



London Northwestern Railway
Community Rail Report
2020

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Executive Summary

As we come to the end of a very challenging year, it has been extremely rewarding to look back at some of this year's achievements and to appreciate everything that was delivered despite the difficult situation. For 9 months of this year the usual station adoption activity had to take a temporary pause, however it has been heartening to see everyone pull together, support others in times of such adversity and for some of the networks local heroes to shine including the incredible Sir Captain Tom Moore, a local resident of the Marston Vale line.

The ongoing effort from our community partners and volunteers has been invaluable, they managed to find new ways to support disadvantaged communities and have been able to provide a lifeline for individuals and groups who have felt even more alone and isolated as a result of COVID.

The recent news regarding the resumption of the Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF) has injected hope and enthusiasm into the scheme holders. This funding will allow stakeholders, community partners and volunteers to deliver some incredible projects across the London Northwestern Railway network which will bring disused buildings back into use, tackle challenges regarding homelessness, improve station facilities and environments, introduce a community transport trial and develop training programmes for adults with learning difficulties and reach out to some of the more isolated members of our communities.

We are filled with enthusiasm and optimism as we look forward to 2021, there were so many exciting events and projects which had to be put on hold this year and we can't wait for them to start up again. There's no denying that the rail industry has a big job to do to get people back onto the trains and restore passenger's confidence in train travel and Community Rail and station adoption will play a vital role in this. We continue to be sincerely grateful for the ongoing support of our community partners and volunteers and the difference they make to the rail industry on a daily basis.

1. Community Funding

Our proposed funding has been discussed in collaboration with the Community Rail Network and we have taken on board their feedback. Funding arrangements have been discussed with the Community Rail Partnerships as part of their Accreditation and annual line plan review, we are content that they are able to deliver their planned activities with the allocated funding available to them from the business. The following table indicates the core funding which will be allocated to the Community Rail Partnerships next year;

	2021/2022
Marston Vale CRP	£44,384
Abbey Line CRP	£44,384
North Staffordshire CRP	£11,096
Total	£99,864

At the start of April 2020 £100,000 was made available for London Northwestern Railway and West Midlands Railway to invest in Community Rail initiatives which encourage additional community rail partnerships and station adopters. To date £26,471.66 has been spent, the table below outlines what projects have been funded through this initiative.

Name of group / organisation	Amount of funding	Description of project
LNR Community & Stakeholder event	£1788.26	Engagement event to announce this year's CCIF projects, showcase the work which has been delivered by our groups and to introduce community rail to new audiences
Women in Community Rail	£2616	Contribution towards production of 2 films to get more people involved in community rail, station adoption and careers in the industry
Friends of Nuneaton	£1000	Additional planters for the new volunteers
North Staffordshire CRP	£440	New art mural at the station designed by new volunteer group
Friends of Winsford Station	£990.25	Community artwork designed by local schools who wanted to volunteer and improve station environment
Friends of Woburn Sands	£375	Promotional event to encourage more volunteers to get involved
North Staffordshire CRP	£2000	Rails to Trails booklet – encouraging more people to get into community rail, volunteering and discovering walks from stations
Marston Vale CRP	£1000	Project to encourage more people to get involved in community rail and rail travel
Wolverton and Greenleys Council Town Council	£2978.48	Additional planters for the new volunteers
Friends of Bletchley Station	£1000	Sponsorship for engagement event and additional planters for the new volunteers
Friends of Penkridge Station	£549.50	Additional planters for the new volunteers
Abbey Line CRP	£6500	Bee Friendly Trust and new volunteers project
Friends of Stone Station	£305	Additional planters for the new volunteers

WMT Community Rail Conference	£3945	Annual conference to showcase the work which has been delivered by our groups and to introduce community rail to new audiences
Total	£26,471.66	

Due to COVID, April's Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF) was postponed, however approval was given by the DfT in late Autumn and projects will commence by the end of this year. We have awarded £797,370.00 for projects on the London Northwestern Railway network and section 4 of this paper provides more information on all 14 projects.

We have also awarded £9,219 to Escape Arts who we will be working with to deliver the Community Arts Scheme committed obligation. This project will develop a public art installation at Nuneaton, which will provide a powerful sense of place, warm welcome and a symbol of community engagement as people both arrive and depart the station. The work will provide a platform for public engagement with the station and the rail service, creating a positive and uplifting environment, building warmth and connectivity with our passengers. This project will be delivered by the end of March 2021 and will coincide with Network Rail's redevelopment works of the over bridge at Nuneaton station.

2. Community Rail Partnerships and overview of this year's activities and achievements

The Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership

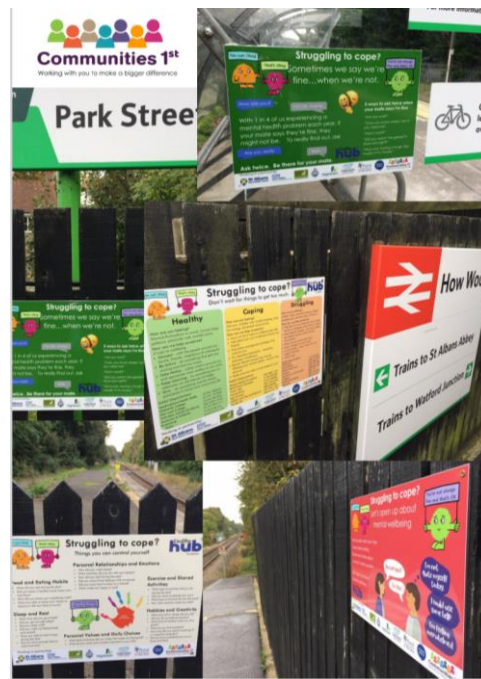
The partnership commissioned Groundwork Hertfordshire and community graffiti artist Mark Tanti to produce new artwork for the Abbey Line. Students and volunteers from St Columba's School, Watford North Scouts, children from Park street Church of England School and Watford St John's Church of England Primary School all took part in the workshops and were asked to create a piece of art based on something which represents the Abbey Line. The Elected Mayor for Watford was asked to unveil a series of children's artwork before it was displayed at each station between Watford Junction and St Albans Abbey.



During October the partnership organised a week of volunteering at Watford Junction station with support from Building Better Opportunities and Mencap Watford, Communities 1st, Hertfordshire County Council, London Northwestern Railway and the Bee Friendly Trust. The volunteers shifted over 10 tonnes of gravel, soil, vegetation and roots before the planters were refilled with soil, bark, spring bulbs and pollinator plants. The project will continue next year with children's artwork, information boards and bee / bug hotels.



Communities 1st have designed 4 mental health awareness posters which have been put up at every station along the Abbey Line. The information included on the posters is even more prevalent at this moment in time, especially as people struggle with the ongoing challenges of COVID and they have been a great reminder that there is help out there how they can get the help they need.



The partnership is already starting to think about how they will encourage people back to rail in 2021, their activities include an updated and interactive website which will feature their new attraction guide which has been designed in partnership with volunteers, local stakeholders and passengers of the line.

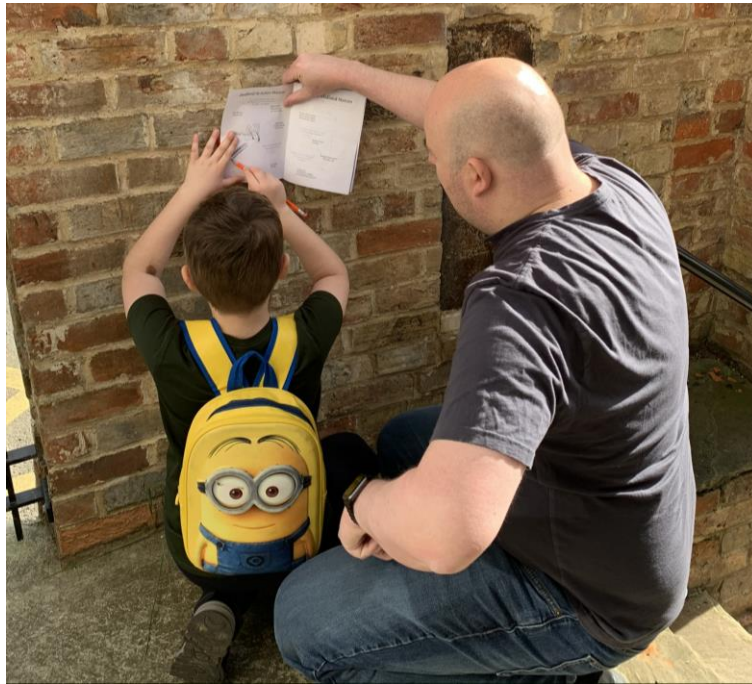
They are also working on a 7-week rail confidence programme with Building Better Opportunities and Mencap Watford, the project will help the partnership gain a better understanding into some the challenges people with additional needs have and which prevents them from visiting a station and using the train. At the end of the programme the individuals who have taken part in the session will design and produce artwork for the waiting room on platform 11 of Watford Junction station as well as a pocket sized self-help leaflet, offering information and assistance on how to make rail travel easier and safer.

Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership

In honour of local hero Captain Tom Moore a poetry plaque was unveiled at his local station, Millbrook. The plaque is a special acknowledgement and recognition of Captain Tom's remarkable efforts in raising more than £32 million for NHS charities throughout the coronavirus pandemic crisis. The wording was crafted by Mick Child, a Social Prescribing caseworker at the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and his tribute is displayed on both platforms at Millbrook Station. It is visible for passengers and the local community to read and pause for a moment of reflection and contemplation in honour of for Captain Tom for years to come.



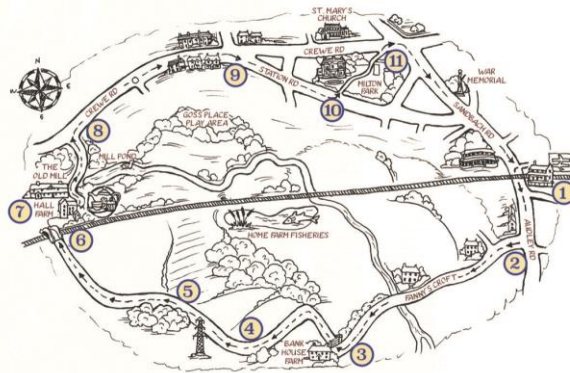
The partnership recently launched their Symbol Spot Trail which has been created in association with Mini Map Makers. The trail is an interactive activity which encourages families to travel along the line to spot a variety of symbols, produce rubbings in their booklets, whilst learning about the history of the line and rail safety. Children are encouraged to collect a symbol rubbing from every station along the line before handing their booklet in, in return for a Completion Coin. On the launch day craft workshops were held at Ridgmont and two bespoke Symbol Spot ordinance survey maps are being produced which feature the whole of the Marston Vale Line on one map.



Throughout lockdown the partnership continued to support local community group, Khush Haal. The relationship with this group was formed just over a year ago and supports Asian women in and around Bedford who are socially isolated, due to their various caring responsibilities and suffer with low mood, anxiety and depression. Last year the group enjoyed a day out on the Marston Vale Line, a visit to Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre and tea rooms, but during lockdown the ladies struggled to meet up and due to a lack of funding their regular classes were cancelled. The partnership were able to direct some of their funding and contributed towards the cost of the exercise classes and equipment. The classes and support of the group has been a lifeline for these ladies to help improve their mental wellbeing and feel less socially isolated.

North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership

The partnership has been working on a Rails to Trails booklet, which is a collection of short walks from stations on the North Staffordshire CRP route, including Alsager, Kidsgrove, Stone and Penkridge on the London Northwestern Railway network. The aim of the booklet is to encourage people to use off peak trains to access stations and to explore on foot the benefits of physical and mental health. The walks and routes have been designed so that they pass by local businesses and shops, cafes and pubs and places for refreshments are all highlighted in the book. There is also an additional dementia friendly walk from Alsager station.



Together with the partnership we have been working with social enterprise, Chase Aqua Rural Enterprise (CARE) to produce a large artwork mural at Penkridge station. We organised for the service users to take a train ride to Stone Station to see some art work already displayed there. CARE's wellbeing group chose their own photos and artwork depicting the plants and animals they help to look after at their base at Lower Drayton Farm. The mural shows a plan of the site surrounded by the participants' artwork and serves to raise awareness of this valuable centre for educational and therapeutic rural activities.

New station adoption groups have been formed at Stone and Penkridge station this year, with thanks to Emma McIntosh the new Partnership Officer. Despite it being a challenging year, the group have already achieved so much with some very exciting plans in the pipeline for 2021.

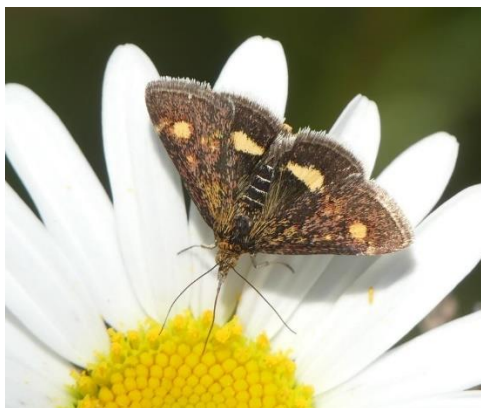


Station Adoption

The Friends of Acton Bridge collected an award at Cheshire Best kept Station Awards for Best Art project. The artwork was created by pupils from Crowton Primary School and was put up to brighten the station entrance and old booking hall. The Friends of Acton Bridge are one of London Northwestern Railway's most active groups, with monthly working party days and a growing number of volunteers. Engagement with the primary school has continued and we have been talking to the pupils about rail safety and facilitating railway confidence train trips.



In autumn 2019, London Northwestern Railway held a volunteer day at Leighton Buzzard to help prepare the area on platform 1 and sow more wildflower seeds. During lockdown, the wildflower garden sprung into action and a wildlife photographer was able to capture some fantastic pictures of the creatures in their natural habitat. The photographer was able to record three species of bumble bee and two species of solitary bee, hoverflies, beetles, several varieties of moths and butterflies. The encouraging news is that there was a beetle or a fly on most of the flower heads and nearly all the insects were functioning as pollinators.



The Friends of Berkhamsted completed their makeover of the garden at the rear of the station and was delivered during lockdown by the 6 members of the group with £1500 from London Northwestern Railway's Small Grants Fund. The group have been overwhelmed with positive feedback from passerby's, rail passengers and local residents.

Before and after photos



We also managed to welcome new station adoption groups at Atherstone, Cheddington and Water Orton this year as well and sign up over 30 new volunteers.

Community Rail Awards

At this year's Community Rail Awards, the Abbey Line community rail partnership collected a third prize awards in the Tourism and Heritage category for their Christmas in St Albans By Community Rail campaign. The Friends of Berkhamsted, Fenny Stratford and Woburn Sands were also recognised for all their hard work and ongoing commitment to station adoption in the 'It's your Station' category.

3. Community Rail Conference

We moved this year's event on to a digital platform and held our first virtual community rail conference. We welcomed a national audience of over 200 attendees from locations across the UK and invited Peter Wilkinson, MD of Passenger Services at the DfT and Robert Nisbet, Director of Nations and Regions at the Rail Delivery Group to be two of our guest speakers and to give their overview on rail recovery. We also showed two films which we made with Morning Sunshine a coffee business at Warwick Parkway station and The Friends of Berkhamsted Station who had to change and adapt their usual ways of working as a result of COVID.

During the two hour conference we talked through how the Community Rail movement at West Midlands Trains is supporting our rail recovery efforts and despite the national pandemic, our communities and stakeholders have been able to launch new ventures that focus on localism and economic and social revival.



To end the conference we announced the launch of Community Rail Accolades - a joint celebration of community rail which will be held during the summer of 2021 to celebrate this year's tireless work and achievements of our community partners and volunteers.

4. Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF)

Bidding for this year's CCIF scheme opened in September 2019 following a wide communications campaign which called for stakeholders, community partners, volunteers and colleagues to submit applications for customer and community focussed projects. Following the the four-week consultation period, we received a total of 208 applications with a value of over £7 million, from this a shortlist was drawn together and independantly assessed by a community panel before being submitted to the DfT for the final sign off. Below is an outline and overview of the 14 London Northwestern Railway projects.

	PROJECT TITLE	ORGANISATION	OVERVIEW OF PROJECT	CCIF FUNDING
1	Unity Park Station Community Club & Centre	Winter Shelter Keynes	Night Milton	£30,000
2	Mind the Gap	Art Alert	The project will invest in the regeneration of the Nuneaton Station Gallery, creating a dynamic community cultural wellbeing hub from which to deliver a 12 month change-making programme with lasting legacy archives linked to rail heritage and place based memories. All underpinned by an exciting volunteer	£49,500

			and emerging youth talent programme.	
3	Bricket Wood station Community Hub	Bricket Wood Station Trust	Restore the old station building at Bricket Wood and turn it into an exciting new space for the benefit of the community.	£250,000
4	Station Square Revitalisation	Milton Keynes City Council	This project seeks to transform Station Square in Milton Keynes, this area gives visitors their first impressions of the city once they leave the doors of the station. It is a public transport hub connecting rail passengers with bus services, bicycle hire opportunities and taxis as well as walking routes to the city centre. The project's purpose is to transform Station Square into a lively, bustling space by introducing community activity, making it feel more welcoming, pleasant and sociable. Additionally it seeks to improve bus travel, cycling and digital infrastructure.	£275,000
5	Tring & District Community Transport Project	Tring Town Council	The bid is by a consortium of 9 parish councils to provide a pilot community transport scheme for those who need transport to the station because of age, sickness, disability or poverty, or belong to a community group	£20,560
6	Women in rail community officer post	Women in Community Rail	Support an officer for three days per week to developing a website, twitter engagement and a greater presence on social media. It would also fund more training events, advertising, improved and reprinting of new literature, networking with more diverse community groups and sharing of best practice opportunities, with a stronger and more tangible support given to the newly established sister group recently launched in September 2019 in the South of the country.	£25,000
7	Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre Enhancement Scheme	Marston Vale CRP	As part of our work to achieve Museum Accreditation from the Arts Council, we are seeking funding to improve the visitor experience and reduce our carbon footprint through the following: Replica gas lamps in the Meeting Room with LED bulbs, Audio facilities in the Booking Office for visitors to listen to clips, Audio visual facilities for the foyer, Pathway around the building for disabled visitors, New Welcome Sign outside the building, Installation of hand dryers in the toilets and Hot water heater timer	£4,230
8	The Homeless Games	The Homeless Games	The Homeless Games (THG) is an Olympic style event to engage the most vulnerable of our society. There are sports for all abilities to take part in from football, cycling, board games. April 2021 is our tenth year, the event will be a two day family festival event to encourage the public to attend to	£20,000

			break down the stigma of people with issues are looked at in the community.	
9	Abbey Line Waiting Shelter Enhancements	Abbey Line CRP	Watford North and How Wood currently have passenger shelters not fit for purpose. They are 'open planned', give no protection to our passengers from bad weather or provide sturdy modern seating. On a line where the waiting time between trains is 45 minutes, there needs to be adequate, comfortable and safe waiting facilities.	£80,000
10	Abbey Line Station Enhancements	Abbey Line CRP	All but one of the Abbey line stations are un-manned. The station environs are bland and un-inviting and acting on feedback from the community and rail user group we want to change that. Volunteers are unable to do much due to no running water, so by providing water butts and planters at the station, this will make it possible for volunteers to work at the stations and maintain them. The aim is to provide and fit five stations on the line with these	£4,300
11	Wolverton Station Improvements - Signage	Wolverton & Greenleys Town Council	Wolverton & Greenleys Town Council are currently working in partnership with Milton Keynes Council and West Midland Railways to increase the commuters and visitors through Wolverton Station. As the station is not situated in the centre of the town we would like to increase the directional signage for people.	£10,000
12	Active and On Track	CARE CIC	CARE CIC is a wellbeing project providing therapeutic rural activities, vocational skills/accredited training to adults with mental health issues and learning/physical difficulties, those socially isolated needing help to re-engage in positive independent lifestyles. Our Active and On Track project would offer a 12 month programme to support health/wellbeing by building confidence/self-esteem, offering a programme of activities in a beautiful rural setting	£20,880
13	Build self-esteem and resilience	The Swan Youth Project Limited	The Swan Youth Project is a Berkhamsted based charity that aims to support the young people of the town and environs as they develop into responsible adults. Our focus is to reduce crime/challenge assumptions for teens 'we need a knife to stay safe' – changing this to a feeling of safety from the community and oneself therefore not needing a knife.	£4,900
14	Trees for Station Road, Long Buckby	Long Buckby Community	This project will bring members of the community together to improve the ecological environment by planting a variety of small trees and flowers along Station Road, Long Buckby.	£3,000
			TOTAL	£797,370