

THE HEART OF WESSEX RAIL PARTNERSHIP

**Bristol to Weymouth
Line Guide**
7th September to 12th December 2015

THE HEART OF WESSEX LINE
Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership
Supported by First Great Western



2015/2016

ANNUAL REPORT

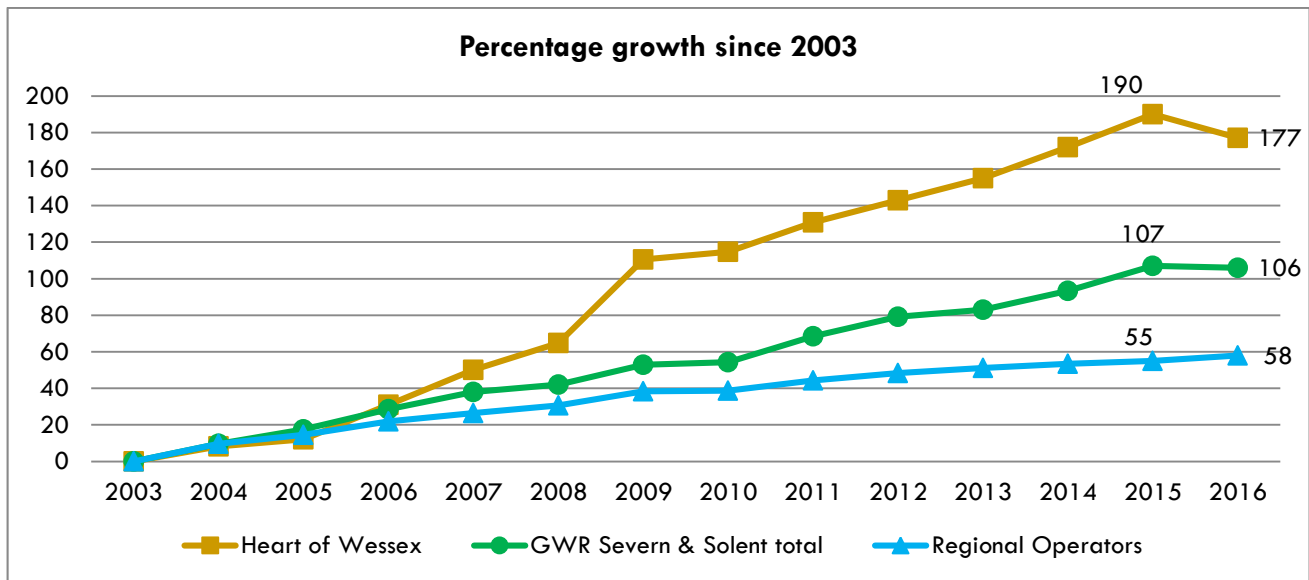


The Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership is a joint venture between:

Bristol City Council, Bath & North East Somerset Council, Wiltshire Council, Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council, Dorset County Council, West Dorset District Council and Great Western Railway

The overall objective of the partnership since 2003 has been to raise awareness and use of the Bristol to Weymouth rail services, by marketing the line, enhancing stations and access to them and working with local communities. Funding partners agree a **LINE PLAN**, updated annually, outlining priority areas of work for the partnership. Direct community involvement in the line includes 118 volunteers who gift over 13,000 hours of their time to enhancing stations, helping to improve customer information and promoting use of the line to the benefit of their local economies. Representatives from local communities come together as the **COMMUNITY RAIL WORKING PARTY (CRWP)** producing a regularly updated action “**MATRIX**” of short, medium and longer term projects, local needs and aspirations. The latter generates the **COMMUNITY WISH LIST** which is a key reference point for deciding project investment priorities.

RESULTS to 1st April 2016



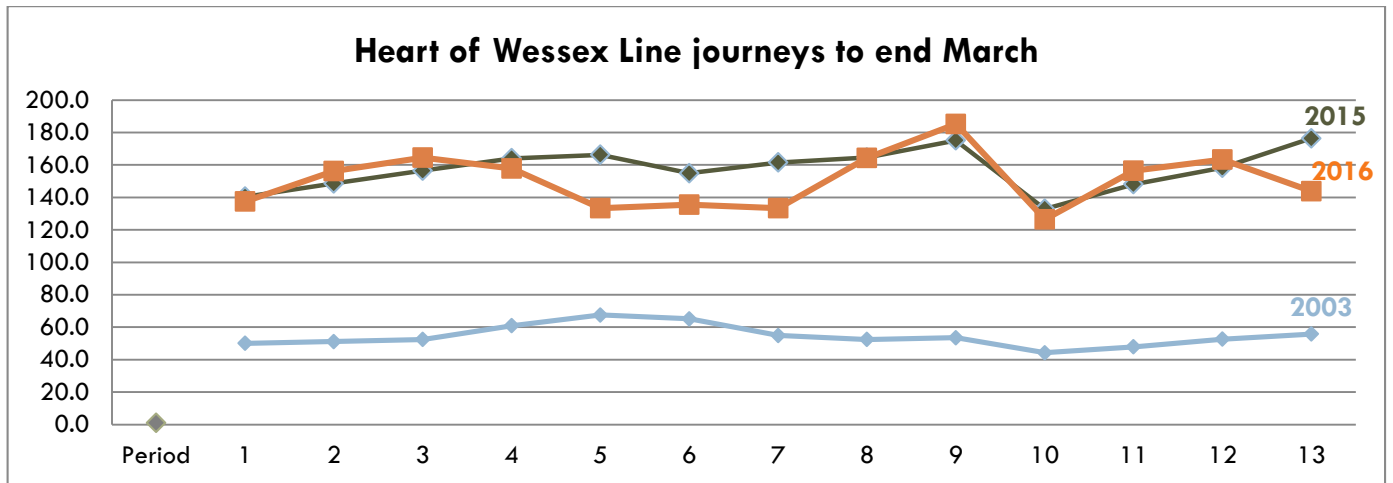
Between April 2003 and March 2015, passenger journeys on the Heart of Wessex Line **grew from 700,000 to 2,046,700**, a growth rate that was double the regional¹ and three times the national² average. The Heart of Wessex overtook the Bristol to Exeter line in 2010 to become the second most important route in the Severn & Solent region after the Cardiff to Portsmouth Harbour service. With no change to service level, for every 100 passengers in 2003, there were 292 using the same trains in the year to March 2015. Originally representing 9% of the total journeys in the Severn & Solent region, by 2015 the Heart of Wessex carried nearly 15% of the regional total.

In the **year to March 2016**, for the first time since 2003, annual passenger journeys on the line contracted from 2,047,700 to March 2015, to **1,957,900** to March 2016 (4.4% down). Total Severn and Solent journeys of 14,271,200 in the year to March 2015 reduced to 13,666,500 to March 2016 (4.2% down)

¹ Regional = Severn & Solent. Includes total of passenger journeys on: Cardiff-Portsmouth, Bristol-Exeter, Bristol-Weymouth, Bristol-Great Malvern, Bristol-Severn Beach, Bristol-Cardiff, Bath-Filton and Swindon-Westbury.

² Office of Rail Regulation. Regional Rail Operators - excludes London and South East.

The reduction in passenger journeys is mainly attributable to the Temporary Period of Disruption (TPOD 1) relating to the major programme of electrification for parts of the Great Western network. July to September 2015 (periods 4 to 7) saw 87,000 fewer journeys on the Heart of Wessex Line than in the previous year.



It is worth noting, however, that even allowing for the impact of the major engineering works, April 2015 to end March 2016 is the second year in a row that the line has failed to outperform the regional average as it had previously consistently done, and there may be some capacity constraints to continued future growth at the exceptional levels achieved between 2003 and 2014.

SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS 2015/16



For the first time in several decades, some additional services were introduced to the Heart of Wessex line in 2015/6.

Most notably, **SUMMER SUNDAY SERVICES TO WEYMOUTH** were extended to run from Easter Sunday to the end of October, and **will run all year in 2017**. A priority on the Community Wish List since 2003, this will be of significant value for leisure, special events such as the phenomenally successful Frome Independent, shopping, employment, hospital visits and other social need. It should also help to alleviate overcrowding on Saturdays in the traditional “summer shoulder” period.

South West Trains introduced a few services to a section of the line from December 2015. The original proposal consulted on & supported by the communities was quite different to the timetable eventually introduced, which caused local disappointment, but the additional four services (1 southbound and 3 northbound) do help to reduce some late afternoon /early evening gaps for Somerset stations.

THE WEYMOUTH WIZARD

Demand for Summer Saturday trips to Weymouth continues to be well served by GWR, with strengthening of key services, and the luxurious option of the Weymouth Wizard, the additional Saturday train run from May to September.



Joint partnership objectives from the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership **Line Plan**

OBJECTIVES	Rail Partnership Priorities	Project Category
1. Economic Development	Promoting more use of the line to the benefit of local economies. Supporting and promoting local businesses	Promotion
	Making it easy for visitors to understand and use services, stations and connections	Connecting Up
	Stations as community gateways & “shop windows” to destinations	Station Welcome
2. Carbon Reduction, Health & Staying Safe	Encouraging more people to switch to rail by assisting new users to understand services, stations and connections	Connecting Up
	Continued improvement of station facilities/ making stations feel safer and more welcoming	Station Welcome
	Encourage, facilitate and promote more walking and cycling to stations	Connecting Up
3. Localism	Manage, motivate, sustain and build community involvement and projects, respond to local needs and aspirations for the line	CRWP & Community projects.
4. Accessibility	Assist those with visual, hearing and learning difficulties. Assist understanding of connections, services and stations	Connecting Up

SUMMARY OF PROJECTS DELIVERED 2015/16

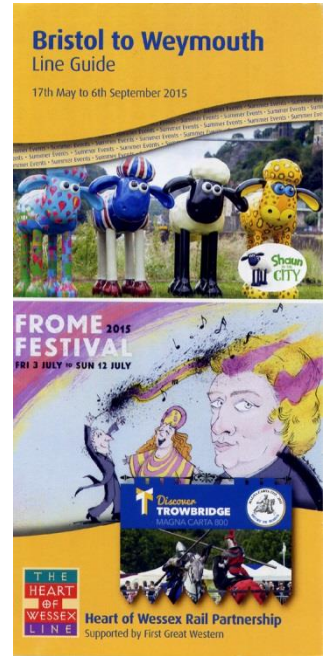
Line guides promoting destinations and events + easy to read 14pt Timetable (page 4)		
Launch of Summer Sunday service extension - campaign developed with GWR publications team		
FRESHFORD: New customer shelter (page 5), customer seating (page 7), Community involvement, station adoption and garden enhancements (page 11)		
BRADFORD ON AVON: Promotional focus and Garden Gang news (page 11)		
TROWBRIDGE: Completion of £1m major improvement project led by Wiltshire Council, including shelter (page 5), Task Force project (pages 8 & 9)		
WESTBURY: Task Forces at Westbury (page 9); Station adoption (page 12)		
FROME: Additional seating (page 7)		
YEOVIL PEN MILL: Welcome banner & directional signing (pages 6&7); Complete station renovation & Barrel Train planters (page 12) GWR Community Rail Conference (pages 13&14)		
Task Force for station garden (page 8) Station adoption project with Lufton College (page 13)		
Frome, Bruton & Castle Cary: Station Friends' & community projects (page 15)		
THORNFORD: Seating on footway to station (page 7)		
DORCHESTER WEST: New customer shelter (page 5), Running In Board (page 6)		
Maiden Newton, Dorchester West & Upwey: Station Friends projects (page 15)		
WEYMOUTH: Bus connection information improvements (page 7)		
COMMUNITY RAIL JOINT PROJECTS: 4 CRWP meetings / events, 5 updates of The Matrix & Community Wish List. Task forces (pages 8&9), Clean for the Queen (page 10)		
WESSEX WANDERERS GUIDED WALKS (page 10)		

BRISTOL TO WEYMOUTH LINE GUIDE

This continues to evolve, informed by comments and ideas from customers, town and parish councils, station and train staff and community rail contributors. 35,000 of each edition is distributed through council and community offices, TICs, shops, pubs and volunteers, and right across the GWR station network including Paddington (featured in the photos below). The 14 point timetable to assist the visually impaired, with minimal and colour coded notes to aid ease of use, responds to ideas from customers and GWR colleagues. 2015/16 editions focused on events (coordinated with a poster campaign), shopping, days out and a special edition for Bradford on Avon (see page 11)



“Bath is one of the most popular destinations on the Weymouth to Bristol Line and the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership does tremendous work in encouraging people to travel to the city by train for work, shopping or leisure. It has been an outstanding success in raising the profile of the line through its high quality publicity and the sheer energy of its volunteers”
Cllr Anthony Clarke, Cabinet Member for Transport, Bath & North East Somerset Council



“Part of my role is to supply local communities and households with local travel information from various services to help promote active and sustainable modes of transport and help reduce emissions. The Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership have been very helpful with this, supplying us with 4000 Line Guides that were perfect for the project as they have large clear print and are easy for people to read and understand, especially if they are unfamiliar with this service. As well as the timetable, the line guides contain everything people need to know if they wish to use the line. Because of the support and materials that Heart of Wessex provided us with we were able to provide a more comprehensive travel package to individuals in the Weymouth and Portland area”
Ryan Pooles, Sustrans Personalised Travel Planning Project Officer
 Working in partnership with **Dorset County Council**

STATION IMPROVEMENTS

During 2015/6 Heart of Wessex Line stations benefitted from at least 11,700 hours of work from 98 local volunteers. Groups at each station focus on creating and maintaining gardens, helping to keep stations clean and free from litter and initiate projects for signing and infrastructure improvements, often based on the direct feedback they get from customers while they are working at the station. Needs and suggestions from local communities are kept on a regularly updated “Matrix”, and representatives from each of the groups participate in the Community Rail Working Party with GWR managers to review progress and discuss new ideas. A longer term community wish list is generated from The Matrix, and helps to set priorities for investment from both the GWR Community Rail Budget and the partnership’s own Community Projects Grant Fund.

CUSTOMER SHELTERS

Three of the shelter enhancements from the Community Wish List were completed in 2015/16.

TROWBRIDGE: Improvements to southbound shelter provision, a long standing item on the wish list, were delivered as part of a £1m improvement project for the whole station led by Wiltshire Council.

DORCHESTER WEST: The old shelter had become completely inadequate, particularly following the doubling of passenger numbers since the Friends of Dorchester West adopted and began to transform the station in 2010. The new shelter was funded from the 2014/5 GWR Community Rail Budget.



Above: Customers waiting in November 2014



and the new shelter completed in April 2015

FRESHFORD: The old shelter that had served northbound customers for two decades at Freshford was replaced in March 2016, funded from the 2015/6 GWR Community Rail Budget.



Design and specification for the shelters followed detailed consultation meetings with the station friends groups, in Freshford including a community email survey, to ensure they would respond to local need. The shelters have also been adapted to “harvest” rainwater from the drainage system to supply water butts for station gardens.

STATION SIGNS

The Heritage style “Running in Board” from the Community Wish List for **DORCHESTER WEST** was installed in February 2016. The design and positioning of the board was specified by the station friends, based on feedback from local customers, and was implemented by the partnership utilising the Community Projects Grants Fund.

Sign of success at treasured station



RUNNING IN BOARDS: Originally developed in the Victorian age to give customers a clear early warning that the train was “running in” to the station, groups along the line have suggested reinstating these, and helped to specify design and placement of them. A heritage style has sometimes been used (first developed for Bradford on Avon 2009) although at e.g. Bruton, the Friends felt a modern style was more in keeping with the station, and at Thornford the opportunity was taken to feature the nearby village of Beer Hackett. At Freshford, the local community actually recovered & restored original running in boards from the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries. Additional signs identified by communities themselves can usually be implemented by the partnership with the Community Projects Grant Fund

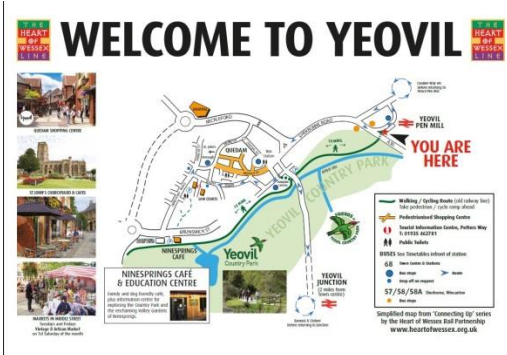


“I can remember the originals from the steam days when I used to travel by train from Cornwall to Leicestershire. Most signs these days are not at all user-friendly. These are accessible to all and pass the clear sight tests as well as being invaluable to hearing-loss users. A sound initiative all round!”
Jane Nicklen, Community Planning and Development Manager, West Dorset District Council

Investment in larger signs more easily visible from the trains also helps to contribute to welcoming arriving visitors and indirectly “advertising” to customers passing through. The banner for **YEOVIL PEN MILL** created for the Community Rail Conference in March has been designed to last a few seasons.



Further additions were made to ongoing “connecting up” projects including **YEOVIL PEN MILL**, and at **WEYMOUTH** a new map was developed by **Dorset County Council** to assist customers in finding bus stops referred to on the live departure screens. The project was initiated from feedback at the Weymouth Senior Forum with significant assistance from the Chairman of the First Bus Customer Panel.



ADDITIONAL SEATING



A heritage style was selected by the local groups for new customer seating at **FROME** and **FRESHFORD** installed in autumn 2015. The Freshford seat was supplied through the Community Projects Grants Fund and the Frome seat by the Friends



themselves. Additional heritage style seating organised by the Bradford Garden Gang in memory of Dave Walden, thanks to generous donations from his family and the local community, will be celebrated in May 2016.

At **THORNFORD**, there were requests for seating along the one mile walking route between Thornford Halt and the village, and this was installed in early summer 2015, a joint project between Thornhackett Parish Council, Castle Gardens and the partnership. The Thornford footway, a Community Wish List item delivered in 2011 by Dorset County Council, continues to be appreciated by visitors and the local community, supplying as it does both safe access to the station and a wonderful asset to attract visitors to come and walk in this beautiful part of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



COMMUNITY RAIL PROJECTS

THE TASK FORCE

Joint Task Forces, where volunteers from stations along the line from Bristol down to Weymouth come together to tackle larger projects, took place at YEOVIL PEN MILL, WESTBURY and TROWBRIDGE between April and September 2015.

In April 2015, Steve Fox from YEOVIL IN BLOOM trained Friends from along the line to sow Meadow Mix, with lovely results through summer 2015 much appreciated by **YEOVIL PEN MILL** customers.



TROWBRIDGE

A Task Force assembled in September 2015 to help the Trowbridge Friends tackle the large bank along the newly reconstructed car park (part of the magnificent £1m transformation of the station completed in summer 2015). This included volunteers from all along the line, Great Western Railway colleagues and a generous contribution from friends in Network Rail who organised help including flat-bed trucks, and gave us some of their voluntary annual leave days to help out.



Before.....



& after!



“A jungle of undergrowth, dense enough to hide a tiger, was soon reduced to a pile of quivering hedge and shrub clippings. Enough to fill 2 skips and several tipper truck loads. 30 volunteers chopping, raking, weeding and litter picking, making an amazing amount of progress through sheer hard work, determination and team play. A picnic lunch was enjoyed in the smart new platform shelters, new relationships forged, and new ideas discussed in a way that can never be achieved behind a computer screen.
Mark Postma, GWR Publications Manager
 (& energetic “Task Forcer” at Trowbridge & Westbury!)



Task Forces to help the Friends of **WESTBURY** station took place in **May** and **September 2015**, combined with update sessions on TPOD1 from Jon Morgan and on GWR publications & promotions with Mark.



I am very proud of the terrific work by the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Partnership. This is a great example of the local community achieving things that really make a difference. Just in my local area their hard work in clearing out overgrown vegetation and making attractively designed gardens and spaces has transformed the appearance of Westbury and Trowbridge stations, creating a welcoming atmosphere and enhancing the towns both for residents and for visitors. No wonder the number of passengers on the line has rocketed since they became involved”
CIlr Horace Prickett, Portfolio Holder for Transport Wiltshire Council

CLEAN FOR THE QUEEN

Stations along the line participated in the national Clean for the Queen event in March 2016. As some of the groups pointed out, they clean the stations regularly anyway, but this was an opportunity to let people know that they do & a good way to remind passers-by how they might help! It also offered an opportunity to kick off a new station adoption project at Yeovil Pen Mill with students from Lufton College.



WESSEX WANDERERS GUIDED WALKS

20 volunteers from local Ramblers groups put an estimated 1400 hours of time into planning, leading and promoting guided walks from stations along the Heart of Wessex Line, coordinated by Ann Light, who also manages the popular www.wessexrailwaywalks.org.uk. The project is supported annually from the partnership's Community Projects Grants Fund.

Extracts from Ann Light's 2015 Wessex Wanderers Report:

"The programme ran from Saturday 2nd May 2015 to Wednesday 14th October 2015 stopping for the 6 week engineering works in July and August. The momentum did not seem to stop because of this and this was well advertised on our programme and website and on the walks themselves. We had 542 participants: 70 % used the trains, 11% used the buses, with the rest coming by car or walking to the station. About 11% of the people who come on our walks are not members of the Ramblers and we get around 14% of first timers on walks – so we are attracting new people all the time from outside the Ramblers as well as within. We had 31 varied walks ranging from 3 miles to 15 miles. The historical tours of Bradford on Avon and Dorchester lead by professional Blue Badge Guides lasted two hours and left the afternoon free to be able to look around the town. A variety of shorter walks with a theme also proved popular and these included going to Farleigh Hungerford from Avoncliff station, a short morning walk and then a visit to Hauser and Wirth art gallery in the afternoon from Bruton station, a visit to Iford manor from Freshford, 2 walks on Portland also proved popular and there was also a walk from Severn Beach. Numbers varied from 8 to 40 with an increase on the average to 17, which is up from the previous year. We are giving a donation from all the 4 Ramblers' areas that the line covers (i.e. Avon, Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire) together with a generous grant from the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership. The funds are used for programme production, postage, hire of meeting rooms, admin expenses, website etc."

OTHER COMMUNITY RAIL HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2015/6

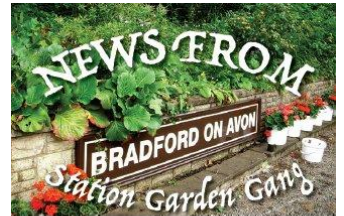
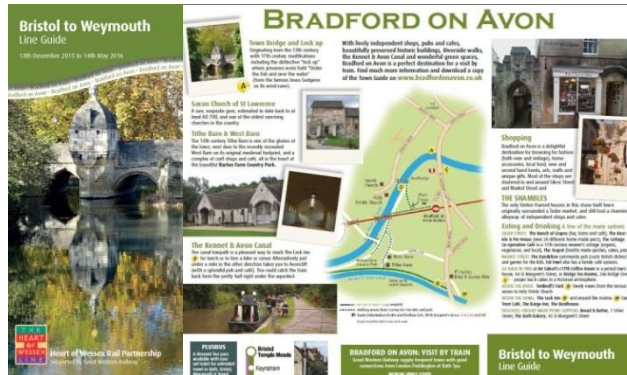
FRESHFORD

Up to twenty local people from the village participate in all day working parties at the station several times a year under the guidance of Garden Designer, Melanie Everard. Community involvement in the railway is particularly strong here, with the station and Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership featuring in the ground breaking **Neighbourhood Plan** for Freshford and Limpley Stoke (believed to be the first in the country to cross a county boundary) that was approved and ratified in September 2015. A Friends of Freshford evening meeting in November 2015 attracted over 60 people to exchange ideas about the partnership and the railway. Amongst several new projects undertaken by the station friends over the last twelve months, new hoggin was laid in the customer waiting area.



BRADFORD ON AVON

The town's economy was badly affected when all trains were replaced by buses during electrification work in August. Use of the station by local people went down dramatically, and local traders reported a reduction of up to a third in takings over the same period of the previous year. The station friends, concerned that local rail users may have got into the habit of using their cars, created and circulated a newsletter announcing the return of the rail services in September. The next Line Guide was then devoted to promoting the town to visitors. Particular thanks are due to **Bradford on Avon Town Council** for their help with this special edition.



Train services back to normal from September 1st! The Weymouth Wizard will run on Saturday 5th September departing 0941, the luxury way to travel to Weymouth! Pocket Timetables at the station or go to www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk



The trains may have stopped during August, but our volunteer Garden Gang hasn't! We'll be working every week throughout the year even in winter!



Thank you to everyone who very kindly gave donations towards a Memorial Seat for our late Garden Leader & Friend, We were humbled to find you had contributed £362! We will advertise a public dedication date once the seat is installed.

Supported by the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership www.heartofwessex.org.uk

In late September, community rail participants from along the line enjoyed an opportunity to meet Paul Salvesson, the man who created the Community Rail concept a quarter of a century ago. Paul's trip along the line took in Yeovil, Bradford on Avon and Freshford, including a visit to the Community Shop and Café.



WESTBURY

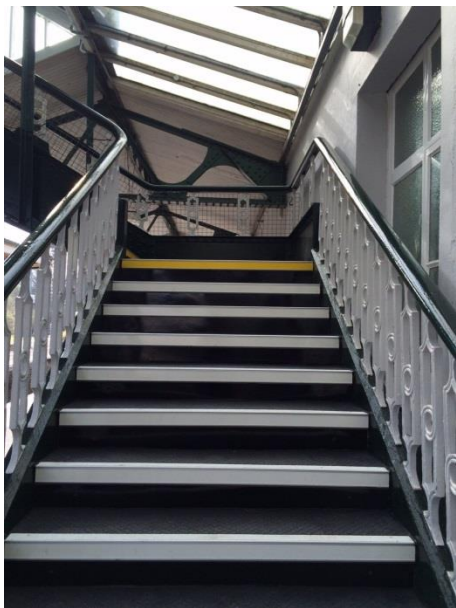


The transformation of Westbury station begun in 2014 continued to gather pace in 2015/6, most importantly with weekly sessions by the Friends of the Station including regular work on the three large planters on the station platforms, and further development of the station frontage, including roses planted for the Queen’s birthday. The Friends now have regular help from volunteers from other stations including Dorchester West and Bradford on Avon.



YEOVIL

A high quality renovation of the whole station was undertaken during February, with the GWR team hard at work there over several full days, painting all parts of the station in the new GWR livery, retreading stairs and clearing vegetation in the station car park



New “barrel train” planters (made from old whisky casks and also painted up in the new GWR colours) were installed.



Financed from the Community Projects Grant Scheme, the planters were installed on the centre platform and at the front of the station.

A new project to adopt the station frontage was begun in February 2016 with **LUFTON COLLEGE** students taking on litter picking, planting and maintenance of “their” train and sowing of new meadow mix for spring.



GWR COMMUNITY RAIL CONFERENCE

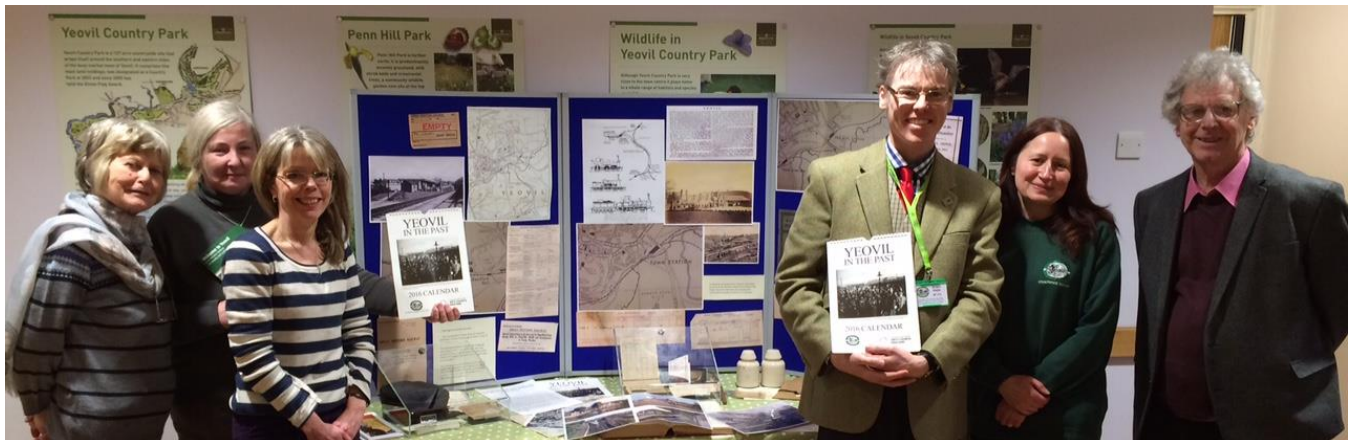
YEOVIL was selected as the first destination for the new approach to **GWR'S** annual **Community Rail Conference**, which will now circulate between the regions covered by the company's five community rail partnerships.

This offered a matchless opportunity to showcase the area's attractions to a wide audience from across the South West. GWR took over several of the Yeovil hotels for accommodation, including a gala dinner at the Manor Hotel, with the full day conference taking place at the magnificent Fleet Air Arm Museum.





A "Love Yeovil" project team (above left) worked in January & February to put together a package of events and materials to ensure delegates would get the most from their visit to the town, including guided walks from the Yeovil Country Park Community Ranger and a visit to the Ninesprings Community café, where the South Somerset Community Heritage Team put on a display on the history of the Yeovil railways. Many of the 120 delegates to the conference came early the day before to enjoy the attractions of the town, with a Yeovil Country Park, South Somerset tourism and economic development and rail partnership welcome team at the station for arriving trains, to send visitors on their way along the green walking route from station to town.



FROME, BRUTON & CASTLE CARY



The beautiful gardens at **Bruton** (above) continue to be enhanced at monthly working “bees”, and lovingly tended planters at **Frome** won a “Frome in Bloom” award in 2015. At **Castle Cary** the community continued to maintain their lovely walking route from the station to the town, including laying gravel to improve drainage under the kissing gate, replacing way marking discs and keeping vegetation cut back.

MAIDEN NEWTON, DORCHESTER WEST & UPWEY

All three stations benefit from regular weekly attention, with additional work at Dorchester West & Upwey, where there are particular challenges with litter, and additional hours are spent collecting waste and organising recycling. Altogether, Dorset volunteers contributed at least 3400 hours of work, not including the significant help some of them give to friends groups at other stations along the line, or participation in Task Forces, meetings and events. Along with continued garden enhancements, the Friends of Dorchester West completed a renovation of the old parcel shed which is used as their “HQ”. The Flanders poppies they sowed in 2014 continue to flourish as a WW1 memorial garden, in front of the picket fencing they restored in a special joint project with local youngsters with learning disabilities.



THE HEART OF WESSEX LINE LOGO

This has been used since 2003 on all the partnership’s promotional materials, and features on community posters at stations in casings financed by the partnership, and reserved for community use. The partnership also invests in hi visibility vests and badges using the logo.



The **Heart of Wessex “Friends of the Station” Hi Vis** is a great way to communicate to staff, including drivers and crews, that our fantastic volunteers all along the line are registered Community Rail contributors, and have been fully safety briefed by us. It’s important for customers at stations to know that they are volunteers, too. The positive feelings that we know customers have when they see the logo is a direct reflection of the local community contribution that adds so much value to our work at stations.

Nick Reid, GWR Stations Manager



A very special endorsement came from the Weymouth train crews, who requested permission to use the logo as their team badge.

Andy Collier (left) arranged for the special enameled badges to be made, and seeing GWR crews & station staff wearing these has delighted community rail contributors as they travel between the stations helping out, making us feel that we are truly part of the railway family!

