

Churnet Valley Railway: Regional businesses unite to build back

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Tourism businesses in the region have been hit hard during the pandemic and face ongoing challenges as they emerge from the cruel realities of the past 18 months and various lockdowns. However, one of the key heritage attractions in Staffordshire, the Churnet Valley Railway, has a recovery plan that is not just to build back better...but build back 'together'.

With the help of local businesses, the railway, whose ambition is to return to full event schedule in 2022, has decided the community needs a fun summer's day out and has planned a Bank Holiday weekend of festivities,

"What better way to lift the spirit of Staffordshire folk than a family-friendly outing which combines a tipple and some tunes" said Jack Ilcyszyn, events manager, Churnet Valley Railway.

The railway, with the support of several local businesses, is opening the railway over the Bank Holiday weekend for a festival dedicated to beer, music and food.

The railway will be receiving beers from 16 breweries including local ales from family-owned micro-

brewery Limestone. The brewery has been in operation since 2008 and during COVID had its own challenges to overcome, which saw the business pivot to online sales and distribution.

Ian Bradford, Founder of Limestone Brewery is glad to see that with restrictions easing, people can share a pint 'like before'. He said: "We are delighted to have our ales at this event. People coming together sharing a few beers, listening to music and generally having a good time is just what we need after the various lockdowns.

"We will have a range of beverages and food available to cater for families, so it's not only about beer." said Ilczyszyn. "In fact, this year more than ever, it is about community."

Other local businesses are coming to the party too, sponsoring the event to showcase their own operations and support the railway.

Jonathon Cornes Associates ,Anglia Shunter Limited, Aarons & Partners ,R Bestwick & Sons Limited, Rowtype Printers, Cisco Aerials, Dale Electrical,DPC Accountants Limited, Leek Signs & Graphics Limited , Diamond Freight ,Stoddards Fuel, North Staffordshire Railway Company (1978) Limited, Batt Holden Limited, Industrial Electronics, K A Carr Groundworks, Premier Electrical, Chaffinch.

Gregory Wilson, Managing Director said: "The local business community has been key in enabling us to run this event. We know many of them have had their own challenges due to the pandemic and we're really grateful for their support."

Chris Plant, Director at Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce said: "We're delighted businesses throughout the region are working together and supporting each other. Many businesses have struggled over the past 18 months, seeing their operations come to a complete standstill, so this collaborative approach to growing business back is great to see.

"This gives a real sense of community both throughout the business sector and the public."

Gregory added: "In addition to the local businesses we've had backing from companies from further afield including Kent and Brighton Vixen Digital, Converse Digital, Pennine IT, Into the Blue, and Gallagher's, a global brand. Thanks to that wider support and our volunteers we can run trains over 3 days."

Trains will be running to a timetable with a planned 20 departures throughout Saturday, Sunday and Monday (28th - 30th August). Both diesel and steam trains will be in operation and trains will depart from Froghall or Leekbrook Junction.

An on-site DJ will get the party started each day playing tunes from across the decades from TIME. Family tickets for the Rail Ale Trail Staffordshire event cost £20 and can be booked on the website. Children under 4 are free. Individual adult tickets £8 and child £6

Visit www.churnetvalleyrailway.co.uk for more details.

Photo credit: Churnet Valley Railway