

ON TRACK

Annual Progress Report of the North Staffs Community Rail Partnership



New wild flower bed at Stone Station

- ▶ Crewe
- ▶ Alsager
- ▶ Kidsgrove
- ▶ Longport
- ▶ Stoke-on-Trent
- ▶ Longton
- ▶ Blythe Bridge
- ▶ Uttoxeter
- ▶ Tutbury & Hatton
- ▶ Peartree
- ▶ Derby
- ▶ Stone
- ▶ Stafford
- ▶ Penkridge



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North Staffs Community Rail



North Staffs CRP

northstaffsrail.org.uk

Chair's Report

When I wrote my last report over a year ago we had already suffered three months of Covid lockdown and station volunteering was at a standstill. The fifteen months since have not been easy and indeed as I write this at the start of September volunteering is still on hold at Stoke Station.

However, we should celebrate the return of much activity as you will read in these pages. I thank our Community Rail Partnership Officers, Claire and Emma, who have been exploring every opportunity to help restart activities and promote initiatives to restore confidence in rail travel once again.

Undoubtedly some commuter journeys on our routes will be reduced as office attendance patterns change, but the hope is that this will be compensated for by increased leisure travel helped by the increased number of 'staycations' as overseas travel is still problematic. In this context I commend the Partnership's station walks booklet which has recently been published and I hope you will try out at least one and encourage others to do so.

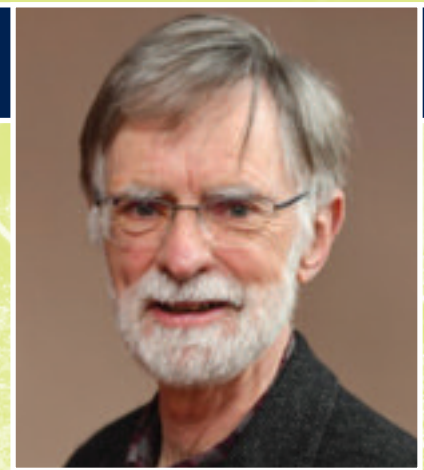
Our accomplishments are achieved as always by our station volunteers. Thanks to you all for your efforts, and that includes all our new volunteers. We are hoping we will soon be able to add a volunteer group at Stafford to add it to the growing number of stations benefitting from station adoption. You have had to endure so many added Covid related difficulties and frustrations in recent times; I trust in the year ahead we will be able to resume our occasional volunteer gatherings at which we can thank you personally for all your hard work.

On the Crewe – Derby line we celebrated the extension of the EMR service to Nottingham and Newark Castle in May, reinstating the direct rail service between Stoke and Nottingham. We have been pressing for the restoration of this link between the two largest North Midlands conurbations since it was discontinued over 15 years ago.

Thank you EMR for finally achieving this aspiration. On the other hand, the promise of post-Covid 'build back better' has not been enjoyed by all passengers on this route. There was first the service withdrawal at Alsager from September 7th 2020 in order, we were told, to improve timekeeping at other stations. We were delighted when the service was reinstated on May 16th 2021. However this was followed by dismay a month later when at three days' notice, the long standing hourly service was reduced to two hourly due to a combination of train crew and rolling stock shortages.

Even if all the trains haven't kept running during this difficult year, NSCRP has! For this we must thank all our local authority stakeholders: Cheshire East, Staffordshire, Stoke, Derbyshire, and Derby City. As local authority finances seem to become ever tighter year on year, we are most appreciative of this continued support.

Almost as numerous as our local authority supporters are the train operators who now also support our work: East Midlands Railway; London Northwestern Railway, Avanti West Coast and CrossCountry.



Thanks to them and also to Community Rail Network (CRN). CRN has provided funding for a number of projects and, through Paul Webster, Community Rail Support Manager, a huge amount of wise advice, guidance and support.

Michael

Michael Willmot



Claire Sandys



Emma McIntosh

STATION VOLUNTEERS – THE LIFE BLOOD OF THE CRP

New volunteers

NSCRP welcomed lots of new station adopters to our stations this year.

We're joined by Danielle and Grant who are volunteering at Longton and Stoke, John and Jackie at Penkridge and Greg and the young adults at Futures2Gether in Stone. At Blythe Bridge we welcome Mick, Mike, Peter and Paul (but no Mary!). Valerie and David have joined the team at Uttoxeter; Stephen and Paul at Peartree; Luke at Tutbury & Hatton; John at Longport; and Jake, Gil, Glyn, Janet and Barbara at Kidsgrove. A big Community Rail welcome to you all!

Peartree Action Day, 13 April 2021

11 people gathered at Peartree Station to tackle the ivy and refurbish the long neglected and empty raised beds. Due to the pandemic we did not invite CRP volunteers from other stations, or local community members, this time. In their place we were very pleased to welcome an enthusiastic workforce from East Midlands Railway's Commercial team.

Neil and Kev removed the rotting timber benches, added a new layer of sleepers to the top of the raised beds and clad the sides with decking timber to protect from further damage.

Many thanks to Neil and Kev, to the Peartree volunteers and to the EMR team for their hard work.



Rock painting at Blythe Bridge

Farewell to Paul Taylor

We were shocked and saddened to hear of the death of Paul Taylor in January 2021. He was a much valued member of the Kidsgrove Station volunteer team and of the wider Kidsgrove community. Our condolences go to his widow, Pauline, and to his family and friends.

Volunteers needed at Stafford Station!

Stafford Station is the latest addition to our Community Rail Partnership. We have been talking to Avanti West Coast about possible future projects, which include 70th birthday celebrations in 2022 and the transformation of a disused platform! We are looking for volunteers so please get in touch if you are interested in helping out.



Peartree Action Day

Blythe Bridge Action Day, 26 March 2021

EMR came up trumps again and provided an enthusiastic workforce, this time from the Comms team. They barrowed and spread three trailer loads of bark chippings to the borders to reduce weed growth and water loss from the soil.

The station volunteers weeded one of the existing perennial beds and spread mini bark to keep the weeds at bay. A team effort was required to cut back a thorny monster of a Berberis plant at the front of the station.

For a bit of light relief, the EMR team finished the day by painting the border rocks white on Platform 2.

STATION VOLUNTEERS – THE LIFE BLOOD OF THE CRP

Lineside cycle/walking track, Longton

On 22 March new volunteer, Danielle, and Claire, met Martyn Brunt and colleague from Sustrans to clean up the Lineside walk and cycle track behind Phoenix Park in Longton.



Litter bags along Lineside track

It's a popular track that connects Heron Cross with Longton and is well used by commuters, shoppers and dog walkers. Altogether 40 bags of rubbish were collected!!! Since then Danielle, accompanied by one or both of her sons, has continued to litter pick the route between Longton Station and Duke Street, including Lineside, once a week. They have done an A-MAZ-ING job!

Thank you for your many hours of hard work in keeping this environment friendly route to the station clean and attractive.



Georgian House, Balance Street by Jane Maia. One of 20 images of beautiful historic Uttoxeter now on display at the station, thanks to the Uttoxeter U3A Urban Sketchers.

Wolgarston High School Station Litter Pick

Pupils from Wolgarston High School volunteered to litter pick at Penkrudge Station in July as part of their Community Day. They did a fantastic job in exceptionally hot weather!



Wolgarston High School litter pick

What is the value of volunteering?

Well, apart from making a positive difference to the environment, making friends, improving physical and mental health, improving our stations for passengers and other community members, we can also give a financial value to volunteering.

For the period August 2020 to July 2021 we estimate that our volunteers contributed a grand total of 3257 hours on station related duties. @£15 per hour, this equates to £48,855. Wow!! The Department for Transport should be very impressed indeed.

Thank you all so much for everything you do to improve our stations for our customers and wider communities.

STATION IMPROVEMENTS

Colourful flowers at Stone Station

Stone Station and Station Approach look colourful, clean and tidy thanks to the ongoing work of station volunteers, Barbara and Rachel. They have been busy litter picking, sweeping and planting and have generated lots of new ideas for station improvements including the new planters for Platform 2 and the wildflowers on Station Approach which have, thanks to funding from London Northwestern Railway (LNR), provided a riot of colour this summer (see front cover).

Penkrige Gardening Club

Penkrige volunteers, Penkrige Gardening Club, have planted new flowers and shrubs at the station including a changing seasonal display in a large barrel planter that's provided colour throughout the year. Thanks to funding from LNR, the new planters were installed on the station car park and in the subway.



Penkrige Station volunteers



Plants enjoying their new home in half a whisky barrel!

Access for All?

We are delighted to see the much needed and long-awaited footbridge and passenger lifts being installed at Kidsgrove Station.

NSCRP has been talking to Network Rail and West Midlands Trains about the possible installation of 2 passenger lifts at Stone Station. This would provide step free access to both platforms. We know that these would be very useful to all sorts of people, such as those who use wheelchairs, pushchairs or bicycles and those with small children and the many of us who simply find steps difficult to negotiate. Competition for funding is extremely competitive. DfT will need to see "evidence of need". Please get in touch if you find it difficult to access Platform 1 at Stone Station.

New community rail poster cases

We have five new community rail poster cases thanks to funding from Community Rail Network. Please get in touch if you would like your community resource or event advertised at Peartree, Longport or Alsager Station.



Weeding at Derby Station

Derby Station Garden

An extensive garden area at the front of the station had become overgrown so a large and noble work force gathered on a very wet May day to clear it. Eventually this will be covered with weed membrane and landscaped to make a more attractive welcome to the city. Particular thanks go to NSCRP volunteers, Mike Robson, Philip Norris and Ian Clark for giving up their time to come and work in the rain.

STATION IMPROVEMENTS

Triple celebration at Alsager Station

Hard working station volunteers, local council representatives and East Midlands Railway (EMR) staff gathered at Alsager Station on 18 May 2021 to celebrate recent achievements: New dementia friendly signage, a Cheshire Best Kept Station award and the welcome return of the full EMR service to the town.

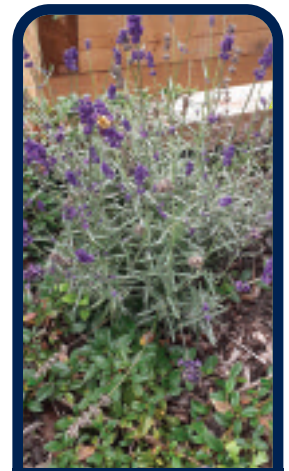
1. Alsager is a dementia friendly community and its station has recently been recognised as working to become Dementia Friendly with the installation by EMR of clearer signage throughout.
2. The Friends of Alsager Station were awarded a special Cheshire Best Kept Station award for their contribution to the dementia friendly project and for their ongoing work on the station's extensive gardens.
3. From 16 May EMR reinstated their hourly service at Alsager Station which had been temporarily reduced since September 2020. This was thanks in part to a campaign led by Alsager Town Council, North Staffs Rail User Group and North Staffs Community Rail Partnership. [Please note that since then the EMR service has been reduced again, though not as severely. Some of these trains will be reinstated in Dec 2021.]



Celebrating the new dementia friendly signage at Alsager Station (photo by Geoff Reader)

New bee friendly garden area at Tutbury & Hatton Station

A pocket of overgrown land at the station entrance is being transformed into a bee friendly garden as part of a Derbyshire wide project with the Derwent Valley Line CRP. After many hours spent on battling with dense ivy and bramble two large trough planters were added in July by the Bee Friendly Trust. The plants are doing well and are popular with the local bees. A new fence has been installed and the ground will be levelled soon to make the rest of the site more usable. We are grateful to EMR and Community Rail Network for financial support and to our neighbours, Nestlé, for allowing deliveries to be made from their car park.



Lavender and bees



Cheshire Best Kept Station Award

Our passengers will be able to take full advantage of this year's EMR route extension to Nottingham, a popular tourist, business and educational destination, and Newark Castle. In addition, passengers also continue to enjoy a direct service to Stafford and Birmingham New Street with London Northwestern Railway.



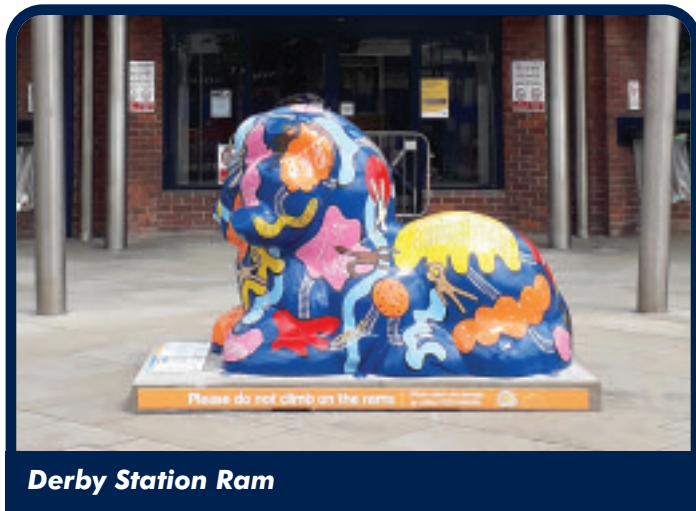
Just some of the many bags of ivy ready for collection

Derby Ram

Delayed by a year due to the pandemic, it was great to see visitors getting excited about rams when the Derby Ram Trail made the city centre its home from May to August 2021.

There were 30 to find, all beautifully painted. The Derby Station Community Ram was jointly sponsored by East Midlands Railway, NSCRP and the Derwent Valley Line CRP. Painted by local artist, Holly Aspinall, it depicts our volunteers and the work they do as well as visitor attractions along both lines.

The Derby Ram Trail has really encouraged people to get back into the city once again, exploring new areas and supporting local businesses. The trail has helped to support the city's recovery after the lockdown and has brought joy and smiles to the thousands of people that have taken part.



Derby Station Ram

Awards

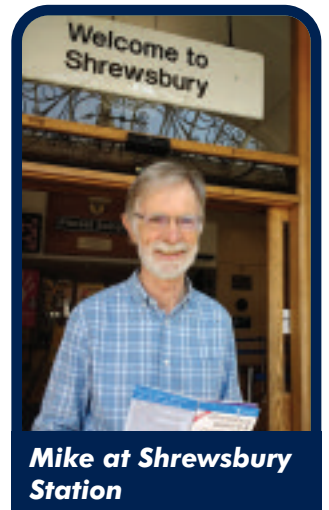
The annual national Community Rail Awards were held on-line last December.

We were thrilled to see the following stations given It's Your Station awards:

- Kidsgrove (Silver)
- Longport (Gold)
- Uttoxeter (Gold)
- Alsager (Gold)

Uttoxeter Station was shortlisted in the Most Enhanced Station category. This was largely due to the splendid new pergola. Well done, Mick and the team!

AND our Chair, Mike Willmot, came second in the Outstanding Volunteer Contribution category! He created NSCRP in 2005 and has continued as its Chair ever since. He also started the Helmsdale Station renovation project in 2009 and continues to help maintain this beautiful holiday home on the Far North Line. He also served for four years on the ACoRP (CRN as was) board. Most recently, he has led the campaign for better access to Shrewsbury Station, in which town he now lives. Mike's dedication to community rail is a force to be reckoned with and we are very lucky to have him as our Chair. Congratulations, Mike!



Mike at Shrewsbury Station

NSCRP INCOME AND EXPENDITURE SUMMARY, APRIL 2020 – MARCH 2021

| Income £ | | Expenditure £ | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|---|---------------|---------------|
| Brought forward from 2019 - 2020 | 39,000 | Salaries (including on-costs) | 44,110 | |
| Income from train operating companies | 56,135 | Running costs and project expenditure | 9,922 | |
| Income from local authorities | 17,007 | | | |
| Grants | 8,149 | | | |
| Total income | 120,291 | Total expenditure | 54,032 | |
| | | Total income minus Total expenditure | | 66,259 |
| | | Carried forward to 2020-2021 | | 66,259 |

Restricted activities during Covid lockdown have permitted reserves to increase, enabling the prospect of some exciting projects in the year ahead and to protect employees from sudden redundancy should there be a future funding drought.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Rails to Trails station walks project



Stone guided walk

Our stations are important gateways to contrasting landscapes: farmland, picturesque villages, market towns, urban centres and industrial heritage. Rails to Trails - NSCRP's new booklet of ten station walks – encourages people to explore them on foot. The walks are between 1 and 6 miles in length and all but one are circular.

Rails to Trails is available as pdf or printed booklet, beautifully illustrated by designer Caroline Dadd of Origin Studios, Stoke-on-Trent. We are grateful to CrossCountry and London Northwestern Railway for their funding of design and printing costs. A programme of guided walks to accompany the booklet is being delivered during Summer and Autumn 2021.



The Railway in Autumn Art Competition

In October 2020 we ran an on-line children's art competition with LNR, East Midlands Railway and Middleport Pottery. Young people were encouraged to get creative and send in their drawings or paintings themed around 'The Railway in Autumn'.

We received a fantastic range of entries with Riley, age 6, taking the runner up place and Benjamin and Harry, both age 7, as joint winners. They all received art supplies to support their future creativity and the winners won a great family day out with local train travel to Longport Station and family entry to Middleport Pottery. Their work is displayed at Longport Station.



Riley, Benjamin and Harry

Hixon and Sherborne projects

NSCRP is delighted to be able to support the Hixon Memorial Project and the Sherborne Urban Garden Project at Crewe, both funded by a CRP Project Fund grant from First Trenitalia / Avanti West Coast. The Hixon community project is in memory of the 1968 rail disaster at a level crossing in the village and includes replacing a vandalised plain leaded glass window in St Peter's Church with a new window, featuring 3 stained glass murals, which overlooks the memorial garden.



Sherborne Urban Garden Project

The Sherborne community project supports an established children's gardening group and adult peer support group and will offer opportunities to connect the residents with the social value of the railway including providing children, young people and others with the skills and confidence needed to access the opportunities rail offers.

For more information about North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership or to get involved by sponsoring a project or joining the volunteer team, please visit www.northstaffsrail.org.uk or email us at: northstaffscrp@stoke.gov.uk Tel: 07385 080496 / 07879 115698

