

## Chairman's Report

This year's report is a little more positive after the trials and tribulations that the route has endured over the last year or more and as British Rail used to say '*we're getting there*'. There are some positives to note but equally some issues still to address.

There are some performance issues to resolve regarding punctuality and trains stopping short of their destination. These seem to centre around the three-way diagram involving Colne, Blackpool South and Ormskirk. With the closure of the line on two weekends to replace Highbury Road Bridge we have still not had the full winter Sunday timetable provided by trains since it was introduced.

I am assured that measures are planned to address these issues during the coming timetable changes. Whilst these are really nothing to do with Community Rail, they continue to have a negative impact on passengers as well as existing and future rail users which I think will take some considerable time to overcome.

Several stations have had new shelters and ticket vending machines installed. CCTV cameras have also been installed but as yet don't appear to be connected to anything. Highbury Road Bridge has been completely rebuilt, re-opening on time and on budget thanks to great work by Story Contracting. The opening and subsequent interviews were well-circulated on social media channels.

Friends Groups at all the stations on the South Fylde Line have continued in their endeavours and a considerable amount of work has been undertaken culminating in awards for stations and frequent acknowledgement by the general public as to how good our stations look.

Improvement work at various stations, including a completely new look Kirkham & Wesham station providing lift access to all platforms, new passenger shelters and so on have shown the line isn't being deprived of investment though we still have aspirations for a more regular service and we continue to press for large scale investment to provide more than one train an hour. Thanks go to David Simper for continuing to pursue the South Fylde Line capacity increase project.

Due to the changeover of staff, community projects have not featured strongly this year but with the appointment of Shahiesta Raja, plans are in hand to involve local school children in rail-related activities over the coming months.

The blue plaque to mark Sir Nigel Gresley's link with St. Anne's (he married a St Anne's girl at the Parish Church) is now included in the newly published Town Council's Blue Plaque Trail.

At Squire's Gate Station the half-barrel containers have been given a new lease of life thanks to some repair work and a timely coat of paint. Additional planters with built in seats now grace the platform too and Squires Gate station is beginning to look a little more cared for.

A 'Friends Group' is taking shape at Squires Gate station though often volunteers from St Anne's station commute carrying paint, tools, water and plants during the working party sessions. Negotiations with Network Rail for a licence to take on derelict areas are on-going and the friends are in discussions with a local landowner to create a water supply from water butts filled with rainwater run-off from the neighbouring garages. A new fence is to be installed shortly too!



Progress is being made on securing step-free access Squires gate station thanks to the involvement of a local landowner and the borough council.

St. Anne's Town Council continue to contribute to the partnership and have proved grants to enhance the area outside St Anne's Station. Both the town's County Councillors also made grants available for specific projects. Disappointingly Fylde Borough Council with 7 stations within in its boundary have yet to 'buy into' community rail.



The Friends Group at Lytham continue to make use of their beach hut as an advertising hub for forthcoming events in the town. They have a strong link with local events and are well-supported by local businesses. Investment in new self-watering troughs on the platform has paid off with colourful blooms giving the station the 'feel good'

factor.

Friends of Ansdell & Fairhaven station haven't rested on their laurels. Their golf bags and figures at the station attracted a lot of positive comments and reflect the Ricoh Women's Golf Championship for station users. Having collected the Best Station Award from North West in Bloom, they have developed a wildflower maze and a wildflower meadow and have introduced plants that do well in dry conditions. Pupils from Ansdell Primary are painting bird boxes and bug hotels. The group are in the process of developing a sculpture area and continue to enjoy their green gym.



Ansdell's Heritage trail was launched a couple of weeks ago and offers something different for users of the line for leisure purposes. Plans are in hand to make the Heritage Trail available from the Community Rail websites.

Planted up golf bags provided by St. Anne's In Bloom made the most of the golfing theme with golf bags lining the route from St Anne's station to the club house. The station's '*silent soldiers*' marked the several Remembrance events in the town and photographs were used widely in the rail media. It is hoped that these 'Tommies' might increase in number and find their way onto all stations along the South Fylde Line in November 2019.



We are being well supported by 'Northern' and grants from the Station Adoption Fund have been readily provided for several projects along the line.

Going forward, the CRP, working with various partners will need to consider:

- how it can help resurrect passenger confidence and encourage passengers back on to the route.

- Recruiting more volunteers at some of the stations especially Kirkham & Wesham and Pleasure Beach
- Developing some innovative ways to engage with existing and future users of all ages.

Attempts to revive a Friends Group at Kirkham are still being pursued – there are planters on the platform that once filled with compost and planted up will make the station more attractive follow on from the major renovation undertaken last year. The station now offers lift access to all platforms and a dedicated car park serving the station is under construction.

St Anne's Town Council deserve credit for their financial contributions to the Partnership and for hosting our Management meetings over the last year. I wish we could convince Fylde Borough Council with 7 stations within its boundaries, to contribute to the work of the Community Rail Partnership. Such contributions, used as matched funding in grant application bids, could lever in more resources for the South Fylde Line.

I would like to personally thank all the Friends Groups for their continuing support for the line. Their efforts really do make a difference in enhancing the travelling experiences of the passengers and station users.

Tony Ford, June 2019