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## New lease of life for Henley-in-Arden station as Network Rail's chair Lord Peter Hendy opens new community space

Yesterday (Thursday 22 February), representatives from the Railway Heritage Trust, Henley-in-Arden Parish Council, West Midlands Railway, Friends of the Shakespeare Line and Friends of Henley Railway Station joined Network Rail's Lord Peter Hendy to open Henley-in-Arden's newly refurbished station building.

The original station building, which dates back to 1908, has been repurposed into a stylish and welcoming community space and bar, after being left empty

since the 1990s.

Concerned about the deterioration of the building and the developing signs of anti-social behaviour, local community group Friends of Henley Railway Station (FHRS) stepped into action to lead the major transformation.

With the support of Network Rail, West Midlands Railway, Henley-in-Arden Parish Council and the Railway Heritage Trust, FHRS carried out structural repairs to the building before reworking and renovating the space which now houses a fantastic community bar and lounge.

The building even accommodates its own micro-brewery which local residents will run, with their products being served in the bar alongside other local beers, local wines, soft drinks and snacks.

The lounge will provide a multi-functional community space, equipped with IT facilities, which can be hired for small functions.

Peter, Lord Hendy, chair of Network Rail, said: “It’s an absolute pleasure to officially open this brilliant new community space that has been created in the old station building.

“It is wonderful to see partners and volunteers coming together to put the railway at the heart of the local community.

“I’d like to thank everybody involved in this project and I hope passengers from Henley and beyond will experience the benefits that this repurposed building brings for years to come.”

Angela Okey, chair of Friends of Henley Railway Station, said: “After living in Henley for several years and walking my dogs past the derelict station building every morning, it saddened me to see the state of disrepair of what was once an iconic and beautiful building.

“The aim was always to make this a community project and by involving local people with the same love of their town, it has been a delight to work on and watch the enthusiasm of everyone.

“As well as being a welcoming meeting place for residents, we hope it will attract more footfall to our beautiful town of Henley-in-Arden, which in turn will support our local businesses and traders.”

Tim Hedley-Jones, Executive Director of the Railway Heritage Trust, said: “We are pleased to have supported this project with grants to restore the building, and we have presented the station with a plaque to record its history which Lord Peter Hendy has unveiled today. It is a testament to the community that they have brought the building back from dereliction.”

Jonny Wiseman, customer experience director at West Midlands Railway, said: “We are thrilled to see the opening of a new community space which will offer a new lease of life for Henley-in-Arden Station and we were delighted to be able to support the project through our Customer and Communities Improvement Fund.

“Community projects play an important role in enhancing the customer experience at local stations and Henley-in-Arden will hugely benefit from this refurbishment.”

Fraser Pithie, chair of Friends of the Shakespeare Line, said: “What has been delivered by the Friends of Henley Railway Station shows the tremendous impact that people from their own community can achieve when they come together for the benefit of their community and engage with the railway. This is an awesome facility which will benefit the community, local economy, railways and encourage people to travel by train.”

All income and profits from the bar and community space will be invested back into the building, facilities and station area.

### **Notes to Editors**

Whilst the original 1908 station building was closed and boarded up in the 1990s, Henley-in-Arden has remained an operational station allowing passengers easy access to Birmingham, Stratford-upon-Avon and surrounding areas.

FHRS, which was formed in 2020, is a Community Interest Company (CIC), which means the community basis of the building is assured, with all income and any profits invested back into the building, facilities and station area.

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Press Contact

[press.office@wmtrains.co.uk](mailto:press.office@wmtrains.co.uk)

0330 095 5626