

Haslemere Community Station paper setting out proposal for funding to Haslemere Town Council Sept 2020

Cllr Nikki Barton, project Chair

Haslemere Community Rail Partnership (now called Haslemere Community Station) is requesting a grant of £2500 from one of its key strategic partners, Haslemere Town Council to enable it to continue to employ a part time volunteer coordinator for the information Hub at the station, and social media project promoter.

This role is vital if we as a partnership are to continue to develop this successful community initiative, started in 2015 that promotes Haslemere, its businesses, events, rich cultural heritage and its beautiful surrounding countryside to both local residents and visitors to the town that use the train station. Another key objective is the promotion of rail travel (and the links with bus, cycle and walking modes)- which is vital given the growing issue of parking that the town faces.

Clearly the Covid emergency has had a major impact on the project, with rail travel virtually coming to a halt with the lock down in March earlier this year- but project has adapted using both its social media outreach and the physical space at the station. While the Community Hub we have renovated so successfully was closed to visitors when only essential travel was permitted, we utilised the large screen and Hub window to let those who were using the buses and trains know where help was available- the 'Haslemere Help' community initiative was advertised with large posters and the via the screen. The Hub took part in the 'National Bear Hunt' initiative that encouraged families to get out and walk during Covid, with a giant bear in the window.

As lock down lifted, the station promoted new walking routes and even more active on social media channels to spread the word on locally available help. After discussions between committee and volunteers, the Information Hub reopened in mid-August. We are now currently open between 10am and 12 noon on Thursday, Friday and Saturday- a reduced schedule compared with pre-Covid where the Hub was open 6 days a week- but ensuring volunteer safety is paramount and the intention is to increase the opening schedule when possible.

During the first week of opening, we were delighted to welcome an average of 9 visitors a day, more than expected. We have a team of over 30 volunteers, including Duke of Edinburgh students ready and waiting to work in the Hub to resume the fantastic visitor information service and to welcome local residents in search of community information. This dedicated team keeps the station flower beds maintained, is researching and mapping new station walks, is ready to go back into our local schools to restart the highly successful Try the Train event, to work with the Hunter centre on a long discussed 'Dementia Friendly' travel initiative, to install new art work to improve the station and to work with Haslemere Vision and SCC to promote more active travel modes- walking and cycling to access the station.

The importance of the project social media outreach was clear during the lock down period- and provided a vital community information service. The data provides clear evidence of this as follows- with March 2020 follower numbers in brackets. Twitter 875 (788), Instagram 685 (118), Facebook 95 (78) followers. The interaction rate is also growing and are now tagged in posts from others in community or walkers visiting Haslemere.

Haslemere Community Station is currently nominated for 4 national rail awards, recognising the outstanding efforts of the both the project coordinator and large team of volunteers.

1. National Rail Awards- Haslemere Station- **Shortlisted for 'Station of the Year' category** in recognition of the work including the renovated and enhanced community Hub space and the quality of visitor and local community information provided by a 30 strong volunteer team, the defibrillator installed by the project, the new bench and wider improvements including the tended flower beds on platforms 2/3 and flower filled tubs at the taxi rank area. The winner will announced on Sept 17th, 2020
<https://awards.railbusinessevents.co.uk/>.
2. Community Rail Network Annual Awards- Haslemere Station shortlisted in **the 'Most Enhanced Station Buildings and Surroundings'** to be announced in December, 2020
<https://communityrail.org.uk/events-training/community-rail-awards/>
3. Community Rail Network Annual Awards- the Try the Train school's initiative with St Bart's primary school is nominated in the **'Community Rail Partnership Trips Involving Diverse Groups'** category.
4. Community Rail Network Annual Awards- Ken Griffiths is nominated **'Most Outstanding Community Volunteer'** category.

On Sept 11th, 2020, Mark Hopwood, Managing Director South Western Rail visited Haslemere Station and the Hub. He was clearly impressed with the local knowledge of the volunteers and focus of the project on encouraging rail travel. The series of Rail to Ramble leaflets produced by the project were particularly noted, these leaflets provide all the information needed to enjoy a walk from the station- either in a circular loop or to another station.

We have noted that walkers are coming down from Guildford, Woking and further up the line all the way to Waterloo to walk and to visit Haslemere. Some are prepared with maps and information, but others arrive to explore and have a wander. Visitors are also coming up the line from the Portsmouth direction- with some visitors meeting up in Haslemere as this is their 'midway' point.

The Hub volunteers have been asked to recommend cafes and walks as well as shops and other places to visit. There is now a bench outside the station! Gardening will continue at platforms 2/3 very soon - we are waiting for permission from South Western Railway. We have a great relationship with the staff at Haslemere Station and they also direct visitors to us. At Christmas our National Trust partner provided a large Christmas tree from the Devils Punch Bowl for the ticket office, which was decorated by the station staff and much enjoyed by passengers.

The Haslemere Vision Neighbourhood Plan used the Hub space for a public information event in February/March 2020. The Information Hub is a central resource for information about all things Haslemere - we have a varied knowledge and the resources to find out information when asked. We are partnered with a wide range of partners including the National Trust, South Downs National Park, Surrey Hills AONB, Haslemere and District Chamber of Commerce, Haslemere Hall, Haslemere Museum. Visit Haslemere, Haslemere Society, Arts Society Haslemere.

Due to the Covid lock down, there has been a growth in the 'Staycation' and interest in exploring the more local beautiful countryside that is accessible by train- and it is clear from recent South Western Railway management presentations that they see this reverse flow of passengers coming out of London and the suburbs to explore the countryside as key future opportunity and projects like the Haslemere Community Station and community rail are integral to this.

While clearly it will be vital for the protected landscapes of the National Trust, Surrey Hills and South Downs NP to manage visitor numbers, this does present huge opportunities for a town like Haslemere to benefit from visitors combining a walk with shopping and dining and thereby supporting our local businesses. Clearly the great advantage of such visitors arriving by train is that they arrive without creating pollution and parking issues associated with private car use.

In a further extremely positive development for the town, and growing out of the success of Haslemere Community Rail Partnership, Haslemere station has recently joined with Witley, Milford, Godalming and Farncombe stations to form the Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership with the objective of working together to promote the visitor economy and the use of more sustainable transport. The new partnership has been recently received accreditation by the Department for Transport, the highest gold standard in recognition of both outstanding governance and project work.

Haslemere Community Station has exciting future project plans that I will outline in the presentation to full council, however securing funding to continue to employ the volunteer Hub manager is fundamental to this.

To date we have achieved a huge amount employing a part time coordinator for 15 hours a week during the summer months and dropping to 10 hours a week in the winter months. This has enabled us to stay open all year, on a 2 hour a day basis as we have been able to rely on the cost free work of the volunteer team. The paid coordinator supervises these opening hours, covers shifts when volunteers are not available and also gives her time for free as a volunteer.

We would like to increase our hours of opening to further raise the profile of Haslemere and to extend a friendly welcome to more rail visitors , to encourage them to explore the town, to visit our events, enjoy our rich cultural heritage and to spend more time and money in our cafes and shops.

As a project to date we have been successful in obtaining funding for capital spending from the ACoRP small grants fund, and from SWR marketing budget as a one off payment. All our community partners have made small contributions either financial or in kind, which has been also vital in supporting our activities. However, we need revenue funding to continue the project as set out below.

Haslemere Community rail partnership Hub manager salary

A Community partnership Hub manager has been successfully employed on a part time, temporary contract to find, train and support project volunteers, to man the Hub, link with partner organisations to promote Haslemere and to establish and build an effective social media outreach promoting Haslemere, businesses, events and sustainable travel.

Current costs: Volunteer coordinator hours April 2021- April 2022- 15 hours per week summer opening/10 hours per week winter opening

29 weeks @£10 per hour x 15 hours a week = £4350

Winter opening staff costs: 10 hours@£10/hour x 23 weeks= £2300

Total staffing costs April 2021-March 2022= £6650

Request: HTC contribution: £2500

Rationale for request: Promoting Haslemere as a visitor destination and supporting the businesses and vitality of the town is a key mission for the town council. HCRP provides visitor information and a community resource at the key, strategic location in the town, as well as a growing social media outreach. As the HCRP hub is manned in the main by a team of volunteers- a relatively small grant to employ the part time project coordinator presents excellent value for money, while raising the profile of the council.

Haslemere Community Information Hub Data

Visitors numbers have increased significantly in 2019. While it is difficult to make a direct comparison of visitor data because of external factors (2018 access to the Hub was blocked due to forecourt works for many weeks and August 2019 the Hub was closed due to renovation)- the data illustrates the success of Hub and volunteer team.

	2018 Visitor Numbers	2019 Visitor Numbers
January	Not open	75
February	Not open	102
March	Not open	119
April	Not open	214
May	75	230
June	141	246

July	90 (Forecourt works blocked access to Hub)	238
August	152	84 (Hub closed for renovation-booking hall used for visitor info)
September	284	N/A
October	117	
November	96	
December	54	
Total Hub visitor numbers	1009 (Over 9 months Hub open, July limited access to Hub)	1308 (Over 8 months to date this year, August and part of Sept Hub closed for renovation)

1. Successful 160 anniversary of the train coming to Haslemere recently celebrated with a blue plaque to be installed at the Oct 2nd launch event.
2. A 7 year lease until 2024- secured at a peppercorn rent- on the Hub shop premises at the station
3. Flower beds on the station platforms, and tubs by the decked car park have been planted and maintained by the partnership.
4. Rail to Ramble maps, providing routes centred on Haslemere train station have been researched, walked and mapped by project partners. An initial two maps have been printed in partnership with the South Downs National Park and the Surrey Hills and are very popular with visitors to the Hub. The maps also available at other sites within the Surrey Hills and South Downs. As funds become available more route maps will be published. All routes are available on the project website.
5. A Rail to Trail link from the station to Devils Punch Bowl and the start of 90km of off-road Surrey Cycle way is being developed with Surrey Hills and Cycling UK. A Surrey Hills cow has been hand painted to mark the Haslemere station gateway to this cycle network- to be unveiled at the October 2nd launch event.
6. Haslemere Community Rail Partnership represented Haslemere at Waterloo station at the annual Community Rail in the City.
7. Defibrillator installed
8. Try the Train event- first event taking 60 St Bart's year 6 children to experience train travel to their senior schools.
9. Worked in partnership with SWR for successful installation of 6 electric vehicle charging points in the car park.
10. New partners joining the partnership include the National Trust

These projects have been successfully achieved due to financial support and support in kind from Haslemere Town Council, SWR, ACoRP, Haslemere Chamber, Haslemere Society, Haslemere Vision, Haslemere Museum and contributions in kind from project partners South Downs National Park, Haslemere Hall, Haslemere Arts Society, Station House.



[Annual Report for AGM, September 9, 2020](#)

Reflection and Review of the last 12 months CRP activity

Background

The Surrey Hills to the South Downs Community Rail Partnership (SH-SD CRP) is an exciting, dynamic initiative that has its origins in the Haslemere Community Station project that started in 2015. The Partnership was launched on June 13th, 2019 for the mutual benefit of all the people and organisations of Haslemere, Witley, Milford, Godalming and Farncombe, together with their immediate surrounding areas.

Working with South Western Railway (SWR), with the support of the Community Rail Network the SH-SD CRP aims to provide access to the local area via rail and more sustainable transport modes. It has a clear vision and direction to deliver the following key objectives:

- To promote the towns along the route of the SH-SD CRP and their surrounding districts, including the Surrey Hills, South Downs National Park and the National Trust, plus the organisations working within these boundaries.
- To promote local events and cultural activities across the SH-SD CRP area.
- To promote social enterprise activities within the SH-SD CRP area.
- To work with schools, youth organisations and vulnerable adults to provide information about the railway including how to keep safe, through activities including Try the Train Experiences.
- To work with the local community and SWR, to provide a high standard of infrastructure and aesthetics at all stations, and to bring them into the heart of the community.
- To encourage greater use of sustainable and environmentally friendly public transport.

- To work with partners to develop and enhance local train services, stations and improve access for all - for example to ensure all our stations are dementia and disabled friendly.
- To work with SWR to increase off-peak rail passenger numbers.
- To enable local railways to play a larger role in local and regional economic and social regeneration including projects to enhance tourist, educational, health, cultural and environmental regeneration and development activities.

All these priorities align with the four pillars of community rail in the Department for Transport 2018 Community Rail Development Strategy namely:

- a) Providing a voice for the community
- b) Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel
- c) Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion and
- d) Supporting social and economic development.

All the SH-SD CRP's activities as set out in the Partnership Activity Plan support or implement these four pillars and follow the SMART principles.

Governance

Our steering group includes the following partners: South Western Railway, South Downs National Park, Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Trust, Surrey County Council, Waverley Borough Council, Milford and Witley Parish Council, Godalming Town Council, Haslemere Town Council, Watts Gallery and the Community Rail Network.

Steering group meetings are held quarterly¹, with the venue and hosting rotating between members of the steering group. At the launch meeting, elections were held for the following posts:

- Chair Surrey County Councillor Nikki Barton
- Treasurer Post currently vacant

The CRP has recently set up a Company Limited by Guarantee, with a board of directors.

Good news and reflections

The creation of the SH-SD CRP is in itself a significant good news story. In a relatively short time, a very strong partnership has come together committed to promoting rail travel and the stations, communities, beautiful countryside and cultural attractions accessible along the line.

One of the key strengths of the Partnership has been its range and depth. It includes representatives of a National Park, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the National Trust, County, District and Parish and Town Councils, as well as major visitor attractions, for example, Watts Gallery (Surrey Visitor Attraction of the Year 2019). In addition, the Partnership has the support of local business chambers



and a town visitor centre, together with the local stations' Adoption Groups. There is a clear recognition by all involved that Community Rail is an extremely positive vehicle by which communities can work collaboratively and flexibly, incorporating local priorities to support the key common partnership goals of promoting rail travel and its integration with more sustainable travel modes, for the benefit of both the local community and the visitor economy.

The SH-SD CRP plays a significant strategic role in that it fills the gap that previously existed between the North Downs CRP that starts to the north of Farncombe at Guildford Station and the East Hampshire CRP that starts at Liphook Station to the south of Haslemere.

Collectively the five stations within the Partnership have a very high patronage, with aggregate c.4.5 million annual passenger journeys (Network Rail data). The stations within the line serve some of the most popular commuter market towns on the Waterloo to Portsmouth line, but uniquely they all also provide a gateway to some of the most beautiful countryside in the south-east of England, comprising the South Downs National Park, the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a range of National Trust protected landscapes.

The National Trust was indeed founded in Haslemere, being the birth place of its founder, Robert Hunter. Haslemere is surrounded by a ring of some of the first landscapes that were bought by the National Trust to ensure their protection in perpetuity for the nation. The arrival of the railway to the town over 160 years ago enabled visitors to travel from London and marked the start of a local tourism attracting artists and poets. Hindhead and the Devil's Punch Bowl, just a short distance from Haslemere Station, were a popular destination as a health-giving 'spa' with clean air and fine views. Conan Doyle wrote his Sherlock Holmes books at Undershaw in Hindhead, less than 2 miles from the station.

The Partnership aims, once again, to promote the visitor economy on this section of the Portsmouth line - to support local businesses and visitor attractions and to promote sustainable transport access to the countryside, particularly to those without access to the private car. The line stations are all accessible in less than an hour from Waterloo station, one of the busiest in London with a very large demographic catchment. The direct involvement of the local visitor information bureau, the business chambers and Waverley Borough Council's Economic Development portfolio holder (who are all committed to

promoting the visitor economy through the SH-SD CRP) lends further depth and strength to the Partnership.

An early successful initiative of the SH-SD CRP has been the development of a series of **Rail to Ramble walking guides**. Two original guides, starting at Haslemere Station were researched by volunteers and printed with the support of the Surrey Hills and South Downs. The line officer is currently working to create an online data base of all Rail to Ramble trails from all 5 stations, building on existing resources and with additional routes added with the invaluable help of volunteers. A new trail from Farncombe station is currently being researched in partnership with our new partner, the Watts Gallery in Compton. The Watts Gallery, voted Most Popular Visitor Attraction in Surrey 2019, is a nationally recognised cultural centre. It was the home of William and Mary Watts, original founders of the Arts and Craft movement.



The CRP participated in the **Scenic Britain by Rail** event at Alexandra Palace, London. The Partnership is promoted on the permanent Scenic Britain by Rail website here: <https://www.scenicrailbritain.com/lines/surrey-hills-south-downs>

A key success for the Partnership has been securing funding for a **line officer** for the project and we are very grateful for SWR support. To date, a huge amount has been achieved by a team of volunteers as set out in the activity plan, but it was becoming clear that, in order to realise the vision and objectives set out in the plan, the focus of a dedicated officer was vital. We were delighted to appoint Lucy Lomax in April, 2020 on a one year contract. Lucy has been working with the East Hants CRP and her knowledge, experience and energy is already having a very positive impact.

A percentage of the line officer budget has been dedicated to continuing to employ a social media expert to promote the project. The @HillsToDowns Twitter account has attracted a growing **social media** presence following over the past months since the launch of the project- @HillsToDowns Twitter account has 317 followers, with 18-150 impressions; Instagram has 220 followers with growing Facebook following. All channels have high levels of interaction.

During the Covid lock down, the partnership has increased its social media presence and provided vital local community information.

A key priority for the CRP is the measurement of our impact - both qualitative and quantitative. We receive regular updates from SWR of passenger data, that indicates any shift in traveller numbers. Social media reach is also analysed with regular updates to all partners and at the Haslemere Community Hub, for example, a daily record of visitors and a visitor comment book are both kept under review. As a partnership we have recently

registered to participate in the CRN Community Impact Assessment Tool, and all partners will be encouraged to input their local activities via the app in order to assess the impact of the CRP.

The complete renovation of the **Haslemere Community Hub** at Haslemere Station has been a significant success for the SH-SD CRP. This is found at @Haslemere_iHub on Twitter. A derelict shop space on the station forecourt was originally renovated by volunteers as part of the Haslemere Community Station initiative to enable its use. However, further improvements were needed if



the Hub was to remain in use. In October 2019, an official opening was held of the enlarged and greatly upgraded Hub. The Community Hub, now open throughout the year on a part time basis is manned by a team of over 25 volunteers to provide visitor and community information and showcasing SH-SD CRP attractions and events.

The Hub has recently reopened, post- Covid lock down- providing an information service both to local residents about rail travel and to the groups of walkers that are gradually returning to explore the surrounding countryside. Given the negative impact of the Covid shut down on local businesses, there is now an even greater role for the rail partnership to promote the visitor economy. The Hub holds promotional information about all partner stations on the line, and actively promotes any events via the Hills to Downs social media platforms.

Clearly the objective of the CRP is to build community capacity via positive and inclusive engagement along the line. But one significant success of the SH-SD CRP that is more difficult to quantify in any activity plan is the building of positive relationships between project partners, and between the Partnership and the South Western Railway leadership team and the operational team on the ground, in particular the staff at each station. The creation of the Partnership for example brought together the local Surrey Hills AONB, National Trust and South Downs National Park representatives for the first time. Project partners have been collaborating with the SWR marketing team to promote events on the line and have actively participated in SWR conference forums to explain the benefits of community rail. Locally, operational station staff have commented how much they appreciate the CRP presence - for example at Haslemere, SWR staff have been able to direct arriving passengers to the Hub to answer enquiries.

The **National Trust Christmas Tree initiative** at all five of the Partnership's stations was very successful and well received by the SWR station teams. The National Trust team from the Devil's Punch Bowl delivered (and later removed) a large Christmas tree to the waiting rooms and ticket offices at each station to be decorated by SWR staff. The donated trees brought cheer to all involved and also promoted the National Trust's 'cut-your-own-tree' scheme that supports the ecological management of the Punch Bowl woodland. They also provided good press and social media opportunities.



In 2019 the Partnership held its first **'Try the Train'** event for Year 6 Primary School children. It is a great way for the SH-SD CRP to engage with the community, working in collaboration with SWR Ambassadors and local St. Bartholomew's School in Haslemere. 60 pupils took part and we plan to do this across the line each year to help prepare children for going to secondary school by train and generally how to use the travel by train safely and responsibly.



The SH-SD CRP has recently been accredited by the Department for Transport, this is the rail partnership gold standard and recognises the outstanding level of governance, performance and commitment by all partners. This was an outstanding achievement, particularly for a relatively new partnership- and is only second CRP on the SWR network to gain this status. The accreditation 'kite mark' is of significant value, as an accredited partnership access to funding of £25,000 per project.

Progress on the SH-SD CRP activity plan has clearly been impacted by the Covid-19 emergency lockdown- initiatives currently on hold include: Try the Train at schools along the line, improving the station environment along the line including the installation of art work, planters, benches and upgrades to waiting rooms and the promotion of the Partnership at major events that were planned to take place throughout the spring and summer of 2020 all on hold.

However, work has been moving forward on other initiatives that are possible despite travel and access restrictions. Our line officer Lucy is progressing the project Line Guide, with a marketing launch with South Western Railway, of a series of 'Rail to Ramble' walks from the 5 partner stations being planned for Spring 2021.

Farncombe and Godalming stations have recently achieved 'adoption' status, they are now eligible for grants from the Community Rail Network for local projects. Milford and Witley stations are currently working toward this status- which again will bring funding and support opportunities from the CRN. A proposal for murals to improve the aesthetic of Haslemere and Farncombe stations is being drawn up- using local artists, and volunteers to install.

The currently disused Station House at Milford Station is under negotiation with a local community interest company, Music Works based at Rodborough School planning to renovate the building to provide community music and music education.

The work of the outstanding community volunteer team at Haslemere has been recognised nationally. Haslemere Station is currently shortlisted for two national awards- the 'Station of the Year' category of the National Rail Awards and 'Most Enhanced Station Buildings & Surroundings' in the Community Rail Networks (CRN) Annual awards. In addition, The Try the Train initiative has been shortlisted in the 'Community Rail Partnership Trips Involving Diverse Groups' category and Ken Griffiths is shortlisted in the 'Most Outstanding Community Rail Volunteer' category of the CRN Annual Awards.

Unfortunately the CRN gala event has been replaced by a virtual awards ceremony in early December, 2020- best of luck to all nominees!

Learning Points

Key to the SH-SD CRP success to date has been bringing together a wide-ranging partnership at the strategic and operational levels, along with partners that represent national and local organisations and governance. It is this breadth and recognition of these partners that contributes to our success. In addition, this range of partners ensures that the Partnership benefits from a particularly wide range of perspectives.

One of the key challenges is ensuring that alignment is achieved across the Partnership which comprises five diverse stations, from Milford and Witley (smaller rural stations) to Haslemere and Godalming (which are busier stations serving larger urban communities) and Farncombe, which although serving a satellite community of Godalming, is physically a larger station due to it being the original terminus of the London and South Western Railway. However as detailed above, all stations are unified as gateways to the Surrey Hills, South Downs and National Trust countryside.

Another challenge is ensuring that there is a balance of projects, and particularly those that rely on volunteers across all the Partnership's line stations, given that Haslemere Station was the focus at the start of the SH-SD CRP, having been previously established as a community partnership in its own right. That said, the experience and success of the Haslemere Community Station initiative has been extremely valuable in guiding the work of the wider SH-SD CRP. It is worth emphasising that there is great freedom for each station to develop its

own initiatives within the umbrella of the Partnership, and 'adoption' status gives valuable access to small grant funds from the Community Rail Network.

Tempering ambition is another key challenge for project partners. We have many creative ideas - for example a desire to enhance the sustainability of our stations with water refill stations and electric charging points for E-bikes, and the hope to improve the integration between rail and bus services, as well as to improve 'access for all' to our stations and into the countryside. Yet we are learning from experience that patience and persistence are needed.

Cllr Nikki Barton

Chair, Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership, Sept 2020