

A Journey Through Time: Arriva Rail London opens spaces for local community hubs at two historic London Overground stations

2023 marks 141 years since Queen Victoria travelled by train to Chingford station, to make a ceremonial visit in which she would declare Epping Forest open to the public. Today, Arriva Rail London (ARL) is pleased to announce that part of this historic station has also been handed over to local communities to be used as a public space.

Areas within Chingford station and the neighbouring Highams Park station have both been transferred to local groups, transforming unused spaces into dynamic community hubs. This was part of a project in which ARL contributed just under £60,000 to make the two spaces usable for their new tenants. The renovation projects were also financed by funds from community groups, local council and lottery organisations.

Shivani Hill, Concessions Contract Manager at Arriva Rail London (ARL), said:

“These projects truly have been a labour of love for those involved. ARL are proud to support the hard work, dedication and passion of local communities in creating spaces for people to come together.

“I am excited to announce that, as part of ARL’s promise to support local communities, the [community fund](#) is now open for bids. We are inviting community groups to apply to enhance the area in and surrounding their London Overground station on a matched fund basis.”

Cllr Ahsan Khan, Deputy Leader for Waltham Forest Council and Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration, said:

“Waltham Forest is committed to investing in Chingford and Highams Park to help communities grow and thrive. The new station community hubs are fantastic spaces that celebrate our local heritage and provide great opportunities for residents and local groups to host events and work flexibly.”

Chingford

Chingford station was opened in 1878, connecting central London to the then Essex village. After serving as a route for those looking to escape from the city to Epping Forest in its early years, over time it became a busy commuter line for those working in the capital. The station was incorporated into the London Overground network in May 2015.

Whilst the station has seen shifts in its customer base and operators, the building has remained virtually unchanged since its construction and still displays many features signalling its Victorian heritage.

The original layout of the station included facilities which were typical of this era, such as a station master’s house and a buffet room, where Queen Victoria herself ate a sandwich on her visit. As these facilities became redundant with changes to travel, the rooms fell into disuse.

Work by ARL began in 2021, totaling just under £30,000. The rooms were then handed over to [Love North Chingford](#) Community Interest Company to further renovate these areas in line with the community group's plans. The group has transformed the space into meeting rooms, a co-working area for remote workers and a podcast/Zoom room.

There is also a dedicated heritage centre run by the [Chingford Historical Society](#), which launched the [North Chingford Heritage Trail](#) at the station in June 2022. The locally listed station is just one of twenty historical stops on the trail, including Queen Elizabeth I's Tudor hunting lodge.

Love North Chingford are now looking to convert the basement into a mini arts centre and gallery, and seek [donations](#) to support the project.

Roger Brown, Chair at Love North Chingford, said:

“Our integrated Community Hub has only been made possible by the combined efforts of Arriva Rail London, National Lottery and the London Borough of Waltham Forest, with 2,000 hours of community effort in restoring the building at a cost of £50,000. Low running costs mean we can offer space at very low rates to encourage community development, such as our new music group.”

Highams Park

Highams Park first opened as Hale End station in 1873. The station was renamed and redesigned at the turn of the century by William Neville Ashbee, the architect behind Liverpool Street station. The same building stands today and is used daily by commuters heading into central London. Like Chingford, the station also became part of the London Overground network in 2015.

What is thought to have once been the station's parcel office was neglected over the years, regressing to a cluttered storage room. ARL dedicated a fund of over £30,000 to initial works on the space, before handing over to [Highams Park Planning Group](#) (HPPG) to manage further refurbishment. HPPG also secured a £10,000 contribution from the Greater London Authority's (GLA) 'High Streets for All' fund.

The Station Rooms at Highams Park are now being used for a variety of local events, including a 'repair café' for Halloween costumes which was held in October 2022 to encourage sustainability.

Gordon Turpin, Chair of the Highams Park Planning Group (HPPG), said:

“The rooms are small but very centrally located and will provide a great resource for the local community – and there has already been great interest in booking the space.”

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

Community groups can bid for funding via ARL's community fund by contacting Community@arrivarl.co.uk.

Images are available at the end of this document.

For further information or images, please contact Robyn Ashley, Communications Manager at Arriva Rail London: Robyn.Ashley@arrivarl.co.uk.

About Arriva Rail London:

Arriva Rail London is the train operating company responsible for running the London Overground network under a Concession Agreement with Transport for London (TfL). The seven-and-a-half-year concession commenced on 13 November 2016. Working in partnership with TfL, Arriva Rail London strives to deliver improvements for London Overground customers through more frequent services, new trains and improved interchanges, as well as developing stations and lines to meet increasing passenger demand and to support new homes and jobs.

www.arrivarailondon.co.uk

About Love North Chingford CIC:

Website: <https://www.lovenorthchingford.co.uk>

Email: northching@gmail.com

About Highams Park Planning Group:

Website: <https://highamparkplan.org/>

IMAGES

Chingford community hub refurbishment (credit: Love North Chingford)



Chingford community hub (credit: Love North Chingford)



Chingford community hub (credit: Love North Chingford)



Highams Park before refurbishment:



Highams Park before refurbishment:



Highams Park community hub:



Highams Park community hub:

