

# Kent & East Sussex Railway trials new coal substitute

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**Kent & East Sussex Railway** has taken a historic step in beginning a trial of a new type of fuel for its steam locomotives as a potential replacement for coal.

The railway took delivery of the first supplies of an ovoid coal substitute on the morning of Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September at its Rolvenden locomotive depot.

Now that steam has returned to the K&ESR, after the lowering of the fire risk during the long dry summer, the substitute will be tested alongside coal, imported from Columbia, over the coming weeks to see if it can be a viable replacement both in terms of performance and cost as well as environmentally.

The substitute, called Heritage Wildfire, has been specially formulated to be suitable for steam locomotives, which normally require a very high-quality of coal to operate efficiently which is now both expensive and increasingly difficult to obtain. It is advertised as being smokeless, producing minimal emissions and low levels of ash.

‘Swiftsure’ was the first locomotive to test the new fuel on its scheduled passenger services and driver of

the day, Pete Salmon, cautiously pronounced it a success.

General Manager Robin Coombes said: “It is early days so the jury is still out, but we very much hope that this could offer a way for us to continue to reduce our dependence on imported coal, alongside bio diesel, whilst ensuring that we can continue to operate as a viable, living heritage railway and keep these magnificent machines in active service.

“Alongside our efforts as a responsible business to continue to improve our sustainability credentials, we also need to ensure that future generations are able to understand the important role that coal played in the history of Britain and to tell the story of a time when nothing that was made, moved or eaten was not, somehow, connected to coal.”

*Photo credit: Robin Coombes*