



Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership Annual Meeting

Minutes of meeting held on 26th June 2023 6 pm – 8 pm.

Apologies

Mr Andy Smith – Watford Borough Council
 Ms Maria Cutler – St Albans City & District Council
 Cllr. Steve Cavinder - Meriden Tudor Division
 Mr Robert Yorke – Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust
 Mr Thomas Barlow – Avanti West Coast

Agenda item	Notes	Action																		
1. Welcome & introductions	Meeting was Chaired by Chair, Sandy Walkington Chair Sandy Walkington (SW) led the welcome and introductions were made.																			
2. Approval of minutes	Chair asked if the minutes from the last AGM were considered a true record. This was seconded and approved.																			
3. Election of Chair & Vice Chair	<p>As per ALCRP constitution each year a Chair and Vice Chair must be voted in and only members of the steering group can vote. One vote per organisation. Email votes received for those eligible to vote but not present. To help adjudicate the voting EW appointed Paul Webster from Community Rail Network. Candidate: Cllr Sandy Walkington The votes were cast as follows for Chair.</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: 40px;"> <tbody> <tr><td>Hertfordshire County Council</td><td>yes</td></tr> <tr><td>London Northwestern Railway</td><td>yes</td></tr> <tr><td>Communities 1st</td><td>yes</td></tr> <tr><td>Watford Bor. Council</td><td>yes via email</td></tr> <tr><td>St Albans D & C</td><td>yes via email</td></tr> <tr><td>Abfly Rail users' group</td><td>yes</td></tr> <tr><td>St Stephen Parish</td><td>yes</td></tr> <tr><td>Avanti west coast</td><td>yes via email</td></tr> <tr><td>Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust</td><td>Absent Vote not received</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Hertfordshire County Council	yes	London Northwestern Railway	yes	Communities 1 st	yes	Watford Bor. Council	yes via email	St Albans D & C	yes via email	Abfly Rail users' group	yes	St Stephen Parish	yes	Avanti west coast	yes via email	Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust	Absent Vote not received	
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This was proposed and seconded, Cllr. Sandy Walkington re-elected as Chair for 2023/2024.

Candidate for Vice Chair: Mr Robert Varney
The votes were cast as follows for Vice Chair

Hertfordshire County Council	yes
London Northwestern Railway	yes
Communities 1 st	yes
Watford Bor. Council	yes via email
St Albans D & C	yes via email
Abfly Rail users group	yes
St Stephen Parish	yes
Avanti west coast	yes via email
Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust	Absent Vote not received

This was proposed and seconded. Mr Robert Varney confirmed as Vice Chair for 2023/2024

Confirmation of ALCRP members is as follows
Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership members and representatives 23/24

Member Organisation	Representative
Hertfordshire County Council (Host Organisation)	Mrs Val Male
ABLY Rail User Group	Mr Peter Brooke
St Stephen Parish Council	Cllr. Nicholas Tyndale
London Northwestern Railway	Mrs Vicky Cropper- Clarke
Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust	Mr Robert Yorke
Community Development Action (CDA Herts)	Mrs Kate Belinis
Communities 1 st	Mr Robert Varney
St Albans BID	Vivian Cannon
St Albans District Council	Ms Maria Cutler Jenny Swatton
Watford Borough Council	Mr Andy Smith

		Community Rail Network	Mr Paul Webster		
		Abbey Theatre	Ms Tina Swain		
		Park Street Residents Assoc.	Mrs Joy Mendelsohn		
		AVANTI West Coast	Mr Thomas Barlow		
		Watford BID	TBC		
		Partnership Development Officer	Mrs Edna Woname		
		Chair	Cllr. Sandy Walkington		
		Vice Chair	Mr Robert Varney		

<p>4. New Chair address</p>	<p>Cllr. Sandy Walkington's address</p> <p>When I see the agenda item 'Chairman's Address', the schoolboy in me wants to say 6 Hobbs Hill Welwyn and sit down. But I have to behave.</p> <p>AGM's are a necessary evil, we try to make ours as painless as possible with time built in for networking.</p> <p>I will start my remarks with a memory, which as fellow addicts will tell you Facebook does for you, so you do not need to remember anything, increasingly useful as I age. In fact, I increasingly think it is the main reason for using Facebook even if no-one else does because you do get these anniversary memories flashed up in front of you.</p> <p>So today I woke up, reached for my phone and read my status from 10 years ago, i.e., 26 June 2013. It was terse and to the point:</p> <p>QUOTE</p> <p>At the AGM of the Abbey Flyer (sic) Community Rail Partnership hearing the sad story of the shelved light rail project</p> <p>UNQUOTE</p> <p>Little did I realise that ten years later I would be standing up and chairing this year's AGM all because of the blandishments of your distinguished and about-to-retire Vice Chair David Parry who persuade me to throw my hat in the ring.</p> <p>Actually, I remember being at St Albans Abbey Station when my friend Andrew Adonis then Secretary of State for Transport first launched the light rail scheme. We know the reasons why it failed and I know light rail is not everyone's cup of tea, but it seems somehow emblematic of us always being the bridesmaid but never the bride.</p> <p>As I write in this year's annual report. in many ways this has been another frustrating year with far too frequent cancellations of the train service making it</p>	
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very difficult to rebuild usage after Covid. Of course, industrial action has played its part with the whole industry feeling like a political football, but it is hard not to feel picked on when all too often the first recourse of London Northwestern is to cancel our service. It is hard graft being a Community Rail Replacement Bus Partnership.

Nevertheless, there are things to celebrate. When the trains are running, the new 'clock-face' timetable during off-peak hours is far less complicated for people to remember, while the additional later evening service makes it a realistic proposition for people on nights out on Watford or St Albans to use the train.

We resumed the festive Santa Express. My warmest thanks to the then Mayor of St Albans, Cllr Geoff Harrison, for being such a perfect Santa and to all his friends from St Albans Rotary Club who dressed up as his little helpers. I ducked the opportunity to wear an elf costume and turned out as the Thin Controller instead. It was a truly joyful occasion, my thanks to everyone involved.

In terms of projects, we are replacing some of the notice boards along the line together with a new one in partnership with the Sopwell Residents Association planned for the heavily used foot crossing over the line at Cottonmill in St Albans. This will give us many more eyeballs for our activities and everything to do with the line.

Initial clearance works have begun with our planned community garden at Garston Station, where we are working in partnership with Sunnyside Rural Trust, a social enterprise that works with vulnerable young people and particularly those with learning difficulties. With Rob Varney's assistance we are also hoping to involve Earthworks and the Daylight Club as well as residents living immediately locally to Garston Station. It is projects like these that put 'the community' into Community Rail Partnerships.

We are also looking forward to working closely with the Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust as they bring to imminent fruition their magnificent vision of a restored station with a period Edwardian tearoom. The Abbey Line has never really had a signature attraction along the route, this is going to be a tremendous opportunity.

Some other musings if I may. As you may know, there has been a gleam in the county council's eye about an East-West mass rapid transit following the line of the A414. The Abbey Line corridor was seen as having a key role in terms of connection Watford and St Albans to the route, albeit with some dangerous language about busways. It has all been very speculative and there has been a strong sense of things coming off the boil. I have to commend my friend Paul Spelzini who as well as being station adopter for a number of stations along the line is also an indefatigable campaigner for buses.

I am sure Paul will not mind if I say that he is like a dog with a bone, and he extracted the following information from Herts CC – I am abridging:

The HERT is very much something HCC are looking at progressing and is a long-term aspiration. We are currently having on-going discussions with the Department for Transport (DfT), as the funding back drop has changed over the last year. Over the last year, it became apparent that to successfully fund a scheme such as the HERT the business case would need to appeal to a wider audience than just the traditional DfT transport business case route. As such we have modified our approach to this phase of the project and are working to

produce a prospectus for the HERT project that will appeal to multi funding partners rather than solely producing a traditional transport focused DfT business case.

It sounds like something produced by ChatBotGPT but I think the message can be summarised in two words, 'grass' and 'long'. We need to continue to track this, but I do not anticipate any magic money tree in the near future, it makes it even more important that we promote the Abbey Line on its own merits.

But there is another elephant in the room and that is the Radlett Aerodrome Rail freight Terminal. It really looks like this is going ahead although I did try to throw a spanner in the works wearing my opposition county councillor hat. Keen as I am on rail freight, I still believe this is the wrong location. But if it is going to happen, we need to be in a position to leverage it, both in terms of seeking good links for Park Street station to the site both during construction and operation so that workers can travel there is an environmentally sustainable way and in the long term, we should take out our long spoons and sup with SEGRO who should be wanting to burnish their community credentials and will be seeking partnerships.

Finally, some thank you's and sad good-byes. David Parry was born and brought up in Bricket Wood and has spent most of his life there or in Park Street. His grandfather worked on the line, and he has been a magnificent Vice-Chair, giving me a huge amount of support. He is now betraying his roots and moving to Flamstead, and so is stepping down from St Stephen Parish Council, whose representative on the steering group he was.

We will be co-opting David as a member of the steering group, but we are pleased to welcome Rob Varney from Communities 1st as our new Vice Chair. Rob is no stranger to the CRP, he brings a refreshingly different focus to our deliberations and activities by looking through the prism of volunteering and focusing on marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

And we also have to say good-bye to Vicky Cropper-Clarke, who has been the community strategy manager for West Midlands Trains and a tireless supporter of us and all the community rail partnerships in the West Midlands and London Northwestern franchises. It cannot always have been easy, but her infectious enthusiasm has remained undimmed. We wish her well in her new role in Trans Pennine Trains, they are lucky to be gaining her to the team.

Unfortunately, Vicky is unable to be here tonight so we cannot thank her in person. I am pleased that Victoria is here to take any questions.

My final thanks of course to Val Male, Hertfordshire County Council's rail officer, and to the irrepressible Edna Woname who is our very own Community Rail Officer. It is a privilege and pleasure to work with them.

You will recall that the bureaucratic but necessary redrafting of our constitution and terms of reference was signed off at last year's AGM. One of the changes in the new document is that it clearly term-limits the length of service of the chair so this is my penultimate AGM, I will have to hand over to someone else next year and that of course may be a good thing if we have to build relationships with SEGRO.

Thank you.

5. CRP overview of the report	<p>The Partnership Development Office thanked those present once again. Asked everyone to take a copy of the new report which covered the period from 2023 to 2024.</p> <p>EW thanked the volunteers especially those who had worked with us with the support from Rob Varney and Communities 1st.</p> <p>Abfly rail users' group for working with the CRP especially on the timetables for the line.</p> <p>Updates on the work at Garston Garden will be given as it progresses.</p> <p>EW encouraged the steering group and all the Partners for the forthcoming year to continue to champion the work of the CRP and be actively involved.</p> <p>EW said that one of the 'actions' from last year was to distribute the new timetable leaflets in the local community. We are now working with a local company Smart promotions and they are now distributed in their displays at key points including Sainsburys St Albans, Watford North library, Watford hospital to name a few.</p> <p>No questions on the report were presented but a question was asked on the illustrated posters that were commissioned last year. These are available to purchase via Watford Museum.</p> <p>A special presentation was made to our outgoing Vice Chair, Cllr. David Parry</p>	
6. Guest speaker	<p>Mr Rob Varney, Assistant Manager Volunteer Centre & Enterprise at Communities 1st gave a presentation on volunteering and the link with the CRP.</p>	
7. Any other business & Q and A	<p>Questions asked to the panel and if to be taken back for action or feedback</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. LF A subsidised fare structure for senior citizens with a bus pass traveling on the line which has been raised at previous AGM's but a response to this not yet received from the train operator. Cllr. Sandy Walkington also gave an example of this on a recent trip where it was offered and asked LNR representative VH to take back again for a response. 	VH (LNR)
8. Close	<p>Cllr Walkington thanked all those present, and the meeting was closed by the Chair at 8pm.</p>	

DP – Dave Parry
EW – Edna Woname
SW – Sandy Walkington
LF – Mr Leslie Freitag
LNR – London Northwestern Railway
VH – Victoria Harris

Post meeting note

Copies of the minutes, presentation from the guest speaker and electronic version of the CRP's activity report will be available to view on our website.