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A brand new railcar is being built for Mid Hants – and local residents are invited to become part owners

For the last year, a consortium including Hampshire County Council, GOCO Co-operative, Mid Hants Railway and Lightweight Community Transport have been trying to develop a commuter service from Medstead and Four Marks to Alton on the Watercress Line. Now engineers in the midlands are hard at work assembling the brand new, lightweight rolling stock that could do the job.

“The trial in January told us two things: firstly, that the vehicle looked good and suited the job, and secondly, that a prototype or demonstration vehicle just wasn't going to be reliable enough for public service. Since then, we have been working hard to supply a vehicle that – under the same bodywork as before – is a brand new railcar that will run as reliably as those in use at Stourbridge.” said Alex Lawrie, the CEO of Lightweight Community Transport.

LCT is a Society for the Benefit of the Community that aids community rail projects by purchasing suitable railcars and leasing them at affordable rates. The service on the Watercress Line will be its first major project. “We are determined to make sure the the vehicle supplied by us is robust, efficient and reliable. Passengers have every right to expect a comfortable and punctual service, and the fact it is a community run initiative doesn't mean that standards can be lowered anywhere.”

The society is currently raising funds through a 'community share offer' in order to complete the purchase towards the end of the year. Investors will receive withdrawable shares and regular interest payments once the service is in operation. Because it is a society rather than a company, all shareholders – large and small – have one vote each. The closing date for the share offer is November 30th, so that the railcar can be supplied soon after – hopefully before the end of the year.

“We are very keen to enable local people who will be using the service to have a stake in the railcar – to be part owners, if you like”, said Alex Lawrie, “For this reason we are offering a minimum investment of just £100, rather than the usual £500, to people who are residents of Alresford, Medstead, Four Marks and Alton. You can find out more at www.lctltd.co.uk, or by writing to LCT at the Hot House, Wellington Road, Taunton.”

Picture editors: photographs are available from LCT.

For further information, contact alex@lctltd.co.uk, call 0845 458 1473, or see www.lctltd.co.uk.