Unfortunately, the good weather we enjoyed in October and November has become very wet and windy in December, with Storms Desmond and Eva lashing the Welsh coastline and bringing heavy rain to the Dee Valley. Many of you visiting the area over the last couple of months will have noticed that the peaceful river has turned into a torrent of water breaking its banks in the upper reaches and spreading over the flood plain. The view of Corwen East marooned from its passengers shows how necessary it is to move the terminus to Corwen Central, safely above the flood plain and ensuring all year access to rail services. Work on a number of projects has had to be suspended pending the arrival of some winter sunshine and a bit of drying wind. This does not mean The Project Team has stopped work! They have hosted a visit by our AM, Ken Skates, now Deputy Minister for Sport, Culture and Tourism. Materials have continued to be moved to the Corwen Central site, a contract for more supplies has been let and a new fund raiser has been launched.

Ministerial Visit

On December 17th the Project Team hosted a visit by local AM Ken Skates now Deputy Minister for Sport, Culture and Tourism. Mr. Skates was accompanied by Lawrence Manley, Head of Appraisals and Monitoring, Welsh Government,
County Councillor Huw Jones, Norman Jones, Corwen Business Group and Peter Lund Chairman of the Llangollen Railway Trust and Plc. Other guests included joint Vice Presidents of the Railway, Gordon Heddon and Bill Shakespeare MBE and Sarah Jones, Cadw ‘Clywd’ – Rural Development Agency for Denbighshire, Flint and Wrexham has already had on the railway in terms of increased passenger revenue and the numbers visiting Corwen town. Ken Skates is not unfamiliar with the Corwen Project, having visited in 2014 during the construction of the track to Corwen East, where he was featured working with the track gang.

Ken Skates AM fronts the Corrog-Corwen progress montage Photo: George Jones

His father, Ken Skates Sr works part-time in the Carriage and Wagon Works at Pentrefelin. After the presentation of a small gift to Mr. Skates, marking his visit, details of the Corwen Central Station Project were given to the guests by Project Manager, Richard Dixon-Gough. In drawing attention to the hard work put in by the volunteer work force Richard put the Corwen Project into the context of the whole Railway Heritage Movement which is now worth £29bn to the UK economy and relies on about a quarter of a million paid and volunteer staff. Earlier the Chairman had noted that the Llangollen Railway was now the biggest employer in Llangollen itself and would be instrumental in securing employment along the Dee valley. Richard observed that “the Carrog to Corwen Central

Bill Shakespeare MBE (L) joint Vice President of the Llangollen Railway Trust listens to Peter Lund (R) formally welcome Ken Skates Photo PR

Peter Lund welcomed Mr. Skates to the Corwen Central Project, outlining what had been achieved so far and drawing attention to the impact that the temporary station (Corwen East)
Station Project is one of the largest civil engineering projects undertaken by railway volunteers in recent years, the work is of a high standard, evidenced by the flow of passengers to the temporary Corwen East Station. However, if the project is to be completed then funds must be made available either via our own efforts and enthusiasm, or through continued generous private and commercial sponsorship or continued support via the local authority – Denbighshire County Council and the Welsh Assembly Government.”

In reply Mr. Skates said “Llangollen Railway brings enormous pride and prosperity to the Dee Valley. The work of the volunteers is incredible and I am delighted that the Welsh Government has also supported the railway. The ambition of taking the railway to the centre of Corwen is great for everyone in the area.”

Thankfully the rain had stayed away for the afternoon and some weak winter sunshine broke through to offer a little cheering light.

Tea, coffee and mince pies were available during the visit, courtesy of Denise Dixon-Gough and Tom Taylor.

The guests were then shown round the Corwen Central site by members of the Project Team.
Bridge 31

The accompanying photographs show Bridge 31 as it passes over the former access road to Welsh Water’s riverside pumping and filtration station.

Currently Welsh Water have a temporary way leave through the gate at “Chicken Dock”, which is due to be removed as the railway moves over the crossing westwards to Corwen Central.

Welsh Water have plans in place to build a new access road on the northern side of the railway embankment coming in eastwards at 90 degrees to Green Lane. Bridge 31 is already redundant and once heavy materials have been moved over it, the decking will be removed and the void filled and levelled to carry the main line and run round loop. The question then arises “How do you fill a hole in a railway embankment without it eventually starting to dip in the middle?” The answer........ “Polystyrene”!!!?? In fact high density Expanded PolyStyrene (EPS) blocks wrapped in plastic and stacked up to fill the space.

A quick look at the photos tells you immediately that the 150 year old structure just isn’t wide enough for modern tankers to get on the pumping station site.

The top is then completed with normal aggregates and the rails laid over the new piece of embankment. The EPS is known as Fillmaster and manufactured by Jablite of Belvedere in Kent. 38 of the Fillmaster Blocks measuring 2.4m x 1.2m x 0.6m and weighing 83kg each have been ordered for the project and are likely to arrive at Corwen towards the end of January.