



# ON TRACK

## Annual Progress Report of the North Staffs Community Rail Partnership



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



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EMR



## CHAIR'S WELCOME

A warm welcome to 'On Track', our report on progress during the past year - and I'd like to begin by thanking everyone who has helped the North Staffs CRP in any way during the year – we depend so much on each other's efforts to achieve our overall aims!

As you may have read in our last issue, Claire Sandys, who along with Emma McIntosh, was one of our two Community Rail Partnership Officers, had announced that she intended to retire with effect from the end of February 2024. In the event, it proved much harder than anticipated to replace her, so both she and also our outgoing Chair, Mike Willmot, stayed on (for quite some time) until we had achieved this. I'm very pleased to be able to report that Sam Burton Smith has now been appointed as our new Community Rail Partnership Officer, working alongside Emma, who has greatly helped in smoothing the transition process. I'd also like to sincerely thank both Mike and Claire at this point for volunteering to stay on significantly longer than they had intended and helping us to successfully begin a new era for the CRP. We've also received strong support from CRN (Paul Webster) and EMR (Alexa Stott) with the recruitment process – thank you both for your help and advice.

With both a background and strong interest in public transport, Sam is a real asset and very approachable – I'm sure that you will make him welcome if you've yet to meet him.

As Mike departs for pastures new, my former role as Chair Elect has also now changed – and I'm beginning to become used to the challenges of being your Chair. I hope to continue to visit various ongoing projects and am looking forward to seeing more of you throughout the coming year.

Moving to other matters; whilst industrial unrest in the rail industry is still yet to be fully reconciled, some of our other issues of concern last year have been resolved. In terms of the full reinstatement of the hourly service between Crewe and Nottingham, the great news is that this will be achieved with effect from the December 2024 timetable changes, as EMR have very recently confirmed the reintroduction / extension of four weekday services and six Saturday services.

Our other major concern during the year was the proposed national ticket office closure programme. However, due to the national consultation exercise resulting in a very significant amount of criticism of the proposals, you will no doubt be aware that they were cancelled and (thankfully) will not be implemented. It should be noted that Kidsgrove (where we were concerned at the potential loss of facilities) produced a number of consultation responses well in excess of its size – the numbers were similar to those from the main stations, such as Nottingham & Leicester. Thanks to everyone who provided supportive responses – it demonstrates that democracy can still work!

I hope that you enjoy reading the rest of this issue, which details some of the work and projects that we have been involved with delivering during the past year. In line with our remit, we continue to work in partnership with the various train operating companies and support our many station volunteers in making our stations more attractive and rail travel more enticing.



David Dowbenko  
Chair



David Dowbenko



Emma McIntosh



Sam Smith



## A HUGE THANK YOU ...

... to all our station volunteers for the work that you do - planting, watering, weeding, litter-picking, painting, helping at events, reporting faults, growing plants, helping passengers, applying for grants, engaging with schools, local authorities and other partners and supplying ideas.

In April we were joined by 39 of our station adopters, plus train operator partners, at Kidsgrove Town Hall for our annual 'Thank You' lunch. It was a great opportunity for adopters from all of our stations to connect, share stories and tips as well as partake in a tasty lunch!



## NEW VOLUNTEERS

We have had a number of new volunteers join us this year. We are delighted to welcome Sue at Stone; Sarah at Penkridge, William at Stoke, Matt at Peartree, Wendy, Ann and David at Blythe Bridge, Ant at Longport, Julie and Kenneth at Kidsgrove, and Neil at Alsager.

**A big Community Rail welcome to you all!**

## THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

We estimate that North Staffs CRP volunteers have contributed 4345 hours to improving their stations and engaging in community activities this year (August 2023 to July 2024). At £15 per hour this equates to **£65,175!**



## STATION IMPROVEMENTS

### Bee Friendly Cub Scouts

We had a great time working with the 12th Burton, 1st Tutbury and Hatton Cub Scouts. During their first group visit to the station in June they learnt about bees from Dr Luke Dixon of the Bee Friendly Trust and went on a rail safety walk with Claire. Back at HQ, the scouts drew their artwork on the theme of bees and other insect pollinators, followed by an appropriate snack of bread and honey.

In September, the artwork was designed into two fabulous banners for the station's Bee Friendly Garden. The children were delighted to see their creations on display for everyone to see.



The Cubs with their Bee Banner

Kindly funded by  
East Midlands Railway and  
Community Rail Network.

### Crewe Poetry Mural

The overbridge at Crewe Station is now home to a large mural featuring a poem by local poet Gareth Williams, titled *The Tracks are our Veins*, which celebrates Crewe's railway heritage. The mural, funded by Avanti West Coast, is a legacy project following on from the 185th anniversary of the first train to pass through Crewe and makes a fabulous statement; displaying artwork featuring local places of interest.



Crewe Poetry Wall Mural

### Crewe Station Gallery Wall and School Poetry Project

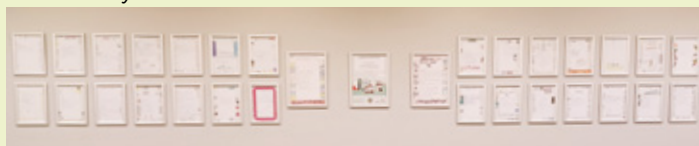
With funding from Avanti West Coast, the waiting room on Platform 5 at Crewe Station is now sporting a large gallery wall that will be used to display artwork from community groups and schools. The first works on display are a series of poems from pupils at Brierley Primary School, Edleston Primary School and Springfields School about travelling by train.

The poems were created by pupils at the schools following a Community Rail Network funded project that saw poet Gareth Williams deliver six workshops in the schools. In addition, Gareth created a poem using an 'experience capture' approach at Crewe Heritage Centre.



Springfields  
School  
Pupils with  
Gareth  
Williams

Crewe Gallery Wall



### Industry Partner Volunteers Build Birdboxes for Local Woodland

In October, volunteers from Thales, Network Rail and Longport Station generously gave their time to nature when they built and installed 16 bird boxes at the woodland adjacent to Longport Station. Staffordshire Wildlife Trust provided kits and instructions for assembly, which was harder than it looked! They also did some litter picking around the site before sampling (some for the first time) a very well-deserved Staffordshire Oatcake.



Longton Bird Boxes

Many thanks to East Midlands Railway for funding this project.



## St Martins at Peartree and New Planter

Our ongoing partnership with the St Martin's sixth form students at Peartree Station has resulted in a new trough planter on the Crewe platform, supported by East Midlands Railway. The students visit the station every fortnight during term time to do maintenance jobs and to litter pick in the adjacent Sherwood Recreation Park.



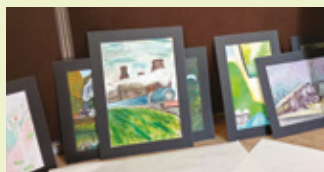
St Martin's at Peartree

## Stoke Sixth Form College Artwork for Knotty100

Second year Art students from Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College produced some excellent artwork for our stations to help mark the 100-year anniversary of the demise of the North Staffordshire Railway (The Knotty) in 1923. Fifteen pieces of artwork were made into large posters and are on display at Longton Station and other copies can be seen at intermediate stations between Crewe and Derby.



Sixth Form Posters at Uttoxeter



Sixth Form putting up art exhibition

## Caverswall Community Art Trail

The Blythe Bridge Station volunteers were invited to create a piece of art to form part of the Caverswall Community Art Trail. The artwork can now be seen on Platform 1. It comprises a collage of images depicting places, past and present, in and around Blythe Bridge Station as photos, paintings and drawings.



Blythe Bridge Station artwork

## Volunteer Action Days

● Staff from Network Rail and West Midlands Trains joined volunteers at Stone Station for a clean-up day. They swept and cleared the length of Station Approach and helped carry compost to top up the planters. Station Approach looked amazing after their efforts!



Stone Station clean-up day

● Our adopted woodland adjacent to Longport Station is a target for fly tippers. The rubbish is clearly visible to people accessing the station and the public right of way from the Newcastle side. So, with the help of volunteers from Network Rail and Thales we regularly hire a skip and fill it. This time, the volunteers also put up some new signs asking for wildlife to be protected. Many thanks to all of our volunteers – we couldn't do this without you.



Full skip at Longport

● The Alsager station volunteers were joined in August by a small team from Cross Country Trains to repaint the stones on the Stoke-on-Trent bound platform. In combination with the new shelter on the Crewe bound platform, and the valiant ongoing efforts of the station volunteers, Alsager remains a first-class railway station!



Alsager Action Day



## Big Bugs at Alsager!

Our Adopt-a-Shelter team from Excalibur Primary School have been helping to build an insect hotel on Platform 1. To go with this, some other pupils at the school have created imaginative bug artwork, which now features in a poster at the station.



Alsager minibug poster

## Art on display!

The waiting room on Platform 1 at Stoke Station is now home to a gallery wall for displaying community artwork thanks to funding from Avanti West Coast. The first display featured artwork from Staffordshire University's Fine Art Award students.



Stoke Station Gallery Wall

## Poem at Penkridge

A poem about the history of Penkridge, written by pupils from Wolgarston High School as part of their annual Community Day, was installed at Penkridge Station alongside a panel showing local attractions.



Penkridge Poem

## New Planters in the Derby Station Garden

Thanks to a Community Engagement Fund grant from CrossCountry, we have been able to create and fill five large wooden trough planters at the front of the station. These were built from railway sleepers by East Midlands Railway's wonderful Station Service Technicians, Neil and Kev. Tracsis volunteers, the new EMR station adopters at Derby, then filled the planters with compost and planted them up with colourful and fragrant flowering plants to enhance the environment for passengers and pollinators. We hope that these will provide an improved welcome to the city of Derby.



New Planters at Derby Station Garden



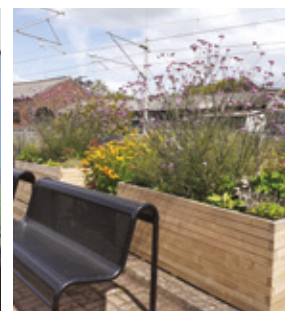
Tracsis volunteers

## Stone Station Projects

Stone Station has benefited from two new planters which are showcasing a wonderful display of pollinator friendly flowers. The flowers were selected by a community vote and they look magnificent! The station has also had a large history panel installed on Platform 2 that provides readers with information on the history of the station, the history of Stone town and some of the historic attractions that can be seen on the Stone 'Rails to Trails' walk. The history panel content was created in partnership with Stone Town Council and local historian Philip Leason and both projects were funded by London Northwestern Railway.



History Panel



New planters at Stone Station

## EVENTS

### All Aboard the Knotty!

As part of the 2023 Knotty100 celebrations we commissioned local community arts organisation B-Arts to put on interactive public tours of Stoke Station with funding from Avanti West Coast's Community Engagement Fund. Over one weekend, participants were guided around the station to meet characters in period costume. The characters each shared their stories which were all linked to the history of the station and The North Staffordshire Railway (The Knotty). The performance ended with a hot drink and an iced bun in a pop-up Knotty Café. In total, the event was attended by 173 people, including 51 children.



*All Aboard the  
Knotty - performers  
at Stoke Station*

### Stone Station Community Days



*Futures2gether  
pop-up café*



*Poetry  
readings by  
St Dominic's  
Priory pupils*



*AEDdonate  
first aid  
demonstration*



*Community event*

Over 100 people joined North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership (CRP) and volunteers at Stone Station in March for a Community Open Day celebrating the work of the station volunteers and the recent station improvement projects.

Clients from Futures2gether provided a pop-up café offering refreshments, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust offered seed bomb making activities, AEDdonate provided first aid demonstrations, pupils from St Dominic's Priory School entertained with their spring themed poems and we gave a guided 'Rails to Trails' walk from Stone Station into Stone Town. The event was also attended by West Midlands Trains, Network Rail, Stone Town Council and North Staffs Rail Promotion Group.

The feedback from those attending was very positive with great appreciation for the work at the station and in particular the spectacular planting displays! The first Community Day was so well received that we held a further "mini" event in August that was attended by 50 people.



## Heritage Open Days

We offered a number of talks and tours again in September for Heritage Open Days. Thanks to support from Avanti West Coast, we held two talks at Stafford Station. The talks, on the history of the Trent Valley Railway and a history of rail travel told through poster art, were very informative and well received. There was also a tour of Crewe Station, delivered by Avanti staff, which shared Crewe's railway history and took attendees to visit areas of the station not normally open to the public!



Railway Poster Art talk



Crewe Station tour

## Tales in the Park

Emma and Sam attended the Tales in the Park Storytelling Festivals in July and August with Jayne from the Travel Smart team. We attended events in Tunstall, Longton, Burslem, Fenton and Hanley Parks. We ran the always popular competition to win a Family and Friends Railcard and gave away lots of freebies including Arlo books, EMR's Railway Safety Activity books, pens and notebooks. The festival is an annual summer event led by the National Literacy Trust in Stoke which sees events at six parks in Stoke-on-Trent. It is very well attended by families; a range of free activities are provided and every child gets to choose a free book to take home.



Sam and Jayne at Tales in the Park

## Meet the Manager Morning @Kingsgrove Station

This was an opportunity for the public to ask rail and bus representatives their public transport questions face-to-face. Attended by EMR and the bus companies, First and D&G, there was much to talk about, especially regarding the Town Deal Fund project at the station which promises a significant upgrade in the next few years. The event was well attended by the public. Special thanks to the Friends of Kingsgrove Station Gardens and to Spotter Tea for serving drinks.

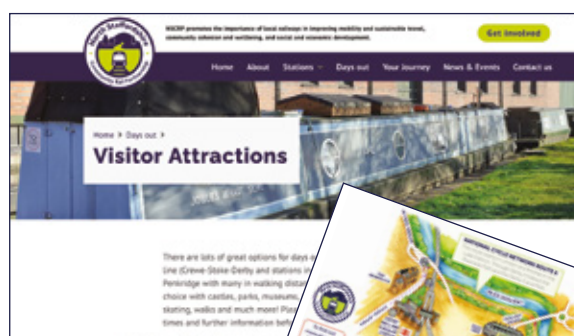


NSCRP stand with D&G

## New Rails to Trails Walk – Derby Station to Peartree Station

Lead Peartree Station adopter, Ian Clark, has devised a new walking route to link Derby Station with Peartree Station. It's quite a long one at almost 6 miles, but is 70% off road and well worth the time. It includes some of the River Derwent Riverside and Derby Canal paths and cuts through Alvaston and Osmaston Parks. This route can be found in the '**Days Out**' section at [www.northstaffsrail.org.uk](http://www.northstaffsrail.org.uk).

Other walks from stations along the line can also be found in the '**Days Out**' section of our website.



The 'Days Out' section of our website

Derby Station to Peartree Station route

## SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

### World Book Day

Pupils from Brierley Primary, Edleston Primary and Springfield School joined us at Crewe Station for World Book Day to share poems they had written about travelling by train. Their poems were printed in an Avanti designed and funded booklet alongside Gareth Williams' poem, *Tracks are our Veins*. The poetry booklets were handed out at the station as the children recited their poems to passengers. Pupils then got to celebrate their performances with refreshments in the First Class Lounge.



Brierley Primary pupils with *Tracks are our veins* booklets



*Tracks are our veins* booklet

### Stone Station Visit and Poster Competition

In June, we visited Christchurch C.E. First School in Stone with Victoria from London Northwestern Railway. Victoria delivered an assembly on railway safety and we then spent time with Year 4, who took part in a drawing activity to identify items they thought should be at a train station. We then took the pupils to the station so that they could compare their drawings with what is there. The pupils had a tour of the station, including the station planters, and were asked to each design a poster asking people not to sit on the flowers. A number of the designs will be to be printed and installed on the station planters.



### Travel Training

Pupils from Church Lawton School took part in travel training with a trip from Alsager to Crewe stations. Pupils were shown how to use ticket machines, read departure boards and had a tour of Crewe Station.



Pupils from Church Lawton School

*Thanks to London Northwestern Railway and Avanti West Coast for supporting their trip.*

### Feel Good Field Trips



Feel Good Field Trips



We were happy to support Avanti West Coast's Feel Good Field Trips programme again this year. This project gives pupils living in low income areas an educational, fun and free field trip by train. Emma and Claire accompanied several schools on trips to Gladstone Pottery Museum in Longton and The Lowry at Salford Quays.



## AWARDS

Mike, Dave and Claire attended the Community Rail Awards event in Swansea in April. They were delighted to be joined by Kidsgrove Station Adopters, Janet and Glyn, who collected a Silver It's Your Station award on behalf of their hard-working group. Other Silver level awards went to the volunteer groups at Tutbury & Hatton Station, Stone Station and Blythe Bridge Station.

We were particularly thrilled to be awarded the It's Your Station national winners award at Bronze level for Longton Station. This station is particularly challenging to work at, as water is difficult to access and then has to be carried up two flights of steps to reach the plants. Between them, the group has also helped with the sourcing and painting of six beautiful bottle kiln trellises, greeted Xmas travellers with chocolates, attended wider CRP events and collected hundreds of bags of litter.

Volunteers at Stone Station received the Community Champions award from London Northwestern Railway in recognition of the fantastic work they do at the station including their magnificent flower displays and work with local schools.

Alsager Station were awarded a Cheshire Best Kept Station Award for their Memory Café on a Train project funded by East Midlands Railway. The photo shows Cheshire East Mayor, Rod Fletcher, presenting the award to Kath Reader, Alexa and the station adopters at the station.

**Well done everybody!!**



*Longton Station Adopters receiving their award from Claire and Mike*



*Stone volunteers with their Community Champions Award*



*Cheshire Best Kept Station Award*

## A Sad Farewell

This year we have bid a sad farewell to our former CRP Officer, Claire and also to our long-standing Chair, Mike. They have both achieved so much during their time with the partnership and will be missed by all. We send them both our sincere best wishes and wish them well for the future.



*Claire and Mike at the annual volunteers Thank You lunch*



## PARTIAL REINSTATEMENT OF THE CREWE – STOKE – DERBY HOURLY SERVICE

In the December 2023 timetable change we were delighted to see a partial reinstatement of the hourly service between Crewe and Derby. This was thanks to a joint campaign with East Midlands Railway, aided by local MPs. We welcomed back five services per day to our stations on weekdays only. Claire interviewed passengers on the reinstated trains during a couple of days in December and January to find out their response and they were overwhelmingly positive about the additional trains. We are also pleased to announce that from the December 2024 timetable change, an additional service in each direction will operate on weekdays, and three additional services in each direction will operate on Saturdays. This constitutes the full restoration of the hourly EMR service between Derby and Crewe, between 6am and 10pm.



### NORTH STAFFS COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP INCOME AND EXPENDITURE SUMMARY (1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024)

We are pleased to be able to report that North Staffs CRP was in a financially secure position at the end of the 2023/24 financial year. £69,959 was carried over to the new financial year, which exceeds the reserves target of £57,545.

INCOME £		EXPENDITURE £	
Brought forward from 2022-23	78,827		
ANNUAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO RUNNING COSTS		RUNNING COSTS EXPENDITURE	
Annual contributions from local authorities (April 2023 - March 2024)	9,500	Salaries (including on-costs)	57,545
Annual contributions from train operators (April 2023 to March 2024)	60,439	Running costs and project expenditure	12,944
<b>TOTAL GRANT INCOME AND OTHER PAYMENTS</b>	<b>40,613</b>	<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE OF GRANT INCOME (includes commitments from 2022/23)</b>	<b>42,681</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>189,379</b>	<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>113,170</b>
		<b>TOTAL COMMITMENTS</b>	<b>6,250</b>
		<b>TOTAL INCOME minus expenditure minus commitments</b>	<b>69,959</b>
		Reserves target (increased from £52,000 in line with salaries increase)	57,545





Aidey and Riley with their Knotty100 posters at Longport Station



Reading Arlo's Adventure at Crewe Station



Trimming the bushes at Alsager Station



Verbena in flower at Stone Station

## Special thanks to:

As well as our funding and project partners, we would like to thank the following individuals and organisations for their support:

- R.D. Cresswell and Co Ltd - for providing tool storage and water for our station adopters.
- Streetscene at Stafford Borough Council - for their support clearing Station Approach at Stone and providing bark.
- Bumblebee Conservation Trust - for their support at events and with planting help and advice.
- Access Storage at Peartree, Derby - for allowing us to park our vehicles in their access drive when attending Peartree Station.
- Crewe Heritage Centre - for allowing us to hold a poetry session at the centre.
- Nestle Tutbury – for supplying our Tutbury and Hatton Station Adopters with water.

