

Volunteers turn Shakespeare line station into a 'Midsummer Night's Dream'

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Moor Street Station, at the head of The Shakespeare Line is now *"Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight"* following a floral and arts makeover by volunteers from neighbouring stations along the railway line between Birmingham and Stratford upon Avon.

The quote from William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is an apt description of the station, thanks to the work of volunteers who, in just one day, transformed the platforms at this mainline railway station in the heart of Birmingham into a blaze of colour, arts and nature. With the station closed between 20 and 25 June for essential maintenance, a team of 20 community station volunteers joined Network Rail and the train operator Chiltern Railways to give the station a glorious makeover bringing summer colours and natural elements to provide a welcoming environment for returning passengers.

- **Birmingham New Street flowers get Shakespearean treatment**
- **The Shakespeare Express returns to the mainline this summer with William Shakespeare on board!**
- **West Midlands Railway to celebrate "Spirit of Shakespeare" following community grant**

The voluntary team were drawn from a 90+ strong community group known as The Friends of the Shakespeare Line (FOSL). It's a unique Community Station Partnership formed at the outset of the Covid lockdowns by friends and neighbours of the railway stations between Birmingham and Stratford upon Avon and is community based and voluntarily led by trustees. This dynamic group has gone from strength to strength over the past two years and the volunteers have now adopted all 21 railway stations between Birmingham and Shakespeare's birthplace of Stratford upon Avon.

The energetic station volunteers were busy last month planting out floral displays on the Eastern Plaza at Birmingham's New Street station, when Network Rail & Chiltern Railways invited them to look at Moor Street Station to see if they could work their magic on the busy platforms ahead of the forthcoming Commonwealth Games. The volunteers got to work organising project management plans, supplies, work programmes and of course, a ready and able community workforce.

The makeover also involved FOSL's sponsoring supplier, Earlswood Garden and Landscape Centre who have supported the volunteers and their station works from the outset and this super-size project involved building eleven custom-made 'platform-scale' garden planters and delivering the planters on the planned volunteer works day, together with 16500 cubic metres of compost. Consequently, the volunteers rolled their sleeves up and got to work, installing, and filling the new planters, refreshing new planters and with hard work and dedication cleared and revived the station garden between platforms 2 and 3 of the station.

Eleni Jordan, Commercial & Customer Strategy Director for Chiltern Railways, said: "We are delighted to have worked with the Friends of the Shakespeare Line on this energetic transformation of Birmingham Moor Street station. The results are a credit to the group's superb can-do ability and their professional approach to working in a railway environment. Their volunteer commitment and tireless efforts shows just how much people care about their railways and we greatly appreciate the time, energy, and professionalism that the Friends of The Shakespeare Line have brought to our station and our customers. We hope our returning customers greatly enjoy the new floral and Daycation displays on the platforms."

Patrick Power, Head of Customer Strategy for Network Rail's Central Route said: "We are very grateful to the Friends of the Shakespeare Line who volunteer tirelessly to bring local character and uplifting landscaping to stations in Central and South-East Birmingham. Their work brings immeasurable benefit to the railways and makes the stations a much more attractive place for passengers, greatly improving the customer experience, one of the main aims of the new Great British Railways"

Fay Easton, Head of Stakeholder and Community for West Midlands Railway, who operates most of the services that use Birmingham Moor Street, said: "I never cease to be amazed at the energy and commitment of the 'Army of Friends' along The Shakespeare Line, this project is the largest single-day works programme I have seen them take on and was it impressive! It's such an honour to work with community champions who care so much for their local neighbourhoods and the future of this region, the West Midlands is blessed to have such people in its midst."

Fraser Pithie, the Chair of Friends of the Shakespeare Line said: "We had a great day as a team of volunteers, and we have shown what can be achieved by a group of people who bring their volunteer energies to the railways. We have certainly given Moor Street station a visual boost. We are also pleased with our new 'Daycation' posters, promoting local attractions and destinations. When passengers return,

we hope they will enjoy the colours, the sentiment and the glory of a natural green environment installed and improved at one of Birmingham's key mainline stations."

And for the ongoing care and maintenance, well-known Birmingham radio personality Les Ross hopes to lead a new team of volunteers to look after the gardens at Birmingham's Moor Street Station. Les is interested in hearing from anyone who would like to get involved and help keep the city-centre station bright, colourful and welcoming. Anyone interested in volunteering with Les as a 'Friend of Birmingham Moor Street Station' are invited to contact; friendsofsline@outlook.com by email.