

Lock-making heritage is key to Black Country railway station designs, say residents

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New rail stations in the Black Country could receive an artistic makeover, after residents said they wanted to see the region's proud manufacturing heritage reflected.

Almost eight in 10 residents responding to a consultation over plans for new stations at Darlaston and Willenhall on the Walsall to Wolverhampton line want the designs for the stations to reflect the Black Country's industrial heritage, perhaps through artwork or architectural features.

Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street has promised to give the public's ideas "careful consideration".

Many also suggested inspiration could be taken from Willenhall's role as the traditional home of Britain's lock making industry. There were up to 340 lock-making businesses and workshops in the town during the mid-19th Century.

Other key findings were:

- 93% of people rated the proposed designs as good or very good.
- 69% called for community gardens or green spaces to be provided around the new stations
- Suggestions also included passenger shelters, CCTV, safety lighting and good links with local bus services

West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE), Transport for the West Midlands (TfWM) and rail industry partners including Network Rail and West Midlands Railways plan to bring passenger services back to Willenhall and Darlaston for the first time since 1965.

The new stations will be served by two trains per hour, one from Wolverhampton to Birmingham New Street and the other between Walsall and Wolverhampton.

Parking is proposed for approximately 150 cars at Willenhall and 300 cars at Darlaston.

Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street said: “These stations will be at the heart of their communities and we want people to be proud of them.

“The stations will not only provide residents with easier and faster links to Walsall, Wolverhampton and Birmingham, but also help unlock land for industrial, commercial and housing development.

“I would like to thank those who responded for their support and their fantastic ideas and we will give them careful consideration as the plans develop.”

Cllr Roger Lawrence, chair of the WMRE and leader of the City of Wolverhampton Council, said: “The reopening of stations at Darlaston and Willenhall has been long awaited and we are delighted at the feedback from residents.

“It is just one of many infrastructure projects being planned or underway as the region’s rail network evolves and expands to better connect people, communities and businesses.”

The plans will now be further developed following the consultation and planning applications submitted later this year. Work will start on site next year with trains running by the end of 2021.