

Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership

THIRD ANNUAL REPORT

October 2021 – October 2022

DRAFT



**DARENT
VALLEY**

COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

Published December 2022

Linking local communities with the rail industry

Chair's Report 2022

This is the third annual report of the Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership (DVCRP). The last year has seen some of the pandemic restrictions removed enabling the DVCRP to move forward with many of its ambitions outlined within this report. I have been proud to be the first Chair of the DVCRP and thank my colleagues and Sarah Newman, the Rail Officer, for all their support. The DVCRP Terms of Reference now require me to step down after two years, I will remain a board member. I wish the new Chair every success.

Linda Larter MBE

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.

During 2021 to 2022, the Covid-19 pandemic continued to pose challenges, particularly for group meetings, but we were able to complete a range of exciting projects, with the planters for the stations blooming, further planters installed, our beautiful posters going on sale at Bat & Ball station, and most exciting of all, bringing life back to Eynsford station with a heritage-funded restored waiting room, ticket office and platform shelter.

The annual accounts for 2021/22 are shown in the table below and as with the previous year, have 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 2022/23.

Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership (DVCRP)

Third Annual Financial Report

1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022 plus April – Dec 2022

The DVCRP was created in 2019 to promote the six stations and related communities and attractions along the Darent Valley railway line. A Rail Officer was appointed in July 2020 during the COVID pandemic and many online projects were started, including creating the website, commissioning artwork for the stations/promotion, and work with other CRPs. Planters were ordered and installed at all the stations during 2022 and renovations initiated and co-funded.

	Year 3		Year 4 (April 22 – Mar 23)	
	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual***
Income	£153,300.00*	£145,536.50	£53,536.10	£45,536.10
Expenditure	£179,710.00	£35,832.11	£185,525.00	£24,813.90
Balance	£29,391.99	£159,656.38**		
Committed Expenditure forwarded to Year 4		£130,541.74	£159,656.38 (carried over)	
Uncommitted balance forwarded to Year 4		£29,114.64		

*excludes in-kind contributions and cash reserves from previous years

**estimated balance to be carried over into Year 4

*** Actual for period April to December 2022

Sevenoaks District Council are the accountable body for the DVCRP, and the accounts will be subject to Sevenoaks District Council's audit. Detailed accounts were submitted to an Extra Finance Meeting of the DVCRP Steering Group on 23 August 2022 when they were approved.

There are a number of reasons why Year 3 accounts are in such a healthy position:

1. The Chairman on behalf of DVCRP successfully applied for a grant from Southeastern of £24,000 Year 1 and £30,000 Year 2 and £30,000 Year 3. It should be noted that a large amount of the grant is committed to budget headings.
2. There was a large sum (delayed) received from the GTR Passenger Benefit Fund (£100,000) and while some committed budget has been spent (planters), there are still many elements of income from the GTR Passenger Benefit Fund committed and waiting to be spent on large projects, including the renovation of Eynsford station and Shoreham station, and on feasibility projects.
3. Slight underachievement in income was due to a grant from Community Rail Network not yet having been applied for.
4. Project expenditure is running behind profile due to major expenditure such as building works falling in to the next accounting year. As a result £159,656.38 will be carried over into Year 4 (2022/23) of which £130,541.74 is committed expenditure against the projects identified.

Review of Events, Projects & Activities 2021/22

Disruption from the Covid pandemic continued to affect our activities, but we were able to press ahead with a whole range of actions, the most significant of which was the restoration of Eynsford station, a beautiful Victorian building, one of four along our line.

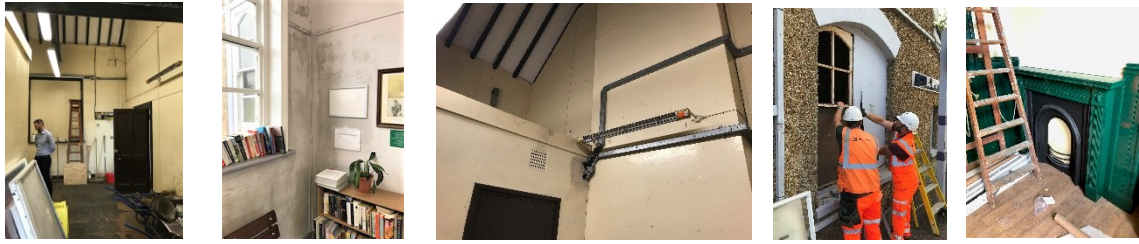
Similar to Bat & Ball, the **Victorian station buildings** along our line have suffered neglect over the years and have rooms sealed off from public use. Our plan to bring disused waiting rooms back into use has seen its first major achievement. With funding from the Rail Heritage Trust, the GTR Passenger Benefit Fund, from Southeastern and from our supporters, we were able to add a much-needed accessible toilet to **Eynsford station**, together with the complete renovation of the ticket office and the restoration of a disused waiting room. Using heritage colours to match the beauty of Bat & Ball station, Eynsford station now provides a warm and welcoming space for rail travellers. Six information panels also offer news about the history of the station, the history of the village, local attractions, local flora and fauna and updates about the DVCRP. The waiting room is furnished and ready for locals to use as a new community space. Network Rail has rebuilt the Victorian shelter on the London-bound platform at Eynsford, with the local artists' panels poised to be reinstated as soon as the bench seating is in. At our request the shelter has been painted in heritage colours.

Shoreham station is next on the list, with possible plans for it to become a micro-brewery run by locals (or restored by DVCRP) with new public amenities promised. And GTR funding for Otford station is pending to make that historic station yet another beautiful space for locals and visitors to enjoy.

The station adoption groups have grown in size, with Otford station gaining no fewer than 18 new volunteers, some with very welcome horticultural and historical skills. Otford station benefitted from the team planting over 100 daffodil bulbs, due to bloom in the spring of 2023, plus several new window boxes filled with seasonal plants. Gardeners at Sevenoaks (thank you to the Sevenoaks Soroptimists), Eynsford (thank you Eynsford in Bloom) and Shoreham (thank you to Shoreham Society and others) all helped plant and maintain the planters and garden areas, with the garden in the taxi area at Sevenoaks station attracting a commendation in the national Britain in Bloom competition in 2022.



Bat & Ball's very smart coal trolley planter has brightened up the platform, and we have plans to add a sustainable corridor of wildlife friendly plants on the station approach to Swanley. The Rail Officer worked with the Farningham & Eynsford Local History Society on interpretation panels for the new waiting room at Eynsford station, while local historians in Otford have produced their own displays for Otford station.



Eynsford station – top row, before renovation and process, bottom row, finished rooms and celebrating with Rail Heritage Trust and Southeastern, and the fabulous new shelter

With **Swanley now completely** renovated and a lively and well-used café in place, we are turning our attention to displays in the waiting rooms, working with the Swanley History Group to find stories to communicate. Plans are afoot to add a Talking Lamppost too, part of a national project to encourage communities to text their stories to coordinating groups, collecting local history and responses.



Refurbished waiting room; café; new south entrance to Swanley; renovated footbridge

We have continued to work closely with partners **the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership** on a number of initiatives, including final applications for much-needed **wayfinding** signs at each of the stations to link to trails, reserves, villages, and attractions in the area. We have also been contributing to efforts to improve **the Darent Valley Path** which links many of the stations, and helping to redesign footpath access, for example at Eynsford and Shoreham. We have been working closely together on Rail Trails from each station, with a packet of leaflets due to be created. We

have also been promoting the recently launched DVLPS **Samuel Palmer Trail**, bringing a cutting-edge audio-visual app (and leaflet) to the Valley. More great reasons to visit by train of course.

Further work pursued includes:

1. Engaging with the Community

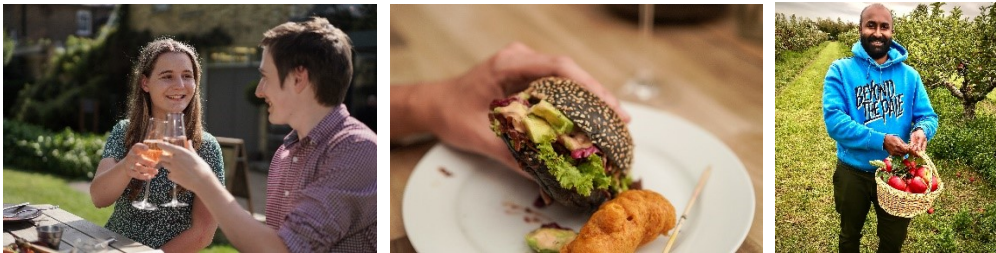
Through the work of the Officer, the Partnership is in the process of engaging the community in a range of ways.

- the artworks created by artist Kit Boyd and incorporated into the Darent Valley Line posters caused a big stir after the launch in March 2022. The reaction from the local community was incredibly positive, stimulating a big social media reaction and prompting hundreds of emails and online requests for purchases. The posters also attracted the attention of local news networks, magazines, bloggers and influencers. Demand for the posters has been high, with several reprints ordered for Bat & Ball station café (where they are on sale to the public). An online on-demand service – to be launched imminently - will give us even more channels to attract new audiences to the area, promoting the distinctive character of each station along the line. We recently also added two arrays of the posters, one opposite Sevenoaks station and the other soon to go up at Swanley station, again engaging with the public and promoting the Darent Valley Line.



Launch at Bat & Ball station; the posters arrive; Kit Boyd interviewed by BBC South East News

- 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.
- **Arts and Heritage:** the Darent Valley has a colourful history with many fascinating writers, artists, engineers, landscape architects, horticulturalists and more having lived here, inspired by local life and the landscape. We have been celebrating some of the famous (and less famous) people linked to the area and were pleased to promote the Samuel Palmer Trail which starts in Shoreham, the Victorian's artist's home, an initiative developed by locals. More will follow in 2023!
- **Food and Drink Trail:** the Trail, funded in-kind by Experience Kent, has been loaded onto our website and continues to inspire rail travellers to explore the Darent Valley by train, enjoying the exceptional food and drink venues in our area. From the award-winning Life on High café and Sevenoaks Bookshop, to the charming café at Bat & Ball station, to the hugely popular Mount Vineyard and Instagram favourite Castle Farm, the UK's largest lavender farm, there is so much within reach of the train stations. We still hope to create guide-led experiences that will benefit both visitors and producers, making a train journey in the area even more memorable.



- Options to **improve disabled access** at both Eynsford and Shoreham stations continue to be explored, both working with locals to consider best options, with money earmarked in our budget to assist with feasibility studies.

2. Social Media and Publicity

We continue to engage with the public on our social media platforms and the Officer has continued to build up a database of useful images, some of which are being snapped up by other tourism organisations. We were very excited to have our poster launch picked up by several media outlets, not least BBC South East News, who came to the area to interview artist Kit Boyd about his work, together with contributions from local councillors, Elliott Waters (Sevenoaks station manager at the time) and the Rail Officer. The benefit of slow travel by rail, promoted by our posters, was captured perfectly! BBC South East returned later in the year, with weather presenter Sara Thornton filming an item about Shoreham's Samuel Palmer Trail.



The Officer has given several **presentations** about the CRP’s work to local organisations, again to Southeastern, to local parish and town council meetings, to local campaigning groups and to a nationally attended tourism seminar for Community Rail. Articles about the DVCRP and attractions accessible by rail featured in several local publications.

3. Training

The Officer has been attending further training sessions offered by the Community Rail Network, including tourism and social media interactions, all of which will feed back into the work of the CRP as a whole. The Chair also attended several training and networking events organised by Community Rail Network.

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. We were delighted when the Guide won a prize at the Community Rail Awards in 2021.

We are developing another guide, due to be launched in the spring of 2023, drawing attention to all the arts and heritage venues along the linked Thameslink CRP stations, including the elegant St Albans Gallery (St Albans), the intriguing Higgins Bedford Gallery (Bedford), the many quirky art galleries and street art venues in Brighton, the award-winning Ditchling Museum near Hassocks, and our very own Samuel Palmer Trail in the Darent Valley,

The composite image consists of three parts. On the left, a woman with blonde hair is seen from the side, looking at several framed artworks on a gallery wall. In the center, there is a screenshot of a mobile application interface. At the top, it shows the time 18:41 and the URL 'www.centralrail.com'. Below that is a map of the South East of England with red dots indicating various destinations: Bedford (for Thameslink), Cambridge (for Darent Valley), London (for Thameslink), Sevenoaks, East Grinstead, and Brighton. Below the map, the word 'DESTINATIONS' is written in blue, and 'Bedford' is highlighted in a white box. On the right, there is a photograph of a grand, classical building with a portico supported by columns, likely a gallery or museum.

5. Travel Coordination

Darent Valley CRP continues to work 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'. We worked with local on-demand bus company GoCoach to provide a tablet at Sevenoaks station, available to the public for information about their services. The Rail Officer also worked closely with local cycling groups, who, together with Sevenoaks District Council, were instrumental in securing funding for a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, a precursor to more substantial funding for cycling routes linking the communities to schools and the railway stations. The Rail Officer and other members of the Steering Group also takes part in meetings about sustainable travel, movement strategies and makes submissions to regional travel partner consultations.

We are still 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

Rail Heritage Trust



Sevenoaks
TOWN COUNCIL



Contact Us

Sarah Newman *Rail Projects Community Officer*

sarah.newman@sevenoaks.gov.uk

Darent Valley CRP Steering Group Chair: **Linda Larter**

Website: www.darentvalleycrp.org

 Twitter: [@darentvalleycrp](https://twitter.com/darentvalleycrp)

 Instagram: [visitsevenoaksdistrict](https://www.instagram.com/visitsevenoaksdistrict)

Darent Valley CRP is hosted by Sevenoaks District Council

c/o Sevenoaks District Council, Council Offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1HG