

Rail Minister digs in to help stations and local youngsters bloom

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Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris dug in today with young people taking their first steps into a horticultural career by working on landscaping projects at Thameslink and Great Northern stations across London.

A partnership between train operator Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) and environmental charity Groundwork London has created a unique opportunity for green-fingered recruits to gain new skills on the job and improve their long-term employment chances.

The charity has recruited four youngsters onto its “Green Team” training programme through the Government’s Kickstart scheme, which supports previously unemployed 16- to 24-year-olds into work placements.

The Minister was supporting the partnership at Alexandra Palace station, one of 18 London stations where the Green Team trainees have been planting new gardens for passengers and local communities to enjoy. They receive 26 weeks of paid work experience and training, the chance to gain City & Guilds Horticulture and Employability qualifications, and practical job-hunting support.

The Green Team's 18 station projects include wildflower gardens to aid biodiversity and save water, and bee gardens to encourage and protect pollinators, vital to the world's food chains. At Alexandra Palace, large timber planters and planters with seating have been installed to add colour and scent, with plants chosen to act as pollinators and encourage local biodiversity.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris, said: "It was fantastic to visit Alexandra Palace station and put in a shift alongside one of Groundwork's Green Teams as they brought new life to a station. As we build back better, we remain committed to improving stations, making our railways greener and providing new skills and jobs through the excellent Kickstart campaign."

Minister for Employment Mims Davies MP, said: "It's great to see our Plan for Jobs changing lives in difficult times. Green jobs is an important part of our recovery, and the skills these young people will develop through the Kickstart Scheme puts them in a great position to develop a career in a flourishing industry."

Tom Moran, Managing Director for Thameslink and Great Northern, said: "Over the past year, we've been investing in our stations to create an even better experience for our passengers as they return to the railway. Our partnership with Groundwork London's Green Teams is helping local young people gain great experience, as well as making our stations more colourful and environmentally friendly places for the local communities they serve."

Graham Parry, Director of Youth Employment and Skills, Groundwork London, said: "We've long believed that the best way to help young people start a career is to give them job, and Kickstart will enable Groundwork London to offer this stepping stone into the green economy for over 200 unemployed young people this year. Our partnership with GTR enables us to offer these young people real work experience in high profile public spaces. The skills they will learn and pride they can take from completing these wonderful projects will prepare them well for their future career."

The Minister's visit marks a milestone in GTR's network-wide station improvement programme, which includes over 1,000 individual projects at more than 250 stations. Much of the work has been suggested by local passenger and community groups. Almost 100 stations are benefiting from landscaping enhancements.

As passengers return to Alexandra Palace station, they will also enjoy a refurbished waiting room, an automatic door on the front of the platform shelter, and a GTR-funded mural in the foyer, painted by local artist Edward Quigley who was commissioned by the Friends of Alexandra Palace Station. Also planned are upgraded customer information systems, and a defibrillator that will be available for public use if needed for anyone in or near the station.

Photo credit: Anthony Upton/PA Wire