

Bishopstone Community Hub converted from station parcel office

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Bishopstone, on the East Sussex coast, is celebrating the opening of its Community Hub, a new local amenity created within the area's Grade II listed railway station by Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) with the support of rail industry and local community partners.

Andrew Blackman, Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex, joined railway historian and TV presenter Tim Dunn to cut the ribbon and open the Hub. Guests at the official opening also included local MP Maria Caulfield, Deputy Mayor of Seaford Cllr Liz Boorman, and Chair of Lewes Council Cllr Adrian Ross.

In collaboration with the Friends of Bishopstone Station (FOBS), Southeast Communities Rail Partnership and the Railway Heritage Trust, the train operator has transformed Bishopstone's original parcel and ticket offices into a 70-square-metre community space. The Hub, which is fully accessible for wheelchair users, includes activity, kitchen and storage areas, and an accessible toilet.

FOBS, a local group dedicated to protecting and preserving the 1930s Art Deco building, will manage and maintain the community facility, renting it out to local groups for events and meetings. A local yoga class and a wellbeing group have already booked regular slots.

Stephen MacCallaugh, head of stations for Southern, said: "Bishopstone is an architectural gem, so it's great to have worked with the Friends, Community Rail, the Railway Heritage Trust and the local council to achieve its potential as a community asset. I thank our many partners for their invaluable expertise and enthusiasm, which have helped create a much-needed modern facility while honouring the history of the station and the area."

The Hub is a key element of GTR's restoration of the station. With architectural guidance from the Railway Heritage Trust and the Conservation Officer for Lewes and Eastbourne Councils, and financial support from the Trust and the Community Rail Network, GTR have restored Bishopstone's interior as part of its network-wide, multimillion-pound station improvement programme. The Trust contributed a total of £57,000 in three separate grants, and the Community Rail Network contributed £15,000.

The refurbishment has also included the spacious octagonal ticket hall. The whole station was designed with the capacity to serve a much larger settlement, but an expected major housing development was cancelled at the outbreak of World War Two, shortly after the station opened.

With further guidance from the Railway Heritage Trust and Lewes and Eastbourne Councils, GTR now plan to restore the station's windows to their original Crittall designs and install new external signs in the style of the 1930s originals.

Barbara Mine, chair of FOBS, said: "We couldn't have got this far without the continued support from Southeast Communities Rail Partnership, GTR's Contract Project Manager Paul Devereux, Community Rail Network, Railway Heritage Trust, Network Rail and others. They all believed in our project and made our launch day a success. We now have a restored and amazing community hub for the local and wider community."

Tim Hedley-Jones, executive director of the Railway Heritage Trust, said: "The Railway Heritage Trust are delighted to see the Grade II listed station finally have a permanent use for the redundant space within the building. The station is a unique example of architecture from the 1930s, and we are very pleased our £57,000 grant has been invested to restore some historic features, including the Crittall windows and signage installed in line with the original architectural designs."