

# DARENT VALLEY COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2024 TO MARCH 2025



**DARENT VALLEY**  
COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

Published April 2025. Linking local communities with the rail industry.



# CHAIR'S REPORT 2024/25

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I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce this Annual report in what is a very momentous year for the railway. Celebrations for “Railway 200” are already underway, and they are set to intensify as we approach the bicentenary of the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in September. The Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership will be taking part in some joint celebrations with other CRPs and is also planning projects and activities of its own.

I am happy to report that during the past year the partnership has continued to move towards achieving its objectives. Although progress has remained slow on some of our larger projects such as Shoreham Station, we have achieved much in other areas. We have contributed to the feasibility study for a new footbridge at Swanley which promises to improve disabled access in and around the station, we have facilitated the forthcoming installation of cycle ramps at Eynsford and Swanley and we have funded two more beautiful murals at Sevenoaks and Swanley.

We have also continued our significant horticultural efforts at all stations and begun exciting new partnerships with SupaJam music academy and Broomhill Bank School, both based in Swanley.

My own personal highlights of the year include being part of the team that created a new shade garden and walking map sign at Otford; helping to kickstart a new project outside Swanley station where a small garden has been created by Broomhill Bank students; and working with Sevenoaks Camera Club to install a new photo gallery at Otford. It was especially satisfying to see the popularity of the gallery grow to the extent that

we quickly received several offers from local amateur photographers to display their work there.

I realise that none of our achievements would be possible without the generous financial backing we receive. My thanks go to Southeastern Railway for our core funding and all the support that Matt Fraser provides, to GTR Thameslink, in particular Andrew Chillingsworth, to Sevenoaks District Council, Swanley and Sevenoaks Town Councils and to Eynsford, Shoreham and Otford Parish Councils. We should not forget the excellent help and advice we get from the national Community Rail Network and from Network Rail. I am pleased to report that, thanks to its support, we have achieved reaccreditation to the national Department of Transport standard.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge all the members of the Steering Committee and in particular our Deputy Chair, John Saynor, for their staunch support this year. I would like to express my appreciation to Sarah Newman, our Rail Officer, whose hard work and dedication contributes so much to our success.

**Chris Sutton, Chair DVCRP**



# 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 75 community rail partnerships (CRPs) in the UK (and many more 'Friends of' groups) that 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.



# ANNUAL REPORT – FINANCIALS

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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, Thameslink and Network Rail, each of which contributed significant sums ensuring the ongoing success of the Partnership. An officer was appointed in July 2020.

The annual accounts for 2024/25 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 2025/6.

## ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT: DARENT VALLEY COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

April 2024 – March 2025

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, interpretations panels, posters and biodiverse plants were ordered and installed at all the stations during 2022/23 and renovations initiated and co-funded, with Eynsford station completed and Shoreham station plans re-initiated. Since then many more community-based projects have been initiated, working with local schools, community groups and volunteers on a wide variety of projects.

	Year 4 Actual 2022/2023	Year 5 Actual 2023/2024	Year 6 Actual 2024/2025	Year 7 Budget 2025/2026
Balance Carried from previous year	£153,420	£177,831	£155,685	£166,525
Income	£47,036	£42,836	£92,458	£12,600
Expenditure	£21,814	£67,958	£81,618	£142,125
Balance to carry forward (Including reserve)	£178,642	£153,520	£166,525	£37,000
Committed expenditure to carry to next year	£130,542	£109,160	£98,453	

Sevenoaks District Council are the accountable body for the DVCRP, and the accounts will be subject to Sevenoaks District Council's audit.

1. The DVCRP successfully applied for a grant from Southeastern of £30,000 and from GTR Thameslink of £6,600 for the financial year 2024/5 plus additional funding from UK Shared Prosperity Funds and Railway 200 grants. The remainder of our income came from Sevenoaks District Council, Sevenoaks Town Council, Swanley Town Council and Eynsford, Shoreham and Otford Parish Councils and Network Rail.

2. The income figure for Year 6 also includes a grant from Southeastern for £30,000 for the financial year 2025/6 (Year 7) received in March 2025.

3. Project expenditure is still running behind profile as train operators/authorities find slots to incorporate our proposals into their schedules.

4. Eynsford Parish Council has requested that funds earmarked for access issues go towards a pedestrian crossing and footpath access study.

5. The figure for committed expenditure includes funds remaining from the GTR Passenger Benefit Fund (£100,000) received in Year 3. Much of the original fund has been spent on projects including the renovation of Eynsford station, murals, posters and poster displays, but a proportion remains unspent but committed.

6. A reserve amount is carried over each year to cover any possible end-of-partnership costs incurred by Sevenoaks District Council (to date a total of £5000). The DVCRP is also protecting £30,000 to cover employment costs in the event of all funding ceasing.

7. The year end balances have been adjusted for accruals.



# REVIEW OF EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES 2024/5

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## 1. Providing a Voice for the Community

In 2024 we worked with a marketing business on devising a survey about travel to and from the area, to discover more about people's choices – why they do (and do not) opt for rail travel, where they have come from and how, what ticket choices they made (or might have made) and much more. We have a quote for the work and are planning to get going with the survey later in 2025 as more rail travellers (and others) arrive in the area.

We held our annual AGM in 2024 with our stakeholders attending as well, offering suggestions for projects going forward and feeding back opinions on all our work to date.

We continue to engage with a wide range of groups within our communities, including transport groups, active travel groups (walkers and cyclists mostly), tourism attractions and visitors, Instagram influencers, schools and many more.

## 2. Promoting Sustainable, Healthy and Accessible Travel

We had a Try the Train expedition with local music academy SupaJam and sound artist Paul Cheese. The excursion to Shoreham and Bat & Ball was slightly damp, but everyone loved the day out and came back with very special found sound recordings to share. The experience of travelling by train as a group was so popular that we have been asked to organise several other journeys, including one with musicians performing on board!

Timequest/PuzzleLine: A new set of puzzles along the Darent Valley Line were launched this year. This is a collaboration with escape room specialists Timequest, funded by Sevenoaks District Council through UK Shared Prosperity Funding, to produce a set of challenging questions to solve, challenging all visitors to the six stations. Using clues within the stations and in amongst surrounding attractions or villages, participants download a leaflet or answer questions online at [www.puzzleline.org](http://www.puzzleline.org) loading answers as they go. Taking up to an hour per stop, this can be a full day's activity or a reason to revisit. On completing all the answers (hints are provided if you get stuck) the quizzers upload their responses and wait to hear if all is as it should be. Another fun reason to catch the train! And a real incentive to visitors to come and explore the Valley and all it has to offer, hopefully spending some money as they move around.

## 3. Bringing Communities Together, Supporting Diversity and Inclusion

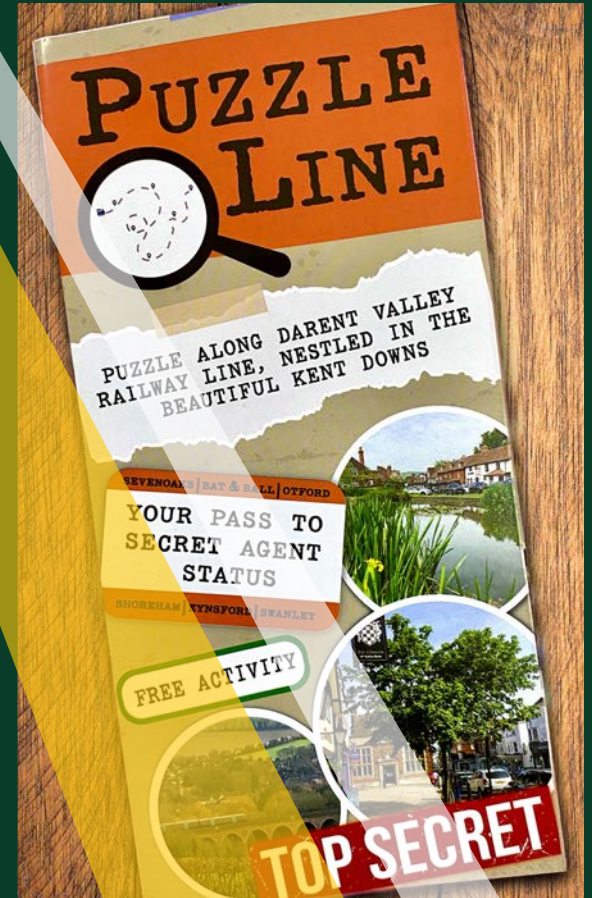
Bat & Ball's volunteers continue to help with Forget-me-Not events/talks at the station for dementia groups and the station is now hosting Rail Safety briefings with local primary schools, funded by the DVCRP.

We continue to work in cooperation with Sevenoaks Camera Club creating a photography gallery in the waiting room at Otford (and in Swanley) exhibiting photographs, with participants from a West Kent MIND six month-long photography course adding their own images of the valley, resulting in a beautiful additional display of their photographs. We celebrated with a launch party and home-baked cakes.

At Swanley the volunteers from West Kent Housing Association are maintaining all of the new planters, while other student volunteers from Broomhill Bank School (a school for students with special needs) put in bulbs in the planter area to the left of the new cycle storage hub at the south entrance. We have arranged career talks at Broomhill Bank School and are planning collaborating on some Railway 200 poster designs too.

We are also working with SupaJam, a specialist music academy in Swanley, offering an education space for students. We have a range of activities ongoing, including further Try the Train expeditions (see above) and creative projects. One of these is a very exciting project to record found sound at some of the stations (and nearby areas) with a view to creating a set of compositions based on each area, to be added to our website and ultimately on an app that can be used by rail travellers. We are working with sound artist Paul Cheese on this project, who has a huge bank of sounds to share from his The Big Record: Darent Valley initiative, in partnership with our stakeholder the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme.

The station adoption groups continue to grow, with Eynsford in Bloom being nominated for the final of Britain in Bloom, and Sevenoaks town keen to spruce up the station frontage as they too are in a Britain in Bloom final. We have been using funds from a Green Grant from Network Rail for Eynsford station, adding self-watering window boxes, a large new water butt, four beautiful birch trees and wildflower seed. The window boxes are regularly filled with seasonal plants and the new garden created to the left of the station entrance at Otford has had signage added, with a space for leaflets. Otford Fete continues to promote our work.



Gardeners at Shoreham (thank you to Shoreham Society and others) all continue to plant and maintain the planters and garden areas. Further bird boxes, built by the Otford Scouts, have been added to the stations.

A mural at Shoreham was also completed recently, with artwork by Ola Intu, working with students from Shoreham Village School. Ola visited the school and the children created images of how they see their local environment, with Ola incorporating all the images into a very long mural at the station. We held a launch event in November 2024 and the mural has since featured in a few Instagram posts!

#### **4. Supporting Social and Economic Development**

Our ambition to restore the four Victorian station buildings along our line is progressing well. With funding from the Rail Heritage Trust, the GTR Passenger Benefit Fund, from Southeastern and from our supporters, the renovations at Eynsford station are nearly complete, with the exterior of the building due to be painted in the same heritage colours prior to a Britain in Bloom judge visiting in July 2025! The waiting room continues to be used by the hard-working Eynsford in Bloom volunteers for well-deserved tea and cakes while working on the station.

Work has again focused on Shoreham and Otford stations, with a feasibility study for Shoreham completed. We are waiting for a quote for the costs of repainting the exterior of Shoreham and expect to have either a waiting room on its own, with a set of interpretation boards, or a combination of a waiting room and community space (possibly as artists' studios) being proposed. We are also looking at options for sprucing up Otford and Bat & Ball stations.

We continue to work closely with partners Darent Valley Landscape Partnership on a number of initiatives, with the greatest success being the Rail Trails and the Rail Trails app, with hundreds of downloads and all the packets of leaflets disappearing as soon as they are put out.

Other work included adding wayfinding signs to the rural stations, now enhancing visitor experience as they arrive. We have also co-hosted a walk with Kent Downs National Landscape/Putting Down Routes, leading a group from Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees on a sunny April day, with Otford Society's cakes to follow.

The funds provided to install cycle ramps at Shoreham and Eynsford stations will also enable cyclists to use the stations and replace the car economy with the healthier, low carbon footprint with alternatives.

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', for example with local cycling groups, who, together with Sevenoaks District Council, were instrumental in securing funding for a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. More substantial funding is promised for cycling routes linking the communities to schools and the railway stations, now under construction.

The Rail Officer and other members of the Steering Group also take part in meetings about sustainable travel, movement strategies and makes submissions to regional travel partner consultations. We continue to push for a new footpath between Eynsford station and the existing valley footpaths, along the A225, to create safer access and will be involved in the feasibility study to make this possible. This is supported by tourism stakeholders in the area, keen to see more visitors arrive by train, reducing the number of cars coming to the Valley.

The artworks created by artist Kit Boyd and incorporated into the Darent Valley Line posters continue to be in demand, with several reprints ordered for Bat & Ball station café (where they are on sale to the public, attracting people to the café) and the online on-demand service – launched in July 2023 – give us even more channels to attract new audiences to the area, promoting the distinctive character of each station along the line. To date we have sold over 500 posters and greeting cards. In addition to the two arrays of the posters, one opposite Sevenoaks station (recently renewed) and the other at Swanley station, we have added permanent frames for the posters at each station. We are working with Thameslink and Southeastern to use the posters in their social media campaigns, with the aim of promoting the Darent Valley Line. The new mural at Sevenoaks station has also brightened up the drop-off area at the station.

Food and Drink Trail: this continues to inspire rail travellers to explore the Darent Valley by train, enjoying the exceptional food and drink venues in our area, supporting the local economy. From the award-winning Life on High café and Sevenoaks Bookshop tea room, to the charming café at Bat & Ball station, to the hugely popular Mount Vineyard and Samuel Palmer pub, and Instagram favourite Castle Farm (now the UK's largest lavender farm), there are so many talented independent businesses within easy reach of our train stations.

Options to improve disabled or improved access and facilities for cyclists at both Eynsford and Shoreham stations continue to be explored, working with locals to consider best options, with money earmarked in our budget to assist with feasibility studies. This involves plenty of emails, meetings and assessments! As mentioned, we are about to install cycle ramps at two of our stations, with a third at Otford being explored.



EYNSFORD  
DARENT VALLEY  
COMMUNITY RAIL  
south eastern

SWENOAKS STATION  
DARENT VALLEY CRP.ORG

BAT & BALL STATION  
DARENT VALLEY CRP.ORG

OTFORD STATION  
DARENT VALLEY CRP.ORG

SHOREHAM STATION  
DARENT VALLEY CRP.ORG

SWANLEY STATION  
DARENT VALLEY CRP.ORG

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND PUBLICITY

We continue to engage with the public on our social media platforms and the Rail Officer has launched a new Instagram and a Bluesky account for the DVCRP, to engage with broader social groups and to benefit from links forged with and training offered by the Thameslink social media team over the last year. When sharing posts with Thameslink or social influencers a couple of posts resulted in over 1.7K plays with 1200 accounts reached. Promotion of the Rail Trails with Kent Downs National Landscape has contributed to nearly 14000 screen views of the trails (2024 figures).

The Officer continued to give several presentations about the CRP's work to local parish meetings, to a group of visiting Kent Mayors (plus a trip out on the railway, including the miniature railway in Swanley Park!). Articles about the DVCRP and attractions accessible by rail featured in several local publications. The Rail Officer also attended the West Kent Expo in Tonbridge, promoting rail travel in the Darent Valley. And several prominent Instagram influencers have featured walks from our stations in their posts.

## TRAINING

The Officer has been attending further training sessions, including tourism and social media interactions, all of which will feed back into the work of the CRP as a whole. Special thanks to Thameslink Social Media guru Callum Marius for his engagement with a group of community rail officers every few months, now concluded! The Chair also attended several training and networking events organised by Community Rail Network and helped set up a new Women's Safety Network with other community rail officers and CRN.

## 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 and Southeastern groups, to publicise all that the Thameslink and Southeastern CRP areas have to offer the rail visitor. The Thameslink Guide and Thameslink Art Guide continue to draw attention to activities accessible from the rail stations in each area and demonstrates which day trips are possible across the entire rail network. And a huge choir project is planned for 2026, collaborating with all the other GTR CRPs.



## PROPOSED PROJECTS FOR 2025/26

### Our First and Last Mile projects are:

- proposed footpath on A225 near Eynsford station
- cycle ramp for Otford footbridge (if needed)
- travel survey for the rural stations
- promotion of a car club and e-bike rental
- working with Kent Downs and others to promote Rail Trails
- participation in Women's Safety Network

### Our Events and Associated Activities projects are:

- working with Broomhill Bank School in Swanley (various)
- working with SupaJam music academy in Swanley (various)
- working with "Chorus for Change" choir (a GTR MIND/Railway 200 initiative)
- working with SDC/Timequest to promote the new PuzzleLine
- working with Otford Fete and other community events

### Our Marketing and Communications projects are:

- continuing poster/greeting card sales
- promotion of DVCRP at Denmark Hill station and others in south London
- new banner/promotion of the DVCRP at Sevenoaks station
- new signage/panel displays for Swanley
- improvements to the website

### Our Station Facilities projects are:

- gardening at all stations
- Eynsford station Porters Lodge Window Museum
- Shoreham station redevelopment
- Shoreham station Mildmay Gate interpretation panel
- Otford/Swanley Photo Galleries – upkeep/small changes
- and painting Eynsford, Shoreham and Otford in heritage colours



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## CONTACT US/GET INVOLVED

The work of the Partnership relies on the dedicated work of over 40 volunteers throughout the year. We are always looking for more people to join us and would love to hear from you. If you have suggestions for projects or ideas about how we could make our stations and rail travel even better, let us know.

Sarah Newman Rail Officer

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Darent Valley CRP Steering Group Chair: Chris Sutton

Website: [darentvalleycrp.org](http://darentvalleycrp.org)

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

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

[darentvalleycrp.bsky.social](https://www.bsky.app/profile/darentvalleycrp.bsky.social)



**DARENT VALLEY**  
COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

## FUNDERS

Darent Valley CRP is very grateful to its funders and partners who back 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. With many 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

Railway Heritage Trust



**southeastern**

**ThamesLink** /



Darent Valley CRP is hosted by Sevenoaks District Council  
c/o Sevenoaks District Council, Council Offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 IHG