

# Rail & Bus for Herefordshire Newsletter Autumn 2019



## Rail Franchising - A Disaster for Herefordshire

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**PLEASE PASS THE MESSAGE ON**

**Buses and Trains, the safeguarding and development of services are important to the future of Herefordshire.**

**PLEASE GET A FRIEND OR COLLEAGUE TO JOIN US AT RBfH (application form on back page)**

## **Rail Franchising - A Disaster for Herefordshire**

It is two years since the award of the West Midlands Franchise to Abellio and its subsidiary West Midlands Trains. It is one year since the border was moved and the line through the Marches was handed over to Transport for Wales. What has happened since then? The fanfare of new franchisees, the media hype and the brave new world of railways has now faded away.

What are we left with? Most Herefordshire passengers would consider our rail services to be worse now than under the previous franchises. Crowded trains, cancellations and creaking rolling stock appear to pervade the management thinking of both West Midlands Railway and Transport for Wales. At least Great Western Railway do have some new trains although the London service remains plagued with irregular timekeeping and cancellations.

We are promised new trains by the others. At best 2021 seems to be the target date for new trains on both the Marches Line and the Birmingham service. But do not hold your breath. New trains does not mean an end to the overcrowding. New train formations being ordered are only of two car and three car formations and the numbers have been kept within a limited and tight budget by the train operators. Replacement appears to be based on like for like, not on the forecasts of a continuing rise in passenger numbers. Surely we should be planning now for an increased role for our railways in the future of our nation.

We are yet again entering into another period of short termism in Britain's transport planning for the future. This undoubtedly must be the worse aspect of what is by now realised to be a dysfunctional railway system.

Will the Williams review dramatically alter things for the better?

## West Midlands Railway

Oh dear! Something seems to have gone wrong with the management of this railway. The following appeared in the recent copy of Rail Future West Midlands:

*‘Capacity Issues- in 2016/17 the on train survey, carried out by Railfuture volunteers in every carriage, of services to and from Hereford to New Street showed that not only were rush hour services overcrowded to the extent that passengers could not board, but also shoulder off peak services were as bad. Both West Midlands Trains and their predecessors London Midland promised that when the Chase Line was electrified the class 170 DMUs used on this service would be used to increase capacity to Hereford. However, as part of the WMT Franchise commitment additional trains now run to Shrewsbury utilising the DMUs released by the Chase Line electrification. WMT are regularly advising passengers that the Hereford to New Street trains are so overcrowded they are unable to board at Droitwich Spa even in the off-peak. We have had several meetings with not only WMT but also with West Midland Rail Executive, who oversee the franchise, as we are unable to accept that there will be no improvement in capacity until the introduction of the new Class 196s in 2021.*

*The position will be exacerbated by the Class 153s not conforming to the “Passengers of Reduced Mobility” requirements in force from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 and with the new build trains not arriving until late 2020 there will be a dramatic loss of capacity if these 153s are taken out of service. We have supported WMT in an application to the DfT for derogation from the PRM requirements by the 153s being coupled to two PRM compliant 170s or 172s.*

*We are delighted that following a meeting with Richard Brooks, Customer Director WMR, we have received written notification that the currently overcrowded New Street to Hereford 15.50 and 16.20*

*departures will be increased from two carriages to three.'*

Please note the reference to the fact that trains displaced from the Chase line would be used to improve the capacity on the Hereford service, but then note these trains went to the Shrewsbury service instead. This means that Shrewsbury - Birmingham gets two West Midlands Railway trains per hour plus a Transport for Wales service.

Poor, poor Hereford and then to rub salt in the wound some of the existing Hereford trains were also transferred elsewhere leaving us with some of the oldest trains West Midlands Railway could find - single coach class 153s coupled together, prime case of inequality in service planning.

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire has been trying to get some satisfaction out of West Midlands Railway management. The result is pathetic as can be seen from the letter received from them quoted below:

*'Good afternoon Will and thanks for your email.*

*I am afraid it is still work in progress in terms of bringing additional rolling stock into the business but we are still working hard to do so and on that basis I have not yet implemented the Bromsgrove option.*

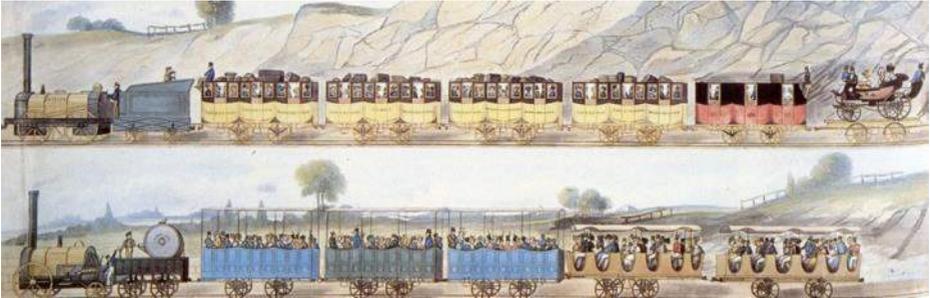
*As I have stated, I do totally understand the challenges that local customers are facing on certain of our services and the solutions are still a key focal point for me.*

*I hope to be in a position very soon to confirm the carriage allocations from the start of the December timetable which will include improvements to certain services on the route. As soon as I am able to do so I will provide this to you.*

*Regards*

*Richard'*

December will soon be here and railway management still cannot decide on rolling stock allocation for the next timetable. One suspects Hereford may get some even older trains dragged up from some long redundant part of our railway system.



### ***The Hereford - Birmingham Express!!!***

Committee Member Michael Sullivan is also incensed when he states:

*'We do not want Platitudes but Action, and here in Hereford we are at the end of our tether with WMT abysmal service to B'ham; in fact it is now worse than the former West Midland franchise.'*

Our newsletter cover photograph shows the appalling conditions passengers have to suffer at the hands of West Midlands Railway. We are used to seeing photographs like this of services in the south east and the major conurbations but now the overcrowding disease has reached even Herefordshire.

Jeremy Milne of Hereford Civic Society states:

*'Extraordinary to be awarding franchises to train companies without trains. The government wouldn't award freight contracts to shipping companies without ships now surely?'*

The Hereford Times has also been carrying a number of articles on the appalling train service Hereford receives and our Honorary President Professor John Whitelegg who supplied our cover photograph and

who has first hand experience has decided to engage our MPs

*'I am writing to you as President of "Rail and Bus for Herefordshire" and as a regular user of the WMR service from Ledbury to Hereford.*

*Passengers on this service are routinely subjected to appalling conditions including overcrowding and cancelled trains. It is totally unacceptable that residents and others should be subjected to insults and abuse on this scale.*

*The attached photo was taken today on the 0813 Ledbury-Hereford service. It was 2 carriages, packed with standing passengers on arrival in Ledbury, large numbers trying to get on and some passengers left behind on the platform. There are no excuses for such appallingly low standards.*

*Please let me know what you are doing to improve matters.'*

But will anything come of all this? Highly unlikely in this day and age where big business and balance sheets count, not the passenger. One realises why Herefordshire cannot attract new business and visitors when it is forgotten at the end of the line.

## **Transport for Wales & the Marches Line**

If you consider the Birmingham service to be appalling then the train service through the Marches is little better. It will be 2021 before there is an inkling of a sign of new trains, and then according to the TfW rolling stock overview only of two and three carriage formation. This means the well worn class 175 and class 158 of twenty and thirty years vintage have to struggle on for at least another year. The annual mileage on these units must be phenomenal considering they handle daily services such as Milford Haven to Manchester and return. Not a bit of wonder breakdowns and cancellations are on the increase.

However, some ‘new’ second hand coaching stock is to be used on the Tfw locomotive hauled premium Welsh service between Cardiff and Holyhead, a Welsh Government sponsored ‘political’ expediency connecting South and North Wales via England.

Chris Clarke, chairman of the Marches Rail Users Alliance is also not happy that the December timetable shows some reductions in service for stations such as Ludlow, Craven Arms and Church Stretton. Does this present a portend for the future when Transport for Wales may wish to substantially speed up the Manchester and Holyhead services at the expense of stations in the England?



*Above shows an image of the New CAF Civity DMUs ordered by Transport for Wales. The numbers amount to 51 x 2-car Civity UK DMUs (21 units with ETCS) and 26 x 3-car Civity UK DMUs (14 units with First Class). This for the whole network with promised service upgrading.*

The question of priority yet again raises its head this side of the Border. Should a primarily English train service be governed from Wales and will the Welsh Government naturally lean towards favouring Welsh railway lines in the longer term planning of train services?

## **Great Western Railway**

The new Transport minister, Grant Shapps makes the news with the surprising announcement that the West Coast Main Line franchise has been awarded to First Group. Even the shareholders were a bit shaken up as indicated in this Financial Times report:

*First's biggest shareholder, Coast Capital, has threatened to sue the board of the company if it took on any more rail contracts. James Rasteh, partner at Coast, told the Guardian earlier this year it would "hold each member of the management team and [each] board member personally and fully accountable if the company enters any new rail franchise".*

*The previous two UK rail franchise competitions won by First – TransPennine and South Western – have proved costly to the company. First wrote down the value of its TransPennine franchise by £106m last year and last month followed up with an "onerous contract provision" of £102m for South Western.*

*Earlier this year, First suggested it could turn its back on UK rail after the expiry of its current contracts, which also include Great Western Railway and the small, open access Hull Trains.*

*On Wednesday First said its board "remains very aware of concerns expressed by shareholders regarding rail, however, it has unanimously*

*concluded that signing the partnership agreement is in the best interests of all shareholders”.*

With Bristolians, South Walians and the South West passengers still suffering from a very indifferent Great Western Railway service, the last words from the Great Western Railway Board says it all..... *'in the best interests of shareholders'*....never mind the passengers. With a likely huge emphasis being put on the West Coast trunk route poor Herefordshire is likely to get forgotten, yet again.

Surely Herefordshire Council, the Herefordshire Business Board and the Marches Local Enterprise Board should be demanding better rail connectivity and a decent 21st century train services.

## **The Williams Rail Review**

Will this promised review lead to any improvement in our national rail system. In a recent statement the chairman Keith Williams offered some hope. The following is an extract taken from the proceedings of a Northern Powerhouse Partnership Event in July 2019.

*'Keith Williams, the deputy chairman of the John Lewis Partnership and former British Airways chief executive did not give details of how he would propose changing the franchising system. But he wrote that a wholesale shake-up was required to restore trust in the system. "Franchising in its current form has had its day. What worked 20 years ago is now preventing innovation, long-term decision-making and stopping the railway working as a system," Mr Williams wrote. "We need a different relationship between the public and private sector. One that allows train operators to get on with running services in the interest of passengers and where ministers take far fewer decisions." Recommended Keith Williams, UK rail needs a new*

*balance between public and private. He said that the idea of a new agency for the railways would be looked at closely to improve accountability and reduce fragmentation of the network. However, he added that more analysis was needed to determine its role and how it might work. The Department for Transport commissioned the review last September (2018) to propose reforms of the system and how they would be delivered. The move followed a months-long timetabling debacle and the collapse of the East Coast franchise. Mr Williams also wrote how passengers would be at the heart of his proposed reforms. “The railway needs a new offer to passengers, focused on excellent customer service, simpler fares, better communication and easier-to-access compensation,” he said.’*

However, can the government be trusted to see any far reaching reforms through and perhaps, given the Herefordshire experience, can the train operators be trusted to manage the industry properly and for the passengers and the community? Do not hold your breath!.

## **The Customer & Communities Improvement Fund**

Earlier this year, Fay Easton, Head of community & Stakeholder for West Midlands Railway delivered a very enthusiastic talk to RBfH on Community Rail involvement. This has been followed by the following announcement from West Midlands Railway.

*‘We’re very pleased to announce that our CCIF is now open and we’re accepting applications for West Midlands Community Project funding. It’s exciting because our CCIF is specifically to support projects in this region, and we’re looking for ideas that bring tangible benefits to our stations, our communities and our neighbourhoods, addressing regeneration challenges and tackling social needs.*

*So this is a chance for people along our routes to apply for a share of this unique fund, which, in its first year is estimated to be £1.7 million (subject to terms and approvals).*

*This is a substantial fund and although this is our CCIF's first year, other Train Operating Companies have been managing similar funds for many years and we've seen the difference they can make.*

*We can't wait to see what benefits our fund can bring to this wonderful region. It's going to make a real impact at our stations and in your neighbourhoods and it's now 'open for business'.*

Although the timescale was tight RBfH has submitted a bid for Ledbury Station. The project is titled '*Visiting Ledbury Heritage by Train: 'The Heritage Jewel at the end of the Line'*' and involves '*the design and installation of a free standing Ledbury Heritage Board at Ledbury station. The board to include a. map of town showing heritage buildings to see and visit: b. brief history of town and railway: c. information on how to get to town centre using the Ledbury Town Trail: d. information on heritage and community organisations: e. information on bus services and locations of bus stops. Signage from bottom of station drive and the design and printing Ledbury Heritage by Train leaflet for distribution through WMR network.*'

The bid has been made with assistance from the Sustainable Ledbury Group and has support from other organisations in the town. Should the bid be successful then a small working group will be formed to manage the project.

The project will provide valuable information on Ledbury for people arriving by train, promoting Ledbury and encouraging travel by train. It will also involve local schools and community groups in the design of board and leaflets.

## The Hay Ho Bus



**Can you believe the bus is turning five? Yes, October 2019 is the 5th anniversary of Hay Ho! and, as a bus supporter, I hope you will be pleased to know that the bus rumbles on!**

Another local worthwhile project which shows what can be done with community cooperation and involvement.

So the message is loud and clear: we need more people on board. If you fancy a trip out to Hay on a Sunday the service offers either two and a half hours or a full day browsing the booksellers and eclectic craft shops or enjoying easy walks near the Wye. There are, of course, plenty of cafes and most of them are open all year round until 17:25 when the last bus for Hereford pulls out of Oxford Street. Hay Ho! leaves Hereford Railway Station on Sundays at 10:15 ,13:15 and 16:15. It returns at 11:25, 14:55 and 17:25

## The Country Bus: Its Place in the Future



The following is a transcript of a report by the Herefordshire Sustainable Transport Group of which RBfH is a founder member.

### The Background

Old fashioned, outdated, unreliable, archaic, a thing of the past—that was the view of one local Herefordshire councillor back in 2012. He

was taking about the humble bus. The result, a local transport authority that abandoned the omnibus as a means of transport for all; the word ‘omni’ just did not register and yet the same authority was to publish its Local Transport Plan 2012-2031 with a key objective to ‘*Provide a good quality transport network for all users*’.

These are fine words without substance. Between 2010/11 and 2017/18 Herefordshire Council’s support for local bus services declined by a staggering 70.33%. The West Midlands regional average was 41.96%.

The result of this dramatic cut in support was predictable. By 2017/18 Herefordshire had fallen to fourth from the bottom in the table of local bus passenger journeys per head as published in the government’s annual report of bus statistics. The bus operators, faced with the disappearance of an important element of their income, reacted as expected with wholesale withdrawal of evening and Sunday services, reductions in day time frequencies and pruning of traditional market day services.

The downward spiral continued to accelerate until it seemed the bus was going to be faced with extinction in this rural part of England. The social effect went unheeded by a council intent on promoting the car as the only way to travel. The young and the elderly were and continue to be the biggest sufferers. Rural depopulation by the young in search of employment became a fact of life. The largest proportion of out migration from the county occurs in the 18-35 age bracket (*Source Population of Herefordshire 2018: Herefordshire Council*). For the elderly there arose rural isolation with difficulty in accessing shops, post offices, doctors, hospitals, relations and a deprivation of the all important conversations with fellow passengers .

The country bus is in danger of becoming an idyllic story from the past as the government concentrates its efforts on public transport in the

urban conurbations. Capital grants for new low emission buses go mostly to the new city regions and large urban concentrations. The deep rural areas of England are consigned to the world of the car. Requests for special measures for rural areas have largely gone unheeded and the decline in rural public transport continues.

But, and this is a big but, there is a growing awareness that not all is well in the countryside. There is a growing realisation that the internal combustion engine and the car as the embodiment of personal mobility has a finite life. The advent of the electric car may not be the panacea that was hoped and the cost of private motoring is set to rise dramatically. Many other factors in the future of personal mobility are beginning to creep in.

June 2019 saw a new dimension reach the news - Loneliness Awareness Week. Claire Haigh, the Chief Executive of Greener Journeys summed up this dimension.

*'What did we learn? That loneliness is now endemic and action needs to come not just from the individual but also, most importantly, from the community they live in. That we may have thought loneliness was a problem for the elderly, but in fact young people are particularly hard hit. That public transport has a vital role to play in tackling this corrosive social epidemic - a role which is currently underexploited.*

*That the UK is suffering from a loneliness epidemic is beyond doubt. Two thirds of us admit to at least sometimes feeling lonely and more than nine million adults in the UK are often lonely. 13% of people in the UK feel lonely every day.*

*The health risks are well documented. Loneliness is as bad for your health as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day, carries greater health risks than obesity and increases risk of mortality by 29%. Lonely people are more likely to suffer from depression, dementia, diabetes, heart condition and strokes.*

*Reduced opportunities for face-to-face contact with others are a major part of the problem. People are finding that a network of digital connections are not replacement for real human interaction. At the same point they may be losing the skills or opportunity to forge those contacts.*

*The experience of using public transport provides opportunities to connect with others. A third of people in the UK have deliberately got the bus to have some human contact. For some people the bus driver might be the only person they speak to on a day when they don't speak to anyone close to them'.*

The reason for quoting Claire Haigh is important. It identifies the bus as an important part of the individual and community fabric of our lives. It moves the bus importantly out of that singular economic compartment it has been locked into by transport authorities, central government and transport planners. This move is as important to rural society and economy as it is elsewhere in the UK fabric.

## **What can be done?**

An important milestone has recently been reached. After years of campaigning by the Campaign for Better Transport, the government has announced it will deliver a National Bus Strategy in 2020. It is important that the country bus gets a good hearing with positive action in such a strategy. That Local Transport Authorities such as Herefordshire Council take a lead in this is all important.

This in itself calls for a Herefordshire Bus Strategy which includes important items such as:

- ◆ A minimum level of service for all rural communities.
- ◆ A strategy of tiered rural services interchanging with main inter-

urban services at specifically designed nodal interchange points. This will strengthen the links between the market towns and Hereford as the county's main centre.

- ◆ Strengthening the possibilities for bus/rail interchange at the county's railway stations.
- ◆ Multi modal/operator ticketing; reduced price bus travel for the young linked to employment opportunities.
- ◆ The reintroduction of a County wide timetable booklet and the introduction of digital timetable information displays at important nodal locations in towns and country.
- ◆ Putting buses at the heart of air quality in Herefordshire's towns and the city. This means a proactive bid by Herefordshire Council for Government grant for low or nil emission buses to be used on specifically designed town and city bus networks as part of local transport plans to reduce traffic congestion.

Central to all these is the need to rebuild trust between Herefordshire Council and bus operators, both existing and those that may be encouraged into the business of **providing a quality transport network for all**. Quality partnerships, whether voluntary or otherwise are actively encouraged by central government. It is time Herefordshire Council took them at their word.

**Like it or not the country bus has a place to play in the future.**

## Hereford Barrs Court Station

This gem of Victorian architecture is aptly described in Gordon Biddle's vast tome on Britain's historic Railway Buildings as follows:

*'The long two-storey Tudor façade is in cheerful red brick with copious cream stone dressings in the form of copings to the partly stepped gables, finials and door and window architraves. Indeed the number of finials - three to each of six gables - and the cusped pointed windows ranging from singles to five coupled, are the two most important features. The upper windows in the large projecting bays near each end are Venetian, and the central gable has an elaborate iron-bracketed clock. On the platform side there is a long, pitched glass and iron canopy on iron Corinthian columns and four-way trefoil brackets, and the refreshment room windows contained coloured glass top lights. More trefoil brackets on pretty stone corbels support the flat canopy cantilevered out on both sides of the lower building on the opposite island platform, which has matching openings and detailing. All in all, an effective entrance to a cathedral city'.*



Hereford Barrs Court Station frontage



*When you next use Barrs court station take some time to examine the wealth of Victorian detail such as:*

*top left: four way trefoil bracket for main platform awning*

*top right: footbridge cover arches*

*middle left: coloured glass window top light*

*middle right: glazed wooden screen in refreshment room*

*bottom: original boundary stone for Shrewsbury & Hereford Railway*

But what a travesty that this fine building is underutilised. The contraction of our railway system in the 1960's and 70's has left just the platform offices in use. The fine upper floor which once was a hive of railway activity, is now understood to be empty and an empty building soon shows sign of decay.

Does Barrs court Station remain an effective entrance to a cathedral city? Step outside the frontage and into the forecourt. Gone is the once fine curved and sweeping approach carriage road connecting the station to Commercial Road and the city. The station is now effectively cut off from the city by a new four lane highway. If the station building still remains proud, care for this fine city seems to have slipped by with the 21st century. All the talk is about bypassing the city not making it a city worth visiting, a city which has not sold itself to the car but resumes that graceful peacefulness that cathedral cities should have.

Is it not time that the transport authority, railway companies and civic bodies and MPs got together to sort the mess out before Hereford is consigned to the fate of many other corporate, standardised and now anonymous cities of Britain?

**THE ENVIRONMENT IS IMPORTANT  
OUR HEALTH IS IMPORTANT  
OUR ONCE FINE CITY IS IMPORTANT**

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT HAS A MAJOR PART TO PLAY  
IN THE REJUVENATION AND FUTURE OF HEREFORD  
& HEREFORDSHIRE**

**SUPPORT BUSES & TRAINS AND HELP:  
SUPPORT RAIL & BUS FOR HEREFORDSHIRE**

## From the Archives

Herefordshire & the Marches once had an extensive network of country railways, many of which were often impoverished, bankrupt but nevertheless colourful enterprises. In this series of From the Archives we recall some of them in Herefordshire and the adjoining counties of Shropshire, Monmouthshire, Breconshire and Radnorshire.

Kington is the smallest of the Herefordshire market towns. Tucked into the north-west corner of the County it has the flavour of a border town, for Wales is but a few miles along the road to the west. Hergest Ridge and Bradnor Hill crowd in from the west and beyond these the mass of Radnor Forest rises to over 2,000 feet. By contrast the area to the east is that of fertile lowlands drained by the Rivers Lugg and Arrow. Here one will find a mixed agricultural landscape dotted with half-timbered black and white buildings and a goodly supply of villages, amongst the most picturesque being Eardisland, Pembridge and Kingsland. It is across this green land that the branch railway set out from the main line junction of Leominster to arrive at Kington in 1857, accompanied by the usual festivities, banquet and speeches from the local worthies. Intermediate villages were served with stations at Kingsland, Pembridge and Titley, the latter being an unusual junction station. The line offered no major challenges being at river level for most of the way and the local roads were crossed with a mixture of level crossings and small stone and brick bridge. Once it was open to Kington, however, it soon became apparent that the small town and the even smaller villages did not of themselves offer sufficient trade for the railway. Soon eyes were cast further west, north and south to tap into a bigger area for possible traffic. It so happens that the Welsh border in the vicinity of Dolyhir and New Radnor is an area of good natural stone and timber, two valuable building materials even to this day. A separate concern, the New Radnor Railway, was already active

and a detached section of line, more a tramway, was opened to Kington in 1875. At first stone and timber were transhipped to the standard gauge branch at Kington but later the New Radnor line was re-laid with an end-on junction at Kington. The private wagons of the stone companies in the area travelled many miles and could be seen in railway sidings far distant from the Welsh borders.

Further north the small town of Presteigne was feeling left out of the show and in 1875 a five and a half mile branch line from Titley Junction to the town was opened, passing through a heavily deciduous wooded landscape. However, the townsfolk of Kington remained somewhat discontent that their supplies of coal and other materials still had to travel a great way round from the industrial areas of South Wales. So in 1862 the Kington & Eardisley Railway was incorporated to construct a line from the same Titley Junction southward through Lyonshall and Almeley to a junction with the Hereford, Hay and Brecon line at Eardisley. This too was built on the alignment of an older tramway and it was hoped the reduction in mileage for South Wales coal would reduce the price of fuel in Kington. There is no

evidence that it did and, despite many other efforts to attract more freight and passengers to these very rural branch lines, most of them had closed by the 1950's. Kington saw its last train in 1964 with the final working of the once a week freight train, with one wagon.



*Nearing the end. The Kington branch engine takes water at Kington.*

## The RBfH Committee

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## ***Rail & Bus for Herefordshire: Application Form***

Name.....

Address.....

Tel.....

Email.....

Membership is £8.00 for a year payable on 1st February. For those joining after October 1st membership is free until following February.

Please make a cheque for £8.00 payable to Rail For Herefordshire and send to: **The Treasurer, Rail & Bus for Herefordshire, 60 Broomy Hill, Hereford, HR4 0LQ** pmgaccountancy@gmail.com

You can also pay by Standing Order or a Bank Transfer. For details contact the treasurer as above.