

Community Rail Report

2024



Pictured above: Children from St Bartholomew's C of E Primary School, with Linda Stokes, SWR.

Foreword

I'm delighted to welcome you all to this celebration of the work done by our magnificent Community Rail Partnerships and Station Adopters over the last 12 months.

I've had the absolute pleasure of meeting many of you and seeing first-hand the amazing range of things you do to enhance your stations and communities.

The role you all play in helping stations evolve from a place to get on and off trains into focal points for their local communities can never be underestimated, and for that I'd like to thank you all.

We provide funding for 12 Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) across our network which do invaluable work to promote the railway and its development, encourage people to use more sustainable means of travel, and - most of all - helping our customers to get the most out of their station spaces and environments.

These CRPs also support volunteers to adopt their local station, and I'm delighted that well over half the stations we serve have now been adopted - 105 at the last count.

During the last year our CRPs and station adopters have continued to drive some great initiatives which have become landmarks in the South Western Railway (SWR) year. These have included a year of fabulous artwork around the network - from England's National Mural at Feltham to the Bitterne Art Trail, whilst we have also seen veteran cars at Micheldever and the Monte Carlo Rally-winning Mini Cooper at Waterloo.

I also want to commend all the colleagues and CRPs who have helped to give many more people the confidence and knowledge they needed to use the train, some for the very first time, though our successful and popular Try the Train initiative.

SWR truly values the hard work that all our volunteers undertake and on behalf of all my colleagues across the business I want to thank you all for everything you do. I will be continuing to visit stations across the network and look forward to meeting even more of you in person.



Stuart Meek
Managing Director



Making train travel easier

2024 has been another brilliant year for Trying the Train across our network.

With the help of Satty Potiwal, Southampton Central Duty Station Manager, pupils from the Polygon Special Educational Needs (SEN) School in Southampton took a Try the Train trip from Southampton to Portsmouth, spending the day at the Spinnaker Tower and watching the Royal Navy aircraft carriers in dock. The pupils were particularly fascinated with the trains and train announcements.



Basingstoke Cub Pack spent an evening on the railway alongside Duty Control Manager Sam Cullington, who showed the group how to navigate a railway station before making a journey on a train to Fleet and back. The group learned about the importance of railway safety, which will contribute towards their Personal Safety badge.

A group from Muntsy's Community Based Learning and Activity Centre in Portland really enjoyed their day out with **Purbeck CRP** where they gained greater confidence and independence.



Reading to Windsor CRP partnered with Reading Buses to support a dual event for clients from two Wokingham-based organisations: Optalis, a social care provider, and CLASP, a self-advocacy group for people with learning disabilities. The programme was designed to empower and promote the use of multiple forms of different public transport and their links, particularly for those with disabilities and also to support their careers, to understand what can be done to promote inclusive travel.



A mural (pictured above) representing local wildlife was unveiled by Winchester's mayor, Cllr Russell Gordon-Smith at Micheldever railway station, during the vintage car weekend (see pp11) . The whole event was organised by Sue Bell from Friends of Micheldever and painted by local artist Sian Storey. It has already received a lot of positive feedback.'

A Network of Artwork

Artwork at our stations has continued to flourish throughout the year, as station adoption groups and CRPs have unleashed their inner Picassos to make our network look more beautiful and decorative than ever!

In **Honiton**, new artwork created by pupils from Honiton Primary School was installed on the station's footbridge and platform. In **Weybridge**, students from the nearby St James Primary School created some excellent artwork for the station waiting room.



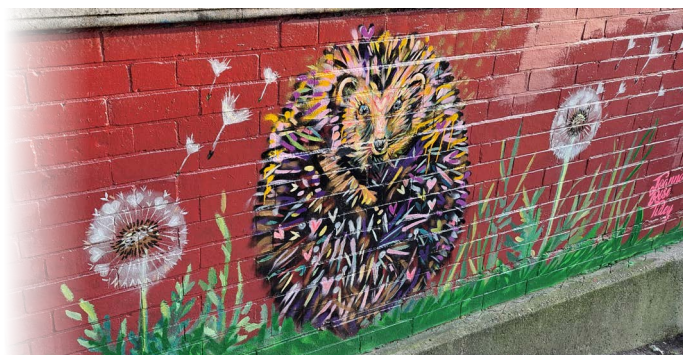
Over in **Swaythling**, artwork created by local group working with men experiencing isolation was displayed on boarded-up windows through a project called Drawing on the Outside. The project provided a space for these individuals to come together and reconnect with their community, whilst creating some brilliant art to brighten up the station.



Feltham was chosen to host the 2024 England's National Mural. Designed by Global Roots, the mural saw **Feltham Station Adopters**, alongside Feltham Community Development Association, Hounslow Council and Feltham residents contribute over 1,300 tiles (ranging from paintings of local landmarks to abstract designs to make a unique piece of art. Hung on the wall to the station – it certainly makes a



Bitterne Art Trail, funded by the Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF) and opened by celebrity guest Chris Packham – came alive this summer. The new wildlife art trail, centered around Bitterne Station (**supported by Hampshire CRP**), is one of murals based on photos taken by some of the local community exhibiting Hampshire's beautiful wildlife through the urban environment of the



Visit this site to find out more about Bitterne Station's 'Nature all around Us' Art Trail



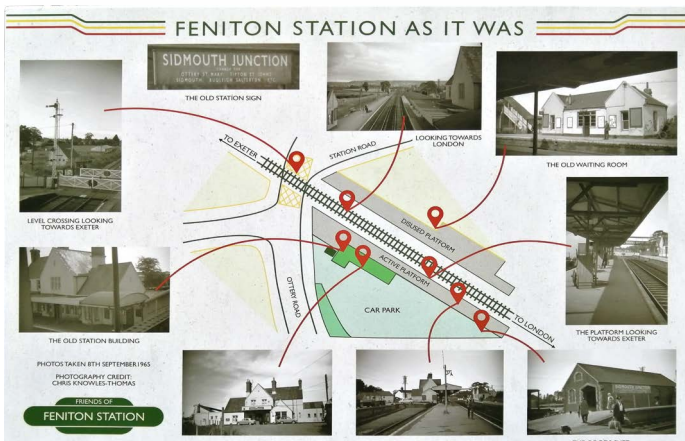
Spotlight on Sustainability

Our Community Rail Partnerships and station adoption groups have continued to make a big push towards sustainability with their planting and projects.

Feniton Station Improvement Project

This year, **Feniton Station** has undergone a major makeover and it's looking greater than ever. Lots of vegetation has been cleared along the disused platform and new station planters have been added in its place containing wildlife-friendly planting and items designed to encourage insects. Boards have also been added along the station platform with information on Feniton's history for people to read whilst they are waiting for their trains. This includes stories on how Feniton Station was used and how it changed over time, such as when General Eisenhower spent the night in Feniton Sidings during World War II. The small 'Feniton' name sign, also introduced as part of the project, is an exact replica of the signs installed at the station for its reopening after four years of closure on 5 May 1971.

This work was led by the **Friends of Feniton Station**, and supported by Dorset Wildlife Trust. Funding came from SWR's Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF).



Staines Community Garden

Loyal volunteers at Incredible Edible Community Garden, **Staines** Railway Station, have taken disused land and transformed the space into a thriving, fruitful community focal point and the produce is available for all to enjoy for free.



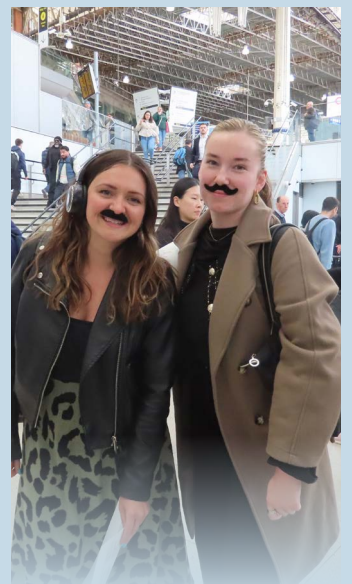
Biodiversity week

The Sustainability team hosted a biodiversity volunteer week in March, with teams of colleagues and the station adopters, to enhance and help improve the biodiversity at stations. This included moving a tonne of topsoil into the flowerbeds at **Raynes Park**, planting eight planters with UK-native flowering plants at **Pokesdown**, and weeding and tidying the flowerbeds at Havant.



Celebrating Icons on our Network

This year we celebrated two of our network's biggest celebrity icons – Freddie Mercury and Brian May. Hounslow and Richmond CRP partnered with Friends of Feltham Green, who led a unique tour around Feltham to explore the hometown of the two pop stars from their local school to their family homes, with a chance to see the only UK memorial to Freddie. In Waterloo, station-goers were also treated to all things Queen, as Dune Rao-reed, with guitarist Petar and the SWR choir, performed some classics for customers coming through.



Working together

Over the last year, Our Community Rail Partnerships have continued building relationships with businesses and other communities on the network, with great results.

The Salisbury – Exeter Rail Ale Trail

The Salisbury – Exeter Rail Ale Trail was launched this year to encourage people to visit local pubs by train across the network. Organised by the **Devon & Cornwall CRP** and **Blackmore Vale CRP**, the Rail Ale Trail consists of 19 pubs dotted along the railway line between the two cities, all of which are within easy reach of the stations in the towns and villages they serve. Small independent establishments were delighted to be asked to take part in this great initiative.



Visit this site to find out more about the Rail Ale Trail.



Rail to Trail walks

The first Rail to Trail Walking Festival took place in April and connected SWR's railway to guided walks around the beautiful surrounding countryside. Over 20 walks were available, each led by a local expert and ranging in difficulties and distances. The walks were developed in partnership with the **Hills to Harbour CRP**, and **New Forest and Isle of Wight CRP** and were a great success with over 100 people taking part.

Supporting Onward Travel

Several of our CRPs have continued to work in partnership with local attractions but supporting onward travel from our stations. This has included the Arne Bus from Wareham and the Test Valley and South Downs Rambler buses at the weekend – which have proved very successful.

Purbeck and South Wessex CRP collaborated on an informative tourism video to encourage customers to travel to their stations.

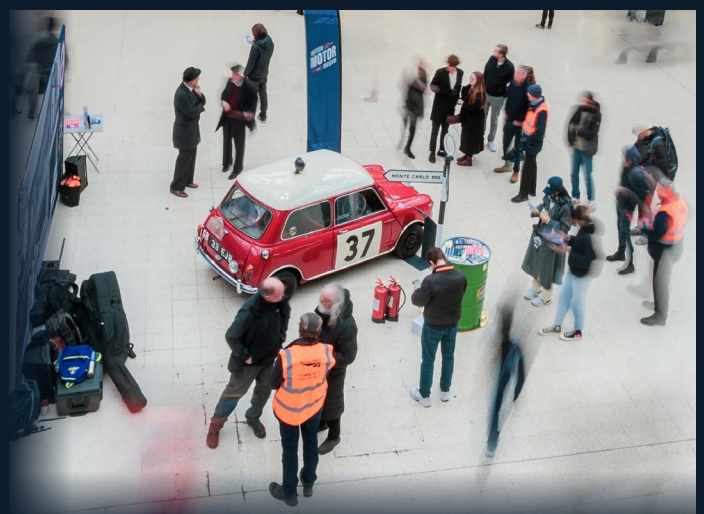


Scan this link to view the video

Cars Through the Ages

Never let it be said that we only ever talk about trains! Over the past year, some of our CRPs have celebrated another popular form of transport, from veteran cars to classic Mini Coopers and old school motors.

In January, The Community Brain CRP turned back the clocks to the swinging sixties to commemorate the Mini Cooper's legendary win at the Monte Carlo Rally in 1964. Marking 60 years since the victory, the original winning car was displayed at London Waterloo to celebrate its sporting successes. More than 200 Mini Coopers and Minis from the last 60 years also gathered at Surbiton, accompanied by 60s style music renditions and a screening of 'The Italian Job.'



July saw the celebration of the first recorded motorised car journey from Micheldever station to Datchet Close near Windsor Castle. In 1895 Hon. Evelyn Ellis collected his car which had travelled by train from Southampton from Micheldever station and made its adventurous first trip. Over 15 cars took place on the journey and **The Friends of Micheldever station** held community led events over the whole weekend to honor the event.



Security and Sustainable Transport

Many of our station adoption groups and CRPs got involved in offering free security marking, maintenance and general safety advice across various stations. Once customers have had their bikes marked, their bikes are registered on a national database used by all UK Police forces. During these events, we also have an opportunity to discuss active and sustainable travel with other valued tourism partners, highlighting the many cycle routes available from our stations to interesting places to visit.



Pictured above: Friends of Brockenhurst (bold) at their bike event in March.

Reading Family Fun Day!

Reading to Basingstoke CRP joined forces with Windsor to Reading CRP, Network Rail, Great Western Railway, Reading Buses, and Brighter Futures for Children to provide a free family fun day at Reading Station. Families got the opportunity to speak to the British Transport Police (BTP), take part in an activity to spot the dangers on a model railway and learn about travelling most economically. The day was a huge success and will become an annual event in the future.

You are invited to a FREE

Thursday 15th
February 2024

FAMILY FUN DAY

— at Reading Station —

Brunei Arcade
Reading Station
RG1 1LT

Enjoy activities including:

- Quizzes to enjoy exploring the station
- Meeting British Transport Police; you may be lucky enough to see inside a police van
- Using props to take photos as someone who works on the railway
- Signalling activity for Lego fans
- Decorating signs for the station

Suitable for ages 4-11. Children must be accompanied by adults.

Time slots between
10 am & 3.30 pm
Booking essential



<http://tinyurl.com/58xbdw9>



A big thank you to our volunteers, old and new

Thank you again to all the amazing volunteers who worked hard across the network this year to keep our stations looking wonderful. Whether you've been tidying stations, planting bulbs, working in one of the station shops or serving food to the local community, it wouldn't be possible without you.

Going for Gold

We have been delighted to support students achieve their Duke of Edinburgh awards through different volunteering schemes. This includes Allegra who has been volunteering with the **West Byfleet** Community Gardening Group (pictured right), and Nina, Noah and Stanley at Petersfield Free shop (pictured below).



Our station adoption number has now reached over a century! – which is tremendous. We welcomed to the community rail family this year – **New Milton, Fleet, Beaulieu, Pokesdown, Southampton Central and Vauxhall, Ashvale and Cosham** plus some new additions to original groups at **Christchurch** and **Woking**.

Many of our stations continued to take part in Stations in Bloom this year, alongside entering the RHS Southeast competition – showcasing and celebrating volunteering and all the wonderful work that has been achieved.

A final note from Paula

Once again thank you all for your hard work, dedication, and support for community rail. It has proved to be another really successful year. I am delighted so many of you entered our first SWR Community Awards and I have really enjoyed travelling across the network to see and hear first-hand about all your great projects. I am also looking forward to celebrating Railway 200 during 2025 and supporting you showcasing the history and personal stories that so many of our stations hold. It is going to be a year to truly remember!



How to get involved

Community Rail

If you're interested in rail, looking to volunteer – either regularly or on an ad hoc basis – or would just like meet some new people, why not join your local community rail partnership? There are 12 CRPs and over 100 adopted stations across the south west to choose from.

Station Adoption

If you're looking for a place to stretch your green fingers, make good use of some time, or help brighten up your local area, why not consider adopting your local station?

- We work with you to develop your plan.
- We provide safety training relevant to your station, so that your aspirations can be delivered safely.
- We provide funding for your group to join the Community Rail Network (the national body for station adopters) which gives you access to more funding.
- We support your group's work through our communication channels.

Email Paula.Aldridge@swrailway.com to find out more.