

## End of an Era at Ashford

### Demolition of Chart Leacon railway works continues as main workshop taken down

Demolition of a disused railway works to make room for a new train maintenance facility is progressing at pace. The former Chart Leacon depot in Ashford closed in 2014 and has lain empty since then. Now Network Rail contractors Balfour Beatty are taking it down to make room for five new railway sidings, where trains can be stored and undergo light maintenance.

Bosses say this will allow for the creation of 50 new jobs alongside numerous other indirect jobs associated with activities on the site. When these photos were taken, the former boiler room close to the entrance off Beaver Lane was one of the only buildings still standing.

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#### *Work is continuing on the site next to Ashford's Matalan*

Speaking ahead of the demolition, Network Rail southern region's investment director Paul Harwood said: "Although it may seem strange to be talking about improving the capacity of the railway during Covid, we know the passenger numbers will grow again and this is a great opportunity for us to build for the future. Before Covid we were running more trains than ever before and one of the aspects we are really short of in Kent and south east London is places to keep them and look after them when they're not running. By purchasing the whole site at Chart Leacon, as well as building five new sidings, we're not only helping run a more reliable railway for today but safeguarding the site for future railway use."



*The view from the entrance to the railway works, taken in mid-November (Freddie Clemen)*



*The view from the entrance, with just the boiler room still standing*

Along with the sidings to store trains, Network Rail is also building offices and other facilities for staff. In August, former employees at the site, which opened in 1961 when electric trains began running to Ashford, were given exclusive tours of the depot before the demolition began.

Marion King, a former project account at the Beaver Lane site, said: "I came as a data inputter for two weeks and stayed for 18 years. You felt part of a family."



*The main workshop is no more*



*Taken on November 22, this shows the site from the other side of the railway line (Barry Goodwin)*



*The site is still being cleared*



*Piles of rubble close to the railway line*



Jim Skinner in his old office - he joined Chart Leacon depot when it opened in 1961 and he's now 95. He got to sit in his old office for one last time.

When the new sidings open, Southeastern trains displaced from the town's Hitachi depot as a result of the £7 billion Thameslink programme are set to be housed at the new stabling yard.

The first stage of the project is set to be completed in 2023.