

Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership

SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

September 2020 – October 2021



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Linking local communities with the rail industry

Chair's Report 2021

This is the second annual report of the Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership and despite the restrictions that all organisations have had to cope with the rail partnership has continued and made progress on its aims and plans for the future. Finances are in good shape, helped by successful grant funding, and we have lots of ideas in progress some small, and others really ambitious. Plans include artwork, murals, and bespoke planters at stations to full refurbishment projects at Shoreham and Eynsford station buildings.

Everyone involved in the partnership has contributed to all these achievements and I thank everyone for their hard work, especially Sarah Newman our Community Rail Officer.

Linda Larter – Chair

What is the Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership?

The Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership (DVCRP) is the link between local communities and the rail industry. We cover the six railway stations between Swanley and Sevenoaks, which includes Swanley, Eynsford, Shoreham (Kent), Otford, Bat & Ball and Sevenoaks.

There are now over 70 community rail partnerships (CRPs) in the UK which work with local communities and a range of partners to identify and implement measures to ensure that access to local stations is easy and that stations are safe and welcoming. Like other CRPs, we promote sustainable, healthy, and accessible travel throughout our region, while supporting diversity and inclusion in the events we coordinate and in the way we operate. We also aim to help local social and economic development.

Financial Report and Funding

Darent Valley CRP is grateful to have received funding from all the local councils, including Sevenoaks District Council, Sevenoaks Town Council, Swanley Town Council, Eynsford Parish Council, Shoreham Parish Council and Otford Parish Council. The CRP was also successful in applying for extra funding from Southeastern and Thameslink, each of which contributed significant sums ensuring the ongoing success of the Partnership. An officer was appointed in July 2020.

The Covid-19 pandemic paused spending, but we are now proceeding with a range of exciting projects, including the new website, planters for the stations, artworks for each station and initial work to bring about the restoration of two of our more neglected stations, Eynsford and Shoreham.

The annual accounts for 2020/21 are shown in the table below and has been adjusted for a financial year running from 01 April to 31 March. The table below also provides an indication of the proposed budget for 2021/22, and includes a one-off payment from GTR's Passenger Benefit Fund of £100,000, which can be used towards CRP projects.

Description	Year 2		Year 3
	2020/21		2021/22
	Budget	Actual	Proposed Budget
INCOME			
Sevenoaks District Council Grant	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00
Sevenoaks Town Council Grant	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00
Swanley Town Council Grant	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00
Shoreham Parish Council Grant	100.00	100.00	100.00
Otford Parish Council Grant	100.00	100.00	100.00
Eynsford Parish Council Grant	100.00	100.00	100.00
GTR	6,000.00	6,150.00	6,000.00
Southeastern	6,000.00	-	6,000.00
Additional Southeastern grant (3.8.20) committed to:			24,000.00
CRP Officer	13,600.00	13,600.00	
Website	3,000.00	3,000.00	
Grant marketing	2,400.00	2,400.00	
Grant unallocated	-	-	
Grant bespoke paintings	5,000.00	5,000.00	
Other			8,000.00
Other			6,000.00
GTR Passenger Benefit Fund			100,000.00
Sub-Total Cash	45,300.00	39,450.00	159,300.00
In-Kind Match Contributions			
Sevenoaks Office	1,500.00	1,500.00	1,500.00
Other	-	-	-
Sub-Total In-kind	1,500.00	1,500.00	1,500.00
Cash Reserve/Carry Over	21,150.00	21,150.00	48,301.99
Total Income	67,950.00	62,100.00	209,101.99
EXPENDITURE			
Staff Costs (CRP Officer)	16,484.46	12,099.71	18,000.00
Office rental (All Inclusive Rent)	1,500.00	1,500.00	1,500.00
Transport	250.00	48.30	250.00
Insurance	-	-	-
Telephone	240.00	-	240.00
Audit Fees	-	-	-
Annual Subscriptions			
Community Rail Network Membership	150.00	150.00	150.00
Thameslink Guide	300.00	-	300.00
Website			
Annual licence hosting fee	120.00	-	120.00
Management	700.00	-	900.00
Other (Design)			3,000.00
Marketing			
Events			1,000.00
Materials			1,000.00
Support			1,950.00
Other			500.00
Food and Drink Trail			6,000.00
Project Items			
Paintings	5,000.00	-	5,000.00
Additional painting for Bat & Ball			900.00
Murals for stations (X3)			3,500.00
Grants to InBloom groups to help with planting			1,800.00
Planters for each station @£1500 each			9,000.00
Social media campaign (with CRN)			500.00
Shoreham Station redevelopment feasibility study			10,000.00
Eynsford Access Ramp/Lift Feasibility			10,000.00
Total Expenditure	24,744.46	13,798.01	75,610.00
Net Balance	43,205.54	48,301.99	133,491.99

Review of Events, Projects & Activities 2020/21

Despite the ups and downs of the Covid pandemic, the DVCRP has managed to keep working on a whole range of projects. The first major achievement was the creation of an online presence through **the DVCRP website** www.darentvalleycrp.org, which draws attention to all the wonderful activities and attractions close to each of the stations, while also offering practical advice about travel and suggested itineraries.

Over the last year we have continued to **raise significant funds** for the CRP, with Steering Group partners (local District, Town, and Parish councils) contributing grants, together with a significant funding package from the current franchisees operating in the valley, Southeastern and Govia Thameslink Railway. We have also been successful in getting additional funding from Visit Kent Experience grants, Community Rail Network funding applications and by pursuing the agreed passenger compensation funding from GTR (from 2018), now successfully acquired.

The station adoption groups have started to begin working on projects although clearly additional lockdowns slowed this activity down. To compensate, we have been focusing on buildings and access issues, in particular working towards obtaining funding – including discussions with the Rail Heritage Trust - to **restore the characterful Victorian station buildings at Eynsford and Shoreham (Kent)**.



Eynsford station – front, with visitors from Rail Heritage Trust, waiting room, ticket office



Shoreham (Kent) – front, old café room, from the platform, old ticket office

Similar to Bat & Ball, these station buildings have suffered neglect over the years and have rooms sealed off from public use. Our plan is to bring disused waiting rooms back into use, with opportunities for the local communities to use the spaces, to collaborate on displays, but also open the rooms to members of the general public while waiting for trains. We will be adding permanent exhibitions detailing some of the history and attractions of the areas, together with seating and automatic closing doors. It's a fundraising mountain to climb, but we have had several planning meetings and are very optimistic!

This summer Thameslink used the **Passenger Benefit Fund** to add a number of improvements along the line, the most impressive of which is a brand new accessible toilet within Eynsford station. More ticket machines, shelters and station information panels have been added too, for which many thanks. We will be using their surplus funds to achieve some of our stated aims too. Network Rail is in the process of rebuilding the Victorian shelter on the London-bound platform at Eynsford, so that will be completed soon and look just as beautiful as it once did, but structurally sound.

During the last year one of our stations – **Swanley** – was renovated using funds raised by Kent County Council and a Sevenoaks District Council Community Infrastructure Levy. The old entrances on both the north and south sides have been completely rebuilt with much more light, rearranged access and new facilities. The footbridge has been given a clear line of sight to improve safety, new cycle storage areas are being added, and Network Rail took the opportunity to upgrade the exterior of the footbridge too. The waiting room and toilets at platform level have also been improved.

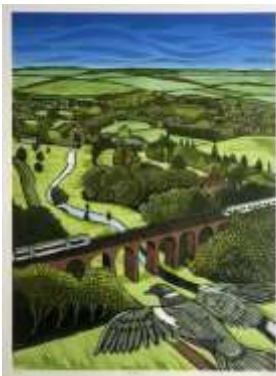
We have also been working closely with partners **the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership** on a number of initiatives, including working towards **wayfinding** signs at each of the stations to link to trails, reserves, villages, and attractions in the area. We have also been coordinating efforts to improve **the Darent Valley Path** which links many of the stations and to redesign footpath access, for example at Eynsford and Shoreham. And we will be working on an exciting promotion of the very recently launched **Samuel Palmer Trail** which they have supported, bringing a cutting-edge audio-visual app (and leaflet) to the Valley for users to learn about and enjoy the extraordinary talent of visionary Victorian artist Samuel Palmer, whose formative years were spent in Shoreham. Another great reason to visit the Valley (by train of course).

Further work pursued includes:

1. Engaging with the Community

Through the work of the Officer, the Partnership is in the process of engaging the community in a range of ways.

- We contacted a wide range of local artists and art groups in order to **commission one artist** to create a unique work of art for each of the stations. Kit Boyd, a regular visitor to the area, was the artist voted to create the works and is close to finishing all six. The artworks will be used to attract new audiences to the area and to promote the distinctive character of each station along the line, using both traditional printed posters and a targeted social media campaign.



- collating suggestions for **trails and experiences** in the Valley, from local residents experienced in devising walks and from cycling groups familiar with routes, which are being put together for a comprehensive Rail Trail guide for the area and will be accessible online.
- **reaching out to groups** with **school/business liaison** staff to discuss setting up educational meetings so that students can learn about the rail industry, and we took part in a skills day with Kent Medway, with our local station manager Elliott Waters describing a day's work.
- **Art and Heritage:** The Darent Valley is an area in which a high number of well-known artists and writers have lived over the years. We have added stories about some of these amazing people to our new website, with the intention of adding more over time and creating a trail to explore where they lived. We are also working with Network Rail to have several **murals** painted on key bridges along the line over the next two years, which will reflect local heritage.
- **Food and Drink Trail:** We were awarded an in-kind grant from Visit Kent to assist the development of our proposed Food and Drink Trail. We spent an afternoon with a professional photographer and two 'models' (keen volunteers) to create an image bank – and videos – to promote the venues. With these images, we have created a virtual food and drink tour for visitors, introducing travellers to talented independent producers along the line – from coffee specialists in Sevenoaks, to French smokeries near Bat & Ball, to sparkling wine producers in Shoreham and the UK's biggest lavender farm in Eynsford. We hope to create guide-led experiences next year that will benefit both visitors and producers, making a train journey in the area even more memorable.



- In keeping with **our first and last mile improvements**, we have been liaising with local **cycling groups** to improve access to and from the stations. This work has contributed to a submission to the Department of Transport (via Kent County Council) for Active Travel Funds. We are waiting to hear the outcome, but at least two cycle routes could receive a funding boost. Options to **improve disabled access** at both Eynsford and Shoreham stations continue to be explored, with money earmarked in our budget to assist with feasibility. We also liaise regularly with our local bus companies.

2. Social Media and Publicity

We have been expanding our engagement on social media platforms, with more emphasis on Twitter and the Visit Sevenoaks District Instagram accounts and the Officer has continued to build up a database of useful images. The Officer has also given more **presentations** about the CRP's work to local organisations, including to Southeastern, local parish council meetings and again to the Visitor Economy Forum which brings together representatives from all over Kent. Articles about the DVCRP and attractions accessible by rail have been written for local publications.

3. Training

The Officer has been attending further training sessions offered by the Community Rail Network, including Promoting Rail's Green Credentials, together with Government conferences on post-Covid recovery in the tourism sector, all of which will feed back into the work of the CRP as a whole.

4. Collaboration with other Community Rail Partnerships

The Darent Valley CRP worked with a whole range of other CRPs in the South East to coordinate projects, including within the Thameslink group, to create a guide that has been published in order to publicise all that the Thameslink CRP areas have to offer the rail visitor. The **Thameslink Guide** draws attention to five activities accessible from the rail stations in each area and demonstrates which day trips are possible across the entire rail network. The Guide has been nominated for a Community Rail Network award, with final prizes awarded in December.



We worked with a fellow Kent CRP to run a morning **pop-up at Otford station**, where the new Kent Downs Line from Ashford joins our line. Locals were offered the chance to have their bicycles stamped with free ID and we conducted surveys with travellers to understand better how they perceive the station and the service offered. We were happy to have a lot of enthusiastic feedback.



5. Travel Coordination

In keeping with other CRPs, the Darent Valley CRP has been working with other transport providers in the area to consider how travel to and onward travel from the station might best be catered for, known as 'The First and Last Mile'. This includes local business GoCoach, who provide on-demand buses on the phone and via an App. Further funding has been allocated for us to develop a universal app helping travellers to link up with available buses and other forms of transport, with information pods to be installed at each station.

We are also in contact with Network Rail to coordinate the introduction of electric charging points at stations to encourage the use of e-vehicles.

Forward Planning

Going forward, Darent Valley CRP will continue to:

- support station adoption groups
- liaise with local communities to improve their stations and train services
- link up with other transport providers
- work with councils to improve information about public transport throughout the district
- contribute to local and county transport planning
- take part in any discussions about sustainable travel
- work with our partners to improve access and wayfinding
- work with local attractions and businesses to ensure locals and visitors can access their locations sustainably
- develop and implement campaigns to encourage more use of the Darent Valley Line for leisure journeys, both originating from local stations and for journeys from elsewhere to the Darent Valley, especially in order to achieve modal shift.

Funders

Darent Valley CRP is very grateful to its funders and partners who backed this community initiative and continue to support us as we develop all the projects. Community Rail Network has been a key pillar in all that we have achieved. Thanks to:

Sevenoaks District Council

Sevenoaks Town Council

Swanley Town Council

Otford Parish Council

Shoreham Parish Council

Eynsford Parish Council

Southeastern

Thameslink

Community Rail Network



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Darent Valley CRP is hosted by Sevenoaks District Council

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