

Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership



Partnership Report 2023 - 2024

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1. Message from the Chair, Sandy Walkington



'CHANGE' seems to be the mantra of the moment and it has certainly been a year of change at the Community Rail Partnership. In brief we said farewell to Edna Woname, our long-serving community rail officer. We welcomed Kate Swindells, her energetic successor. We saw the opening of the restored Bricket Wood Station with the wonderful tea room. And after an elephantine pregnancy, ground was finally broken on the Garston Garden project.

Taking each in turn, we owe much to Edna who brought a unique and infectious enthusiasm to the role. The 'Abbey Line Days Out' promotional campaign was her initiative and we are planning to reinvigorate it since Covid meant it never got the airtime it deserved. We also have fond memories of hilarious Santa Expresses brightening up the approach of Christmas.

Our new community rail officer Kate Swindells brings an intriguing mix of new skills with her close existing connections with local community groups and her passionate interest in sustainability and resilience, two things which are going to become increasingly important as we appreciate the increasing impact of climate change. Our social media presence has also been hugely invigorated.

The high spot of the year was the completion and opening of the restored Bricket Wood Station. All the credit belongs to the Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust for their huge effort in bringing this to fruition and then finding such a brilliant use with Cheryl's Edwardian tea room. The significance of this cannot be over-emphasised. For the first time there is a real draw at the mid-point of the line to complement the attractions of Watford and St Albans allowing us to plan all sorts of new initiatives

Finally, there is obvious progress on the Garston Garden. Our particular thanks to Andy Smith and Watford Borough Council for arranging the contractor to clear the land ready for planting. We owe so much to all our local authorities: Hertfordshire County Council for hosting the CRP and handling all of our finances and HR; St Albans and Watford councils (and particularly Mayor Peter Taylor) for their unstinting involvement and interest; and St Stephen Parish Council for hosting our meetings.

We are bubbling with ideas going forward, looking particularly at the sustainability agenda and how the Abbey Line can be a role model in practising and promoting this philosophy. We have agreed a substantial new activity plan which will keep us all well occupied! This includes a survey of current users which we have distributed along the line, as well as vigorously promoting via social media.

We are locking into all the community groups along the line, I am particularly encouraged by our burgeoning relationships with local residents' associations. Our title is community rail partnership, the clue is in the name, and our local communities both geographic and social are the bedrock on which we stand.

Finally, my thanks to Rob Varney, my ever-supportive Vice Chair, and to the Steering Group, also to Val Male the county council's rail officer and to everyone reading this for your interest and support.

It has been a year of change and real progress. The future is bright and full of possibilities.

Sandy Walkington

Final memo to self: Make sure that London Northwestern Railway reduces, or even better eliminates, train cancellations. Reliability and customer confidence should be the cornerstone of all rail services.

2. A message from Cara Higgs, Community Strategy Manager, London Northwestern Railway

Welcome from London Northwestern Railway to the 2023-24 Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership's annual report.

The report is a fantastic opportunity to reflect on the diversity of social value delivered through our partnership and celebrate the great strides which have been made since Kate came into role at the start of 2024.

As we continue to focus on developing our community rail partnerships - a key deliverable of our National Rail contract - I am delighted to see the breadth of activities and opportunities for engagement outlined within the Abbey Line 2024-25 Action Plan. I am confident that such a robust plan will bring the local community together to raise the profile of the line and aid in rail recovery.

Finally, congratulations to all the organisations, volunteers and CRP members who have continued to drive forward and support the Garston Garden Project. It's been a longtime in the making and there have been a few bumps along the way, but the group have never lost faith and with groundworks due to commence at the time of writing this, I look forward to celebrating its success in next year's annual report.

Once again, can I take this opportunity to thank you for your continued commitment to the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership. We are sincerely grateful for your support of the rail industry; we believe that together our continued efforts will strengthen our communities and help to restore the country's confidence in rail.

3. About the Abbey Line

The Abbey Line is a 6.5-mile-long railway that serves local communities between Watford Junction and St Albans Abbey. The train, known locally as the Abbey Flyer, also provides a link for those wishing to make onwards connections into London or to Milton Keynes and beyond.

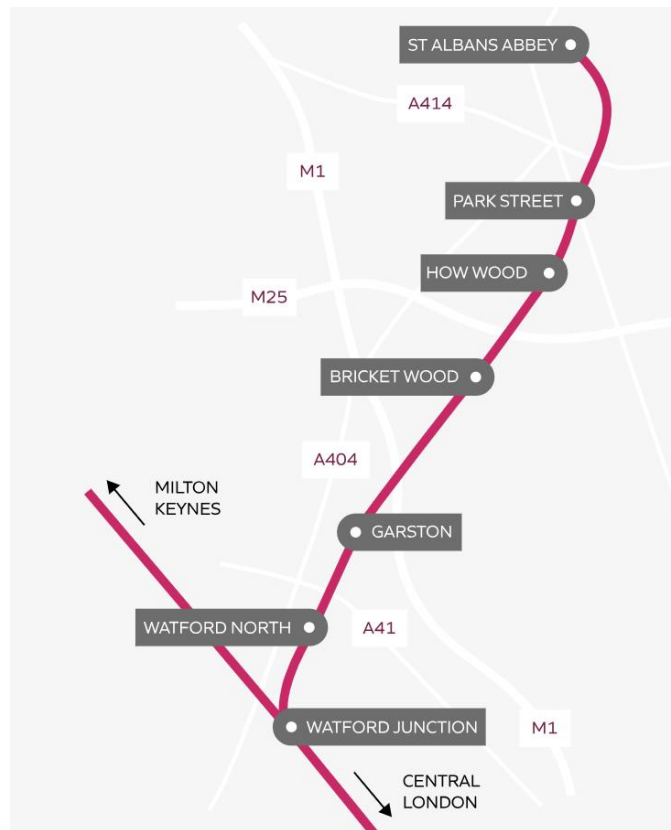
The Abbey Line was the first railway that the ancient city of St Albans received. London & Northwestern Railway (LNWR) received parliamentary powers to construct the 6 mile, 32 chains long branch line on 11th February 1853. Work started in the early months of 1856 and the line was opened to public traffic on Wednesday 5th May 1858.

Being a branch line, trains were made up of 3 to 4 coaches and hauled by a tank engine until the branch was fully 'dieselised' for passenger trains in 1955.

July 2005 marked the designation of the branch as a 'Community Railway' under the government's 'Community Rail Development Strategy', launched in 2004.

The service is operated by London Northwestern Railway.

More on the history of the Abbey Line can be found on our website.



4. An Introduction to The Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership

Community Rail Partnerships provide a link between the railway and local communities. They are about positive development, bringing together a wide range of interests along the route.

The Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership was established in June 2005 and brings together a number of partner organisations with the purpose of increasing usage of the line and connecting communities to their railway.

It also aims to enhance station environments to make them a more pleasant place and to give the local community the opportunity to become more involved in their local railway line.

Community Rail typically involves local people and organisations working in partnership to improve their local railways. Community Rail initiatives such as station enhancements and innovative promotional schemes can help get better value for money from the rail network.

This might include improving bus links to stations, developing walking and cycling routes, bringing station buildings back to life, art and educational projects, organising special events which promote the railway and its relevance to the community.

As per our constitution, 'The Partnership is primarily a development and promotion group not a lobbying organisation', so our work and projects reflect this.

Current members of the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership are;

Abfly (Rail Users Group), Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust, Communities 1st, Hertfordshire County Council (also the current host organisation), Watford Borough Council, Watford BID, St. Albans BID, St. Albans City & District Council, St. Stephen Parish Council, Avanti West Coast and the train operator London Northwestern Railway.

Observers from The Community Rail Network, Network Rail, Department for Transport and British Transport Police support and regularly attend steering group meetings.

The Community Rail Network (CRN) is the representative body which provides support, advice and information to the Community Rail sector, particularly through membership services and events.

The organisation is an advocate for community rail, providing a link between members and national and devolved governments, partners and industry. Government recognises the important role that CRN plays in helping to deliver strategic outcomes and is a key funder of the organisation. (Source: The Department for Transport)

5. Our Aims and Objectives

Aims and Objectives

- Help secure the long-term future of the Watford Junction – St Albans Abbey railway line through a community-based partnership approach
- Highlight the benefits of fixed-rail transport links
- Link the railway more strongly with the communities it serves, in order to contribute to the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of those communities
- Reduce the road congestion in the area by enhancing the role of the local railway in delivering local transport solutions, as envisaged in Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan (LTP) and other local authority economic and wellbeing strategies
- Deliver sustainability benefits associated with the railway and increased active travel
- Promote environmentally-friendly projects which improve the surroundings and biodiversity at the stations along the route
- Meet the objectives set out in the Department for Transport Community Rail Development Strategy

6. Overview of our Work and Projects this Period

The partnership undertakes numerous projects and events during the year including station adoption & volunteering, station enhancements, promoting sustainable development, community engagement events, and marketing and promotion.

Station Adoption & Volunteering

Our long-standing Station Check volunteers act as the 'eyes and ears' locally for London NorthWestern Railway, with regular reports on the state of the Abbey Line stations.

Checks highlight issues such as litter, graffiti, lights not working, faulty passenger information, emergency help points and any potential hazards at stations. Through regular station checks and sending in reports on their findings, train operator staff are alerted sooner to issues that need attention.

We also support Park Street Residents Association who has adopted Park Street and How Wood stations, and the Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust which tends Bricket Wood station. Thank you to both groups and their volunteers for continuing to look after their local station environments on behalf of the communities that use them.

We have exciting plans to help form Station Adoption groups at St Albans Abbey and Garston stations, and would love to hear from anybody who would like to get involved there.

Also, we thank our many other volunteers who help support the partnerships' activities, and we warmly welcome any groups or individuals who would also like to get involved in putting something back into their community.



Robert Yorke, Bricket Wood Station Heritage Trust;
and Joy Mendelsohn, Park Street Residents Association

Community Projects

This year, a big focus has been on connecting our communities with nature – by making better use of railway land and by encouraging integrated sustainable travel.

Pollinator-Friendly Planters

We have commissioned the Bee Friendly Trust to maintain the pollinator-friendly planters at Watford Junction Station, and we look out for local groups to help here too. Planting flowers that produce plenty of nectar is essential to provide enough food for our bees, butterflies and other pollinators.

We encourage the use of pollinator-friendly plants at all the stations along the Abbey Line.



Pollinator-friendly planters at Watford Junction Station

Garston Station Community Garden

The stretch of unused land at Garston station is being designed to improve the space. The aim is to create a nature garden – encouraging biodiversity – and also offering a place for small local groups to get together for gardening activities and opportunities to learn about wildlife.

We thank Sunnyside Rural Trust for the initial work they did to clear the ground there. Unfortunately, concrete was discovered below the surface of the area. Removal of this proved to be a big job and the Community Rail Partnership took over and has made plans to clear the ground thoroughly.

Although this is a frustrating set back, we are looking forward to finally going ahead with creating the garden later in 2024, with the help of local residents and community groups.



Garston Station Community Garden banner

Abbey Line Trail 'Refresh'

The Abbey Line Trail 'refresh' was completed in summer 2023, with the installation of new map lecterns at Abbey Line stations. These act as both promotional and wayfinding resources, encouraging users to hop on and off the train to walk sections of the beautiful countryside in the Colne and Ver valleys.

After a very wet autumn and winter, the water-meadow areas of the trail are water-logged and flooded in places. We are looking into ways to best communicate this and to adapt to these changing conditions.



Abbey Line Trail waymarker



Abbey Line Trail map lectern at St Albans Abbey Station

Community Engagement Events



Community Rail Week

We always look forward to Community Rail Week - in May each year – showcasing the innovative projects and inspiring initiatives from across the community rail movement.

In May 2023 we had a stand at Watford's Atria shopping centre, promoting local days and nights out by train and the new timetable – highlighting the new later train times.



Abbey Line CRP members and volunteers at the Atria in Watford



Abbey Line CRP chair chatting with a member of the public at the Atria in Watford

Stakeholders Event

The partnership aims to hold an engagement event for partners and stakeholders every two years. In September 2023, we held a successful inaugural event with attendees from many different community groups, local authorities and organisations. We generated lots of brilliant ideas for new activities and events that 'Connect Communities with their Railway' and look forward to implementing them.

We also said farewell and a big thank you to officer Edna Woname and we wish her all the best for the future.



Brainstorming ideas at the autumn Stakeholder Event

Online Rail Safety Training with Schools

We would love to visit all local schools and deliver much-needed rail safety training in-person to them. However, we are a small Community Rail Partnership and simply do not have the time resources to do that. We have therefore partnered with LearnLive UK for them to deliver this training online.

This year we have already reached 3580 young people - across eight schools - and have an ambition to reach a total of 45 schools in the area from Watford to St Albans in 2024.



Rail Safety Training social media post showing how many young people we have reached

Rail Confidence Workshop

New officer, Kate, reached out to one of her existing contacts to put on a Rail Confidence workshop with a difference!

Salaam Women's Cafe in Sopwell, St Albans, is a place for local women to meet for activities and improve their English-language skills.

We helped out with a role-playing rail-travel-themed English lesson that everyone enjoyed!

We plan to follow up with a trip on the Abbey Line later in the year – visiting The Tea Room at Bricket Wood.



Delivering a Rail Confidence workshop through role-play with members of Salaam Women's Cafe

Accessibility Issues at St Albans Abbey Station

In March 2024, we braved the weather to look into accessibility issues at St Albans Abbey Station.

Boarding the coaches is a challenge for many and with the new rolling stock the raised-platform 'Harrington Hump' is not aligned with the accessible coach.

This means the ramp is very steep and unsuitable for independent wheelchair and mobility scooter users.

We thank St Albans Access Forum for highlighting this and to representatives from Network Rail and West Midland Trains who joined us to assess and take this forward.

We know solutions are being looked into, and look forward to reporting progress on this issue soon.



Local family involved with St Albans Access Forum, demonstrating the accessibility issues with the high platform/train interface at St Albans Abbey Station



Representatives from Network Rail, London NorthWestern Railway, St Albans Access Forum and the Abbey Line CRP at the St Albans Abbey Station Accessibility Meeting

Marketing Activity

Engagement via our social media platforms continues to grow and has been a positive way of promoting our events, meetings and news stories. This has been a great way of reaching Abbey Line passengers, getting visitors to events and a form of engagement.

We also have been working with a local company - Get Smart Promotions - to distribute our timetable leaflets in key locations. Some of these are Asda Watford, Watford North library, Watford hospital, Sainsburys St Albans, to name a few. This way we hope to reach those who are yet to give the Abbey Line service a try.



Our leaflets on display

7. Forthcoming Projects & Events

We're looking forward to continuing our existing projects and adding new ones too. Watch this space for our activities - guided by the four pillars of community rail - such as undertaking an assessment of line use, promoting sustainability and community resilience, engaging more with schools and community groups, and station enhancements, particularly Watford Junction.

We're especially excited to get stuck in at the Garston Community Garden and plans for Railway 200 celebrations in 2025!

8. London Northwestern Railway figures

Below are the passenger journeys and public performance measurements provided by London Northwestern Railway

Periods	No. of Days	Period end	Journeys	PPM	Reliability	PPM MAA
				On Time		
2023/P01	30	Sat 30/04/22	14,518	68.2%	97.2%	100.0%
2023/P02	28	Sat 28/05/22	17,690	72.7%	97.6%	99.9%
2023/P03	28	Sat 25/06/22	14,462	73.2%	93.4%	99.8%
2023/P04	28	Sat 23/07/22	17,925	64.8%	90.1%	98.2%
2023/P05	28	Sat 20/08/22	14,240	68.6%	90.2%	97.5%
2023/P06	28	Sat 17/09/22	19,010	73.1%	94.3%	98.7%
2023/P07	26	Sat 15/10/22	17,206	77.3%	94.7%	98.0%
2023/P08	28	Sat 12/11/22	17,879	75.7%	91.3%	95.8%
2023/P09	28	Sat 10/12/22	20,908	70.2%	94.3%	100.0%
2023/P10	28	Sat 07/01/23	3,263	70.6%	75.0%	76.4%
2023/P11	28	Sat 04/02/23	15,747	82.3%	96.6%	100.0%
2023/P12	28	Sat 04/03/23	21,630	80.1%	96.4%	99.8%
2023/P13	27	Sat 31/03/23	18,357	78.4%	96.4%	99.8%
Annual			212,835			

PPM* - PUBLIC PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

MAA* - MOVING ANNUAL AVERAGE

Periods	No. of Days	Period end	Journeys	PPM	Reliability	PPM MAA
				On Time		
2024/P01	29	Sat 29/04/2023	21,573	81.2%	97.1%	99.9%
2024/P02	28	Sat 27/05/2023	17,258	83.5%	97.9%	99.9%
2024/P03	28	Sat 24/06/2023	21,407	83.0%	96.3%	99.7%
2024/P04	28	Sat 22/07/2023	17,280	No Data	97.2%	100.0%
2024/P05	28	Sat 19/08/2023	11,786	No Data	95.5%	98.5%
2024/P06	28	Sat 16/09/2023	18,032	No Data	97.9%	100.0%
2024/P07	26	Sat 14/10/2023	18,299	No Data	96.3%	100.0%
2024/P08	28	Sat 11/11/2023	22,063	No Data	97.6%	100.0%
2024/P09	28	Sat 09/12/2023	16,596	No Data	93.9%	100.0%
2024/P10	28	Sat 06/01/2024	13,061	No Data	96.0%	99.6%
2024/P11	28	Sat 03/02/2024	16,533	No Data	98.6%	99.9%
2024/P12	28	Sat 02/03/2024	19,262	No Data	97.0%	99.9%
2024/P13	29	Sun 31/03/2024	20,237	No Data	96.9%	99.8%
Annual			233,386			

				On Time		
2025/P01	27	Sat 27/04/2024	17,492	87.8%	98.8%	99.6%
2025/P02	28	Sat 25/05/2024	18,350	87.7%	97.3%	100.0%

PPM* - PUBLIC PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT
MAA* - MOVING ANNUAL AVERAGE

9. Finance Information

FINANCE REPORT - 2023/24 END OF YEAR

Author: Trevor Mason

1. Purpose of Report

Individual reports have been produced for each of the quarters throughout the 2023/24 financial year. This report consolidates them to set out the position for the whole of the year.

2. Financial Transactions in 2023/24

A table on the financial transactions carried out in 2023/24 is attached as Appendix 1.

Total expenditure was £49,608.

3. 2023/24 Contributions

The total of core contributions received for 2023/24 was £60,659, as detailed below in Table 1.

Table 1 Core contributions received for 2023/24

Organisation	2023/24 Contribution (£)
West Midlands Trains	40,000
First Trenitalia	7,159
Hertfordshire CC	10,000
Watford Council	1,500
St Albans C&DC	1,500
St Stephen PC	500
TOTAL	60,659

4. 2023/24 Expenditure

The total expenditure for 2023/24 funded by the CRP was £49,608, as detailed in Table 2. Detailed for expenditure in each of the categories is set out in Appendix 1.

Table 2 Expenditure for 2023/24

Activity	Expenditure (£)
Hosting costs	34,128
Additional running costs	1,116
CRN Membership	150
Website hosting	575
Annual costs sub total	35,969
Projects (net expenditure)	13,639
TOTAL	49,608

5. Summary of 2023/24 Financial Position

The table below sets out the financial position for 2023/24.

Table 3 Summary of Financial Position for 2023/24

Balance carried forward from 22/23	(+) 165,700
23/24 Income (Table 1)	(+) 60,659
23/24 Net Expenditure (Table 2)	(-) 49,608
Balance to carry forward to 24/25	£176,751

Appendix 1 Expenditure in 2023/24

(a) Projects

Date	Vendor	Amount (£)	Description
23/5/23	Lemondrop Creative	950.00	Summer design & artwork for - Timetable leaflet & posters
20/6/23	Get Smart Promotions	800.00	Distribute summer timetables
27/7/23	Herts Reprographics	113.00	Fence banner – design and print
27/7/23	Herts Reprographics	675.00	May timetable
1/8/23	Abbey Theatre Trust	120.00	Hire of venue
23/8/23	Fitzpatrick Woolmer Design	1,540.00	Installation of lectern signs
31/8/23	Herts Reprographics	27.00	Abbey Line Days Out material
28/9/23	Herts Reprographics	78.00	May timetable
23/10/23	Lemondrop Creative	600.00	Design & Artwork
02/11/23	Holiday Inn	1,661.67	Stakeholder day
20/12/23	Bee Friendly Trust	2,000.00	Maintenance of bee-friendly planter
22/2/24	Learn Live	4,500.00	Learn Live membership
22/3/24	Herts Reprographics	575.00	May timetable
TOTAL		13,639.67	

(b) Hosting

Date	Vendor	Amount (£)	Description
29/6/23	Hertfordshire County Council	8,532.00	Hosting Costs (April – June 2023)
11/10/23	Hertfordshire County Council	8,532.00	Hosting Costs (July – Sept 2023)
18/12/23	Hertfordshire County Council	8,532.00	Hosting Costs (Oct – Dec 2023)
28/2/24	Hertfordshire County Council	8,532.00	Hosting Costs (Jan - Mar 2024)

TOTAL		34,128.00	
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(c) Additional Running Costs

Date	Vendor	Amount (£)	Description
30/6/23	Herts Repro	463.00	Printing of Annual Report
28/9/23	Herts Repro	463.00	Annual Report 2023
29/11/23	Herts Repro	190.00	Abbeyline namecards, posters and leaflets
TOTAL		1,116.00	

(d) CRN Membership

Date	Vendor	Amount (£)	Description
24/7/23	Community Rail Network	150.00	Annual membership subscription
TOTAL		150.00	

(e) Website Hosting

Date	Vendor	Amount (£)	Description
19/9/23	Tessellate Design Studio Ltd	500.00	Website maintenance for July 2023 – July 2024
12/12/23	Tessellate Design Studio Ltd	75.00	Domain & e-mail renewal
TOTAL		575.00	

10. Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership Members 23/24



Supported by:



11. Resources and links

- Visit our website www.abbeylinecommunityrail.org.uk
- Our social media pages

Find us on:

Facebook and X: @abbeylinecrp

Instagram: @theabbeylinecrp

- London Northwestern Railway
For train times, tickets and customer service contact
Website: www.londonnorthwesternrailway.co.uk
- Avanti West coast trains
For train times, tickets and customer service contact
Website: www.avantiwestcoast.co.uk
- Community Rail Network
Website: www.communityrailnetwork.org.uk
- Network rail
For information on railway maintenance in your local community /near your home
Website: www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/contact-us/

12. CRP Contact Information

Partnership Development Officer: Kate Swindells

Email: info@abbeylinecommunityrail.org.uk

Office Address: Hertfordshire County Council, Farnham House, SG1 2ST. CHN 216.



Kate Swindells - Partnership Development Officer

A big thank you to all our volunteers, stakeholders, partners, the train operator London Northwestern Railway, passengers and our local community.