



FRIENDS OF THE NICKEY LINE

17th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 16TH MAY 2023, 19.30

We are holding the 2023 AGM by Zoom and issuing normal AGM report documents by email prior to the meeting.

Contents:

1. Chairman's report
2. Financial Report and re-election of independent examiner
3. Proposal for new Constitution
4. Election of Committee members
5. Events and Line Management (report by Roger Thornhill)
6. Discussion / Feedback
7. Presentation by Jim Cannon, co-author of 'The Nicky Line' published in 1977.

1. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

- This has been our 17th year of operation. My thanks go to your committee who have done sterling work again throughout this year and likewise to our many volunteers. I also thank Jim Cannon for agreeing to talk to us after the AGM about the early history of the Line.
- We remain grateful to all 5 local councils (Dacorum BC, St Albans DC, Hertfordshire CC, Redbourn PC and Harpenden TC) for their long-term support of the Nickey Line, which they all recognise as an important local amenity.

Organisational:

- Membership stands at 336 households, up from 334 last year. Many more people have been using the Nickey Line than are members but we do value our members and want to recruit more. Opportunities for this remained limited this year but we did participate in the Redbourn Classic Cars event and we plan to do so again this coming year.
- We issued 1 newsletter this past year. We continue to use emails to communicate with members and to receive feedback and news of problems arising on the Line.
- Our website www.nickeyline.org continues to be well used but it is now old and not mobile friendly. We have begun work on a new mobile friendly site to be developed by our web host Fortem Digital based in Dunstable and expect this to be launched by the Autumn. We sought a number of quotes for the development work and hosting and Fortem were significantly more competitive.
- Our Facebook group "The Nickey Line" has 1,575 members, up from 1,400 last year.

We undertook an active programme of work parties and other events throughout the year. See Roger Thornhill's report (item 4) for more details on walks, work parties and event attendance.

- As some of you may recall, we lost Hemel Hempstead's Roger Green to cancer in April 2020. I am pleased to report that we have placed a plaque commemorating Roger's Nickey Line work on the Cherry Tree Lane bridge which had been one of the many focal points of his efforts.
- We ran a thank you evening for our volunteers last year and plan another in September. We do value our volunteers and each year they contribute many hours of their time to making the Nickey Line what it is.

Line Management

St Albans DC Green Action Plan (GAP) and Shared Use Management

The SADC GAP 2021-2026 was published. This included at our suggestion the topic of Shared Use Management measures to reduce problems potentially arising between users as the user numbers increase.

We have produced a Friends of the Nickey Line Users' Code which we hope summarises some of the best ways of helping everyone to enjoy their use of the Line (see copy attached).

Resurfacing

The quality of the Nickey Line surface remains a concern over much of the Line with muddy patches or longer stretches after wet periods being the norm in places. We are pleased to report progress made with two significant resurfacing projects this year:

1. Following scraping of the earth / mud top layer over the Roundwood Halt to 'Five Ways' intersection part of the Line last year, a further project involving improved drainage and a crushed concrete top layer over a shorter section South West of the Roundwood Halt platform was undertaken funded by Herts County Council. We want to thank the councils involved and the CROWS team who were the project managers.
2. Hemel Hempstead Garden Communities are resurfacing the Queensway to Redbourn Road with a coloured tarmac surface similar to the 2014 surface laid from Holly Bush Lane to Roundwood Crossing in Harpenden.

We are aware of other local muddy sections and we have asked SADC to consider hotspot treatment for muddy sections before the next Winter. The Council budget for this may be tight but we are prepared to consider contributing from our FONL funds if this would unlock problems.

In this context, I want to thank Councillor Paul de Kort for his donation of £750 from his Herts CC discretionary fund which has added to our ability to offer at least seed funding for additional surface maintenance.

Other Management Issues

- Litter: We continue to seek more litter bins in the Dacorum area, in particular around Hunters Oak. Whilst we have run litter collection work parties along the Line throughout the last year, we know many users do their own personal litter collections as they use the Line and we want to say many thanks to them for their contributions to keeping the Line attractive.

Historical Platelayers Huts

A small but dedicated team of our volunteers have been researching and physically uncovering a series of Platelayers Huts along the Line from its time as an active railway. Work is continuing but I want to thank in particular Alan Gahagan for masterminding much of the work.

2. FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer Mike Platt and independent examiner Mike Aldridge have agreed the appended figures, with formal signatures when a face-to-face meeting is possible. Cash funds at our year end (31 March 2023) were £5458.39 c.f. £5033.16 last year.

MOTIONS:

- a) **We propose a motion to accept the accounts**
- b) **We propose a motion to re-appoint Mike Aldridge as our independent examiner.**

3. PROPOSED NEW CONSTITUTION

We have retained the same constitution since forming in 2006. We believe it is time to make minor amendments to our constitution in the light of our experience over these years. We circulated a draft to members in April and received some useful feedback as a result. We now recommend a final version to the AGM for adoption (copy appended).

MOTION:

We propose a motion to adopt the amended constitution

4. COMMITTEE MEMBERS RESIGNING / STANDING FOR ELECTION

- Annette Cotter resigned from the committee last year but has generously offered to advise us on sourcing funding when required and I thank her for her contributions during her tenure.
- David Abernethy and Ian Caldwell are resigning in accordance with the constitution and re-standing
- We would like to have a second committee member from each of Hemel Hempstead and Redbourn. Anyone from there interested in contributing a small amount of their time to us please do let me know.

MOTION:

We propose a motion to accept David Abernethy and Ian Caldwell as committee members.

5. FRIENDS OF THE NICKEY LINE VOLUNTEERING REPORT 2022-2023

Our volunteers have contributed to our busiest year ever, with 590+ hours worked on the Nickey Line. A massive 'thank you' to all concerned. Your efforts have led to the way the Nickey Line is enjoyed today, with great views, new habitat for birds, flowers, and insects, and exposure of the industrial past. We practice the skills of our forebears, carrying out coppicing, hedge laying, and scything.

We have run 10 full work parties along the length of the NL, plus a large number of smaller work parties where the task or the location has required fewer numbers:

- In DBC, below Solway Bridge on the South side, we removed large self-seeded trees with tree poppers, and coppicing others which were too large to pop. We also worked above Hunters Oak, cutting ivy alongside the woodland on the South side
- On Cherry Tree Lane Bridge we erected a plaque in memory of Roger Green, and reduced undergrowth to maintain the views treasured by Roger
- We exposed the flooring of a platelayers hut by Owens Sidings. CROWs cut down several trees on the North side at this location, while our volunteers removed smaller trees from the South side, to let in more light.

- Just to the East of the tunnel under the M1 we expanded a grassy area with low fertility where some flowers unique to the Nickey Line, such as chichory found. We sowed some kidney vetch, the laval food plant of the small blue butterfly, a Hertfordshire rarity, in the hope we can help increase its numbers in the County.
- Three further local varieties of fruit trees were planted in the orchard near Chequer Lane, Redbourn where we continued to dig out some of the blackberry roots, to help wild flowers flourish. Lungwort was found this May, a first for the site and the Nickey Line.
- The entrances to the Millennium site, Redbourn have been widened to encourage use of this lovely amenity. The site contains a small orchard and picnic table.
- Our annual activities of cutting the six scallops (grassy areas) we have created to the west side of the path going up from Redbourn Lane as far as 5 Ways, together with the attendant views, take up a lot of our time, together with the hedge laying and hazel coppicing activities we undertake. We planted 100 hawthorn trees to thicken the above hedges, kindly donated to us by CROWs. Dense hedges are fantastic habitat for invertebrates and nesting birds
- Working near Redbourn Lane, one of our volunteers spotted evidence of a hut, which has been partially exposed. Hut discovery has been an exciting feature of this year. We received a report of there being a hut close to 5 Ways, which looks like that of a further platelayers hut. This site contains several dozen bricks, with clear evidence of having been a stove at the back. We are indebted to one of our volunteers consulting old maps to pin point the location of this hut, and several others which have yet to be found on the ground.
- We attempt to respond promptly to reports from you about fallen branches and trees, either by clearing them ourselves or forwarding them to St A DC or DBC where the work requires a chainsaw.
- Litter continues to be an ongoing issue, and we have run a number of litter picks when the need arises. Many of you, members of the Friends or our Facebook group, will have picked litter up when seen, and along with the general public, such as the litter angels, we say thank you.

We plan with CROWs to apply for a Heritage Lottery Grant. In addition to the discovery of several sites of huts, a small stretch of the original rail was found by Roundwood halt during path surface improvements, which the path contractor kindly fixed in place by the platform

We held three walks during the year

- A Springwatch walk in Hemel Hempstead
- An industrial historical walk on the Alban Way, led by Mike Atkins, one of our members
- Our annual butterfly, from Redbourn

We now mainly advertise these walk to our members and our Facebook group. Groups of about 12 are ideal for imparting knowledge, allowing people to hear.

We also hold an annual 'thank you' event for our volunteers. The support of Redbourn Parish Council for these events is hugely appreciated.

Thank you

David Abernethy
Chairman

APPENDICES

- April 22 to March 23 Accounts
- Proposed constitution
- Proposed Users' Code