

Southeastern station gardens come into bloom, in time for passengers' return

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Ahead of commuters returning to offices on 21 June, Southeastern's station gardens are bursting into bloom, ready to welcome passengers back.

Research by the Mental Health Foundation **found 70% of UK adults agreed that being close to nature improves their mood**. And, thanks to the ongoing effort from station staff and volunteers in the local community, gardens across the UK train operators' network are ready to boost the moods of those returning to the railway as lockdown restrictions lift.

The rail operator's most admired station gardens are spread across its network, from South East London, Kent and East Sussex. Tunbridge Wells, Snodland, Elmstead Woods, Petts Wood and Eynsford each boast a variety of fragrant flowers and an abundance of different plant species attracting butterflies and bees. The nearby benches provide a welcome pause for passengers to admire the gardens and spend time in nature between home and the office.

The report also showed that **49% of adults found being close to nature helped them manage stress**. With just a matter of minutes between local stations, and their high-speed trains from London St Pancras

International to top destinations in Kent, it has never been easier to take time out in one of these serene spaces.

The gardens also support the local community coming together to maintain their mental wellness – as well as the garden’s plants and flowers. From platform assistants to school students, the Southeastern team along with the local community tends to the green spaces together.

Supporting mental wellness is a long-term focus for the train operator across their network. Lee Woolcott Ellis, Southeastern’s Mental Health Lead Manager said: “At Southeastern, we make supporting the mental health of our people and our passengers a priority, and the station gardens offer a space for everyone to decompress and take a moment for themselves. We know that the commute can often act as our passengers’ decompression time, helping them to unwind after a day at the office or a bit of me-time at the start of their days. Hopefully, with the burst of greenery just steps away from the start or end of the journey, we’re able to provide another moment of calm. They also provide a way for our neighbours to come together too, contributing to the feeling of community, a factor we know is important for mental wellness.”

Sally and Ed Bywater have maintained the Elmstead Woods gardens since the Garden Club was started in 2013. They said: “Our volunteers love the gardens here at Elmstead Woods, they make the station such a special place. So does everyone – staff and passengers alike. The Garden Club works with the staff here to keep this space a tranquil haven for the whole community.”

To show their commitment to supporting mental health within the workplace and the wider community, Southeastern has also signed up to the [Mindful Employer Charter](#) and launched Colleague Network Groups to promote inclusion and collaboration within the business. The groups include WIRE – Women in Rail Empowerment, LGBT+, and Mind The Gap – Mental Health.

Photo credit: Southeastern