Between the Lines

Issue 8 | December 24

Sandy Mahon, Windsor to Reading CRP officer with her SWR Community award.

South Western Railway

Welcome to our latest edition of Between the Lines.

We have all been extremely busy over the second half of the year with a variety of projects and, as 2024 draws to an end, and we are looking forward to celebrating Railway 200 throughout the whole of next year. We have taken time in this edition of the newsletter to reflect on the past few months which have included adding to our many works of art across the network, and of course our annual Community Rail Conference highlighting our award winning individuals, CRPs and adopters.

To read any of our past newsletters or our latest Community Rail report please click here.

If you have any community rail stories to be included in the next edition of the newsletter, please email: swrcommunityrail@swrailway.com

Paula Aldridge at a PEDALL event in the New Forest to raise awareness of their all-inclusive cycling programme. PEDALL received some CCIF funding this year to support this great initiative.

Community Rail Conference

On Thursday 10 October we had the pleasure of hosting our annual Community Rail Conference in Woking with our extended Community Rail family. Over 100 guests heard from SWR's Interim Managing Director Stuart Meek as well as Mark Goodall, Network Rail Route Director for Wessex, about achievements in the community over the past year and future plans. Other speakers included Mike Lamport, railway historian Mike Lamport talking about Railway 200, and some of our station adopters, CRPs and recipients of CCIF funding.

We also held our first ever SWR Community Awards where eight categories gave the judges lots to consider. The judging panel was made up of Peter Williams and Dean Pettit from SWR, Jack Wharton from Network Rail and Martin Pearce from the Department of Transport. We were delighted by the quality and quantity of the entries and these awards will be part of our annual celebration of all things community related moving forward. A video from the event can be seen here.

Liz Lane, Friends of Raynes Park, receiving her award from Stuart Meek

Best Art at the Station Award

- Highly Commended – The Art Society Basingstoke
- Winner – Friends of Honiton Station

Best Photograph Award

- Highly Commended – Berrywood Primary School, Hedge End
- Winner – Broadlea Primary School, Lake

Biodiversity Award

- Highly Commended – Friends of Crewkerne Station
- Winner – Friends of Feniton Station

Sustainability Award

- Highly Commended – Friends of Brockenhurst
- Winner – Friends of Raynes Park

Best Communication and Education Award

- Highly Commended – Suit Yourself
- Winner – Purbeck Community Rail Partnership

Young Person Award

- Highly Commended – Friends of West Byfleet
- Winner - Friends of Hedge End

Outstanding Volunteer Award

- Highly Commended – Thames Ditton Volunteers
- Winner – Derek Beer

Community Engagement Award

- Highly Commended - Linda Stokes for her work at Haslemere Station
- Winner – Reading Station Family Day.

Farnham anniversary celebrations

Farnham railway station marked its 175th anniversary on Tuesday 8 October with a community-wide celebration, paying tribute to its storied history and vital role in the local area. The event, organised and funded by the **Wey Valley Community Rail Partnership** and SWR, brought together commuters, railway enthusiasts, and local historians to honour the station's rich heritage. The Mayor of Waverley, Cllr John Ward, unveiled a commemorative plaque to mark the event just outside the station's main entrance. This will serve as a lasting reminder of the historical significance of the station, which first opened in October 1849.

Colleagues from Farnham station with Mikey Nevitt - CRP officer for Wey Valley line.

Among the event's highlights was a captivating history display put together by local historian Roy Waight, which explored key milestones in the station's past. This display will remain available for public viewing for a limited time, with plans to turn it into a permanent exhibition within the newly refurbished waiting room, offering an ongoing historical insight for visitors and commuters alike for Railway 200.

Adding to the sense of nostalgia, a vintage Aldershot & District bus was exhibited at the station, alongside festive touches such as birthday cakes and vibrant balloon displays, which contributed to the celebratory atmosphere. Over 400 cakes were distributed to both our customers and the local community.

Visit to Fratton Depot

After a successful summer trip to Butser Ancient Farm with **Hills to Harbour CRP**, who partnered with Motiv8 for the trip, we were asked if we could organise a trip to Fratton Depot for several of the young people, who had a real passion for trains.

Kate Webster, Train Presentation Manager was happy to oblige and organised an interesting tour of the depot, with a surprise trip to Havant Signal box. The students were very enthusiastic and passionate about transport and we enjoyed nurturing this pipeline of potential future employees.

Swaythling' Station - Free Shop

The Free Shop at Swaythling (**Three Rivers CRP**) recently ran their first winter warmer session putting out a call to the local community to donate good quality coats, hats, scarves, and gloves that were no longer needed, as well as baby and men's clothing. They were delighted by the generous amount of items donated.

Some of the items were also picked up by Swaythling's local church and Southampton Action, a charity which supports male refugees.

Peter Williams, Customer and Commercial Director at SWR, presenting awards to The Friends of Crewkerne station and Ziggy from Friends of Bitterne station

Stations in Bloom

Another annual event was also celebrated in October, with **Blackmore Vale CRP** and Derek Beer (our Outstanding Volunteer winner and Chair of the CRP) hosting Stations in Bloom.

More than 60 stations across both SWR and GWR's networks were judged with a presentation event being held at Castle Gardens where Peter Williams, SWR's Customer and Commercial Director, had the honour of awarding the groups with their certificates.

This year many of the stations also entered the 'It's Your Neighbourhood' awards organised by the RHS and were presented their certificates for these during an event at Wisley Gardens. Well done to all those that entered. Derek is encouraging as many of possible of you to enter these prestigious awards next year – he will be contacting you all very soon.

Caroline, CRP officer for Blackmore Vale, has produced a Bloomers Guide for those who would like to visit the various stations.

If you would like to receive a copy of the guide please email, blackmorevalecrp@gmail.com

Art at the stations

Fantastic Mr Fox!

A fox family known to roam a railway embankment in Devon has inspired a colourful mural at Pinhoe station, part of the **Devon and Cornwall Rail** Partnership. Artist Chloe Farrant, who painted the mural, said the foxes were something that regular commuters at Pinhoe "could connect with". Chloe spent 14 days on the project and was asked to include the foxes because they were "often spotted playing on the embankments".

"I paint to give an uplifting feeling to people, I hope it brightens their day as they come past, it was a really lovely project to be part of."

Ebbie Peters, from Wellbeing Exeter, who was tasked with finding an artist to transform the wall, said Pinhoe had "mourned the loss of green spaces" due to housing developments and transforming the wall was a reminder of that natural world. Ebbie also took the lovely photographs.

Pinhoe Mural – photo credit Ebbie Peters

Bookham station

Carrying on the theme of foxes – **The Friends of Bookham station** have been working with local artist Jacqui Taylor to produce two colourful pieces of art for the station. They look absolutely wonderful and have really brightened up the space.

Unveiling the Winchester mural with the artist Joanna Dewfall, Emma Back – Chief Executive Winchester SALT with local community members

Winchester station mural

One more piece of art work was finally unveiled at Winchester station after many years of planning. The 'Winchester – City of Sport' mosaic was the brainchild of local charity the Winchester Sport Art and Leisure Trust (SALT) – **Winchester station adopters**. The adopters worked with local mosaic artist, Joanna Dewfall, who developed a design that shows a range of sports being played across the Winchester city landscape. Joanna ran eight community workshops, where she supported local volunteers to make different parts of the design. Joanna then brought these together to build the final mosaic. In total, 37 local residents took part, with several attending more than one workshop throughout the week.

LGBT Heros at Vauxhall

SWR PRIDE

Promoting inclusivity for our LGBTQ+ employees and communities

In October, we were extremely proud to have LGBT HERO become the first LGBT+ group to adopt one of our stations, and indeed Vauxhall, one of our busiest stations, is the first major station in the UK to be adopted by an LGBTQ+ group.

LGBT HERO is the national health and wellbeing charity for LGBTQ+ people, based in South West London, supporting over 100,000 individuals every month and has adopted Vauxhall station jointly with SWR's 'Pride' colleague network.

The move has been warmly supported by Florence Eshalomi, MP for Vauxhall and Camberwell, Seb Dance, Deputy Mayor of London for Transport, as well as Transport for London given its role managing buses and the London Underground at Vauxhall.

Florence Eshalomi MP, SWR's Managing Director, Stuart Meek, and LGBT HERO's Chair, Alan Palmer, unveiled a commemorative plaque and pieces by local LGBTQ+ artists at the station's waiting room, where they also cut a rainbow ribbon.

Eshalomi MP, SWR's Managing Director Stuart Meek, and LGBT HERO's Chair Alan Palmer, cutting a rainbow ribbon.

The national health and wellbeing charity LGBT HERO and the SWR Pride Network have jointly adopted Vauxhall station

Checking in with our CRPs

Southeast Communities Rail Partnerships with Fiona Morton, CEO

Can you tell me about the history of the CRP?

Southeast Communities Rail Partnership was started in 2004 to connect people to their railway stations and services. SCRP has grown to include ten community rail lines and two education projects. We work with five different train operating companies. In 2021 we began working with SWR on the Windsor to Reading Line and in 2023 took over the management of the Hounslow to Richmond Line.

Members of SE CRP at the Freddie Mercury event

What current projects are you working on?

Railway 200 features greatly. It is a great opportunity to persuade people to leave their cars behind and use public transport. As we head off into a new era for train services it is important that we celebrate the contribution the railway has made to economic and social development and fully recognise the skills and commitment shown to the public by the railway family. Our blue plaques project will highlight the role played by railways in the past through bringing to life social history and look to the future by getting new groups to try a train and consider careers in this industry.

We are working on a project to market the lines with Scenic Rail Britain to tempt people to explore the connections to entertainment industry along the lines. The Freddie Mercury event at Feltham and Waterloo was a great success. There are many more sound and vision projects in preparation to highlight the rock and roll royalty connections across many SWR lines.

What benefits do you think the CRP brings to the local community?

There are so many. We provide good volunteering opportunities and bring diverse groups together to showcase their neighbourhoods and uncover hidden gems. We help people feel pride in their community by helping improve the station environment with art and history displays and through gardening projects. We do our bit to make the railway accessible, supporting physical improvements but also working with groups like Optalis to help those with additional needs to feel confident about using trains.

Do you have any plans for the future of CRP or ideas/projects you would like to introduce?

In addition to Railway 200 and marketing initiatives, Community Rail Network secured a grant from Motability to organise Try the Train and a Bus/Tube trips for people from the SEND (special educational needs/ disabilities) community, much like our project with Reading Buses and Optalis and staff at Wokingham. The project lasts from Jan 2025 to Dec 2026.

What is your favourite CRP project that you've worked on during your time here?

One should not have favourites! What links them all together is the opportunity to bring disparate groups together to work on a shared goal. Whether it is all the organisations that supported the Family Fun Day at Reading, the Coronation Parties and recently the Freddie Mercury Event.

In monetary terms, one of our education projects on neighbouring lines, contributed £8 million per year in added social value using the RSVT tool. Volunteers account for £500K, if we do a campaign to combat anti-social behaviour that adds an additional £50K. In the first six months of this year, we raised £54K from external funders. Success can be measured in many different ways. The parents of a partially sighted young man wrote to us six months after he had joined a Try a Train Project. They let us know that he was now travelling independently and was enjoying all the benefits we take for granted through access to education, work, and leisure. The Try a Train scheme had helped him reach his full potential.

Michael Olden at Mortlake Station with Stuart Meek, David Wilby and the young artists at Mortlake

How long have you been a part of/ worked for the CRP?

Sandy Mahon, Line Officer for Windsor to Reading, joined in 2022 and Michael Olden took on the Hounslow to Richmond line in 2023. I have managed the SCRP since 2019, just in time to get us through COVID!

Arterio rollout celebration

We celebrated the official rollout of our new fleet of Arterio trains on the 28th November in Waterloo. We treated our customers and guests to a day packed with tours of the new trains and thrilling entertainment. The **Community Train CRP** supported with the ‘ Art ‘ element with pupils from St Johns Primary School, Kingston who helped the artists paint a mural in the morning . We also had a roving caricaturist who captured our guests during the day – and of course we had guest appearances from Wes and Sandy !

If you would like Wes and Sandy to attend one of your events next year, we are now able to ‘lend’ out the costumes. You would be squawking mad to miss out on this opportunity . Email swrcommunityrail@swrailway.com with your request.

New Malden

New Malden have been busy with their new planters at the station – and have planted some tulips ready for the spring as part of the #bigbulbplantout.

Station adopter Liz at New Malden with planters at New Malden

Honiton ticket booth

The ticket booth at Honiton that has been upcycled by SWR Fleet colleagues from Bournemouth depot

New Milton defibrilator training

Friends of New Milton after their defibrillator training

Recently, our new station adopters at New Milton participated in confidence training with our manikins and defibrillators. They learned how easy it is to use an AED and effectively perform CPR. It was such a pleasure to work with this enthusiastic group, eager to learn and make a difference. Sheree Whetren – SWR Wellbeing Practitioner had a lovely day with the group!

A few words from Jenni Jones - Community Rail Network

The last 6 months has been a whirlwind of station visits, conferences, meetings and calls. Being a newbie in the rail industry isn't for the faint-hearted – the acronyms alone are enough to fry your brain! – but when they told me Community Rail is like a family, they weren't kidding. I've met so many warm, devoted, resourceful and creative people on my travels, and I'm completely hooked.

The highlights are really too many to mention, but let's start by heading west. A trip on the Blackmore Vale line is a true joy, the home of the wonderful Stations In Bloom competition. And then there's Honiton! From holidays to hippos, the station features a stunning array of community art, signposting travellers to local charities and brightening the dreariest of days. Thanks to Martin and team, who are always willing to share their knowledge with others with others.

The community rooms are another jewel in the community rail crown – from cafes to community kitchens, heritage rooms to harvest festival collections, our volunteers and CRP's are always looking for more ways to support and enrich their communities. Projects like Shawford's Platform 1 café are not only creating employment, but it's also a safe space for vulnerable people who may not even have left the house. Truly life-changing stuff.

Looking forward, there's plenty more to come. Next year promises a year of celebration with community rail at the heart, championed by Paula and the SWR team. Surbiton are having a silent disco, we've got murals and art projects all over the region and even some amazing bioreceptive art panels at Ryde Esplanade, which double up at wildlife habitats! There's a parklet going in a Dorchester for the bike hire scheme, and Haslemere's signal box project will be ramping up.

So thanks everyone for the warm welcome and contagious energy you all bring. Roll on 2025!

South Western Railway