approach and the use of local businesses wherever possible.



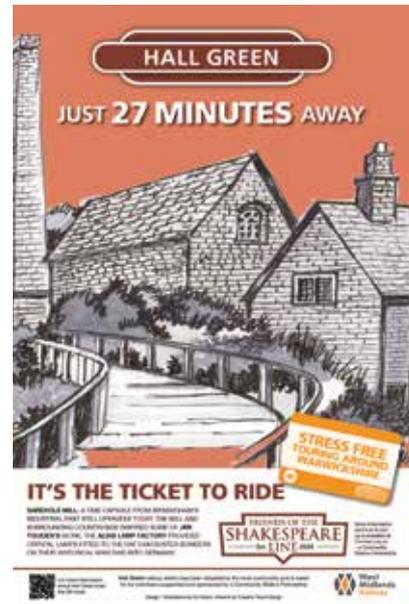
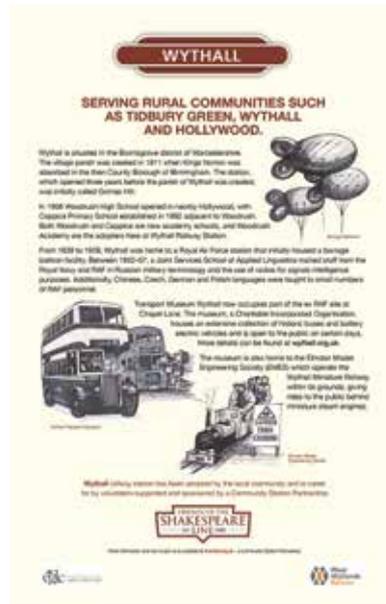
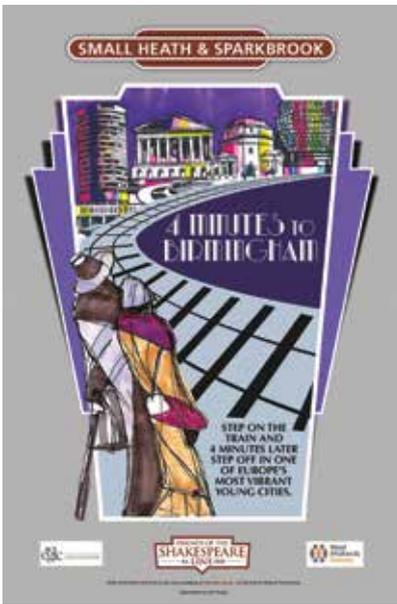
Councillor Waseem Zaffar MBE, Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment at Birmingham City Council with Councillor Shabrana Hussain (Sparkbrook) unveiling a new art deco board at Small Heath highlighting that the City Centre is only 4 minutes away by train.



Impact at Shirley

We have lived close to and used Shirley Station all our lives but, until we became involved in volunteering, we did not really look at the station and appreciate it as a lovely building and a pleasant place to sit and wait for a train. The planters, with their flowers, have added so much to the whole atmosphere. Regularly when we are there tending the plants, a passenger has commented that they like what they see and thank us for making the station a more attractive place. This gives us a sense of purpose and it is always good to feel that what we do enhances someone else's experience and is appreciated.

Sue and David, Shirley



INNOVATION AND GREAT BRITISH RAILWAYS

We know that our volunteers are focused on improving and enhancing their stations and bringing greater well-being to those who use them and crucially also encouraging rail usage growth from new passengers. The work volunteers have done to date and will continue developing are all designed to improve the passenger experience.

Wythall



Impact at Wythall

Our students as volunteers are learning new practical skills and well as communication and other social skills which are all embedded in working as part of a team. More people in the local community are taking note of the changes at the station, feeling a sense of pride in the local area, appreciation for the work carried out by young people and feeling a sense of collective ownership of the station.

A. Reece
Head of Humanities
Woodrush Academy



Impact at The Lakes

At The Lakes station our group don't only have planters but also have quite a large area of ground to work with, so it has been a challenge. On the days we are volunteering, and also at other times, we get some lovely comments on the work we have done from local residents, train users and even the railway staff. Everyone is very complimentary and comment on how it has improved the area and how much they enjoy seeing the colourful displays that have resulted from our efforts, which makes it feel very worthwhile.

Cheryl, The Lakes

Earlswood



The Lakes



By making and maintaining welcoming, vibrant, and engaging station environments, we will incentivise growth in passenger numbers. The government's Williams/Shapps plan, known as Great British Railways, sets out what we believe are clear objectives, and we welcome its focus and direction, which puts the customer at the absolute centre of the operations.

See below for some quotations from the original document and how we are contributing towards the vision:



As the country emerges from the pandemic, the railways must better meet passenger needs to avoid a society dependent on the car.

Our work is designed to make stations along our line much more an active part of the community in which they are located and more visible and engaging. We believe this will grow interest, greater train service usage and contribute to modal shift.



I need to be safe and feel safe.

Station environments that are well maintained, looked after and cared for significantly improve the overall ambience of the environment. We know that good station environments reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and enable passengers to feel safe and thus be able to use train services. The relationship we have developed and continue to foster with British Transport Police is focused on how volunteers can contribute towards preventing crime by building safe and welcoming environments. As a community-based group with over 70 volunteers, we have supported BTP by successfully influencing the investment into CCTV at all stations along our route.



Stations can play a bigger role in their local communities by providing opportunities for new, innovative services for passengers and residents alike.

At Henley in Arden and Wythall, we work with and support volunteers to bring innovative ideas to life. The restoration of Henley in Arden's original GWR station building to its former glory will provide a community hub and enhanced facilities for passengers. At Wythall, Woodrush Academy is looking to develop a recognised national qualification in horticulture and biodiversity-based on their station adoption activities.



Teams will be empowered locally to work collaboratively with private partners to do the right thing for passengers and freight customers. They will also improve engagement with local businesses and communities, including through creating new opportunities for local partners and businesses to play a greater role in shaping investments in their area.

Through relationships we have developed, Friends of the Shakespeare Line supported Network Rail at its Birmingham New Street station, where volunteers joined Network Rail staff as part of their employee volunteering scheme to plant out all of New Street station's frontage.

We have consciously used local businesses along the railway route to develop and provide a range of resources to support the volunteers; these have ranged from unique artworks, design, equipment, photography, and of course, horticultural supplies.

This has led to **positive** local relationships between businesses and the railway that provides a basis on which we are determined to build.



Project SPEED will accelerate the delivery of improvements, making more efficient results the new normal.

We consider that our model reflects the principles enshrined in the government's Project SPEED. Our organisation was formed to provide SWIFT responses, funding and tangible support to station volunteers. We are built to operate in a PRAGMATIC way with sound governance and controls, enabling decisions to be made promptly and crucially based on common sense. The Friends of the Shakespeare Line are EFFICIENT. We are operated and managed by volunteers who bring a diversity of experience gained across the business, commerce, public and private sectors delivering better, greener, faster and cheaper.

A NEW MODEL FOR COMMUNITY RAIL



Impact at Danzey

My involvement gives me a sense of achievement when the unloved stations are transformed into a more welcoming place. I believe tidy well-presented stations are safer and much less likely to attract folk that might misuse the facilities. I've always enjoyed using the train services available and want to make sure the experience of travel is one that travellers will return and do again. The train is far more eco-friendly than a number of cars carrying one or two passengers heading to their destination and I feel I'm contributing to encouraging people to make a decision that benefits the country.

Neil, Danzey

Our focus is on supporting station adopters in terms of their plans and how they feel they would like to develop and enhance their station. The strength of our organisation lies in its organic nature and voluntary basis with volunteers giving their time and commitment, including each one of the trustees.

FOSL enables volunteers at each station to do the things they feel will enhance and improve their station, the experience of those using it and building greater relevance of their station to its local community encouraging more people to travel by train.

We believe that volunteers should be supported and enabled. The formation of this Community Station Partnership enables the volunteers to do what they love, contribute to their neighbourhood and stations, without having to worry about administration, fund finding, membership fees or the laborious process of opening bank accounts.

FOSL has introduced a new and effective model into the world of community rail and a key element of this has been a direct and close relationship with the Train Operator, West Midlands Trains and Network Rail who have demonstrated unwavering commitment to the neighbourhoods they serve and community rail by embracing this new local model.

With pressure on budgets unlikely to ease in the foreseeable future, we believe this wholly voluntary approach best serves the railway and the funders, be they stakeholders or individuals making donations. The Community Station Partnership model delivers visible benefits and tangible enhancements for customers and communities, crucially with Value for Money at its core.

The central mission of our work and volunteer activities is to enrich local communities along our railway line. We are dedicated to helping improve train travel experience and encourage more rail passengers in a post-pandemic world. As our object says, we are committed to increasing the leisure and visitor market and positively contributing to the local community's well-being by creating social value and public benefit through a range of activities both within the communities and at the railway stations along the 'Shakespeare Line' route.

Wood End



Danzey



BUILDING RESTORATION HENLEY IN ARDEN

At Henley in Arden, an ambitious project has commenced that will see the derelict original Great Western Railway station building restored to its former glory and provide a range of community-based facilities that will help make the railway station a more important part of the town.

As the volunteers come from a wide range of business and sector backgrounds they will be seeking at all stages, by habit not exception, to manage work and contracts efficiently mirroring the Project SPEED approach.

The Friends of Henley in Arden (FHOS) and Friends of the Shakespeare Line (FOSL) station are leading the project and fundraising and are supported by the Railway Heritage Trust, Network Rail and Heart of England Community Rail Partnership.

As our first Annual Report went to print, we were about to see the derelict station building finally handed over to the FHOS/FOSL after a lengthy period involving several issues. Notwithstanding this, the tenacity of those involved at FHOS has ensured we have gotten this far and the determination is there to see things through to completion and success.

There is much detailed work to do and issues to address. However, with FHOS we are confident we have the right people, processes, and plan to ensure that the ex GWR station building is safely and professionally restored to its original condition and that we can raise the remaining funding needed.

SUPPORT

We would like to acknowledge the support we have received from several sources including several individuals, businesses and other organisations.

We'd like to thank West Midland Trains and Birmingham City Council for funding support. The Wilmcote Chariturst for a significant donation towards Wilmcote station and the Heart of England Community Rail Partnership through its small grant scheme which has helped part fund those stations for the section of the route covered by Heart CRP.

We also wish to record our appreciation towards Ian Taylor, Line Manager at West Midlands Trains for the Shakespeare Line. Ian is a dependable and very customer focused manager who makes himself available and is always very responsive to issues and ideas.

Our thanks to Network Rail and British Transport Police who have also supported the volunteers and all the works that has taken place over the first 18 or so months since we started.

Finally, we would also like to thank Mark Williamson, Jack Boskett, John Whitehouse and Geoff Dowling for their fabulous photography and providing us with so many fantastic images.



Impact at Henley in Arden

“Volunteering at the station gives me pride in our community, a sense of place and of local history. Physically and mentally a feeling of well-being. A time of solitude or a time of reflection and especially the opportunity to socialise with like-minded people

Sue, Henley in Arden

Henley-in-Arden



FROM THE TRAIN SERVICE OPERATOR WEST MIDLANDS TRAINS

"In the West Midlands Railway network, we are proud to host the first ever volunteer-led Community Station Partnership in the UK. This collective of adopted stations, managed centrally by volunteers is a new model in the world of community rail and we have two more partnerships in development, inspired by the success of this group. Over the past year it has been a joy working with the volunteers who have impressed both local residents and our own station teams with their energy and innovative ideas, they are now supporting the rail industry with their plans to develop 'rail recovery programmes' and developing concepts for 'urban community rail' at inner city locations. The Friends of The Shakespeare Line are truly a pioneering partnership and it has been a joy to work with them all this year."

Fay Easton

Head of Stakeholder & Community
West Midlands Trains Limited



Malcolm Holmes (right) with Fraser Pithie, Councillor Shabrana Hussain (Sparkbrook) and Fay Easton at Small Heath & Sparkbrook station



FROM BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE

"I'd like to say thanks for all the work the volunteers do along the Shakespeare Line. Without question the work is a wonderful example of community spirit and determination that creates a public benefit and positive environment on the railway."

Lucy D'orsi

Chief Constable, British Transport Police



Impact at Bearley

We like to think that the planting scheme we have started brings a bit of colour and interest to an otherwise plain looking station. Although there are few passengers using the station, one lady waiting for a train commented how it was nice to see flowers brightening up the area. We have enjoyed planning future planting for this bare strip of ground at Bearley and hope that some of the evergreen shrubs being planted now will add a 'cared for' feel to the Station that it's never had previously.

Gary, Bearley

• Wootton Wawen



Impact at Wootton Wawen

“The planters soften the railway platform image and compliment the rural position of the station. We think it subtly shows as a village we have a caring community spirit.”

Jessica, Andy, Roger and Derek,
Wootton Wawen



Impact at Claverdon

Volunteering at Claverdon Railway Station means I get to work with a friendly team of volunteers who share common goals to give something back to the local and wider community. Fitness, mental health benefits, putting my skills to good use and protecting the environment by encouraging more passengers to take the train are important to me and through volunteering I can achieve these aims.

Phil, Claverdon



Bearley

FROM WEST MIDLANDS RAIL EXECUTIVE



With COVID-19 continuing to affect train service delivery, primarily due to the impact on West Midlands Trains staff, it has clearly been another challenging year for our West Midlands Railway network and for the customers and supporters of the Shakespeare Line. However, as we continue our journey towards what many are describing as the “new normal”, there are last clear signs of light at the end of, what for many has been a very dark tunnel.

In spite of the difficulties, it has been heartening to see the positive effect of the many dedicated volunteers at stations all along the Shakespeare Line, from the suburbs of Birmingham and Solihull through to Stratford-upon-Avon itself and, on a personal level, I was particularly pleased to be able to join Fraser Pithie, Councillor Shabrina Hussain from the local community and Fay Easton at Small Heath Station, back in August. The carefully tended, often reclaimed, flower beds and planters have brought a welcome splash of colour to many stations, whilst new information boards (and even poems!) have reinforced that sense of community ownership and pride in both the local stations and surrounding areas.

Elsewhere on the network, it has been good to see the restoration of Stratford via Solihull services, the return of the popular Shakespeare Express (on which you might occasionally find me as the Guard!) and progress with the new Class 196 trains which will start to enter service next year. Behind the scenes WMRE has been busy supporting Network Rail and Midlands Connect in progressing Midlands Rail Hub (and in particular the early delivery of a fourth through platform at Birmingham Snow Hill) and we are continuing to seek the government funding required to complete an Outline Business Case for the electrification of the Snow Hill lines network, including the lines to Stratford.

Last, but by no means least, we are delighted to have secured an ongoing role for WMRE alongside the Department for Transport in relation to the management of the new National Rail Contract for West Midlands Trains (which commenced in September) and we are already focusing on our future involvement with the new Great British Railways regime.

Malcolm Holmes

Executive Director (WMRE) & Director of Rail at Transport for West Midlands

• Claverdon





“Volunteers from the Shakespeare Line joining with our staff undertaking their employee volunteering was a great success and delivered a colourful transformation of New St Station frontage in less than a day. There’s great public benefit by working closely with volunteers who give their commitment to the railway”.



Patrick Power
Head of Stations & Passenger Experience, Central Route, Network Rail.



“All of the team at Earlswood Garden & Landscape Centre were very excited to be given the opportunity to get involved with this amazing project. As a caring business, we like to give back to our local community where we can, especially when we know it will benefit the wider public, so being part of this ongoing project means a lot to us. We’re proud to have helped adopters introduce an abundance of new life, colour and scents at their stations whilst also equipping them with the knowledge required to keep everything looking its best. We are looking forward to building on this success for 2022 and beyond.”

Brett Sheridan
Marketing & Sales Director
Earlswood Garden & Landscape Centre



• **Wilmcote**



• **Stratford upon Avon Parkway**



Impact at Stratford upon Avon Parkway

“I hope my station volunteering provides a more welcoming and neater station environment that will make rail travel more pleasant, and make the station a valued part of the local environment. I’ve already had comments from strangers at the station that it is looking better and the flower planters are nice, so it seems to be working!”

Jon, Stratford upon Avon Parkway

Stratford upon Avon





70 Garden planters built, installed and planted at 14 stations



8 Heritage Art Boards with rail recovery content installed at Small Heath Station (community arts grant)



10,000+ Volunteer hours logged at wmr.uk/friends



80 Registered volunteers' safety briefed with High Viz and ID Cards



7 Stations lockable mains water supply taps installed



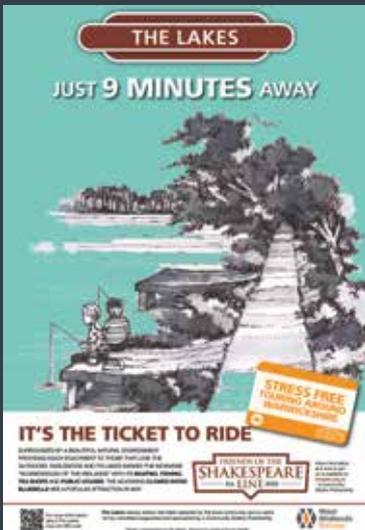
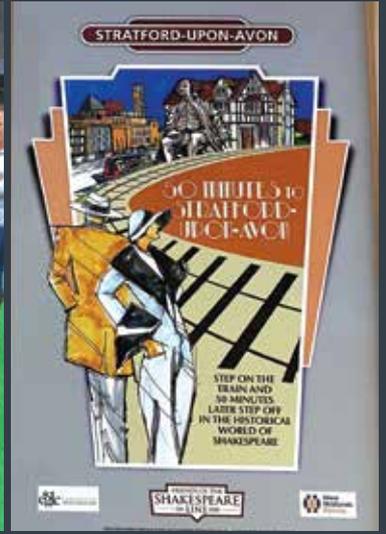
18 Heritage Poster Boards with individual content to each locality installed at 18 stations



12 Water butts sponsored by Severn Trent



£2,500 Sponsorship from Earlswood Garden & Landscape Centre via discounted supply of planters and horticultural supplies



WE COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOU



Join our journey

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✉ friendsofline@outlook.com 🐦 @FriendsSLine