

DARENT VALLEY COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2025 – MARCH 2026



DARENT VALLEY
COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP



CHAIR'S REPORT 2025/26

I am happy to introduce this Annual Report after what was an unforgettable year for the railway. Along with other Community Rail Partnerships up and down the country the Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership took part in Railway 200, on the occasion of the bicentenary of the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. My own personal highlights of the year were our events celebrating local railway history; the creation of an interpretation panel on the Mildmay gate at Shoreham and, alongside our friends from the French twinning association, the installation of a replica Golden Arrow at Otford to commemorate the famous luxury boat train that linked us.

The progress that our partnership has continued to make over the past year has been steady, with several projects coming to fruition. We completed the installation of cycle ramps at Shoreham and Eynsford and have plans for more at Otford in the coming year. We also commissioned an extensive rail traveller survey at Eynsford, Shoreham and Otford, now available to share.

Throughout the past twelve months we have also been making steady progress towards realising two long held objectives, the painting of Shoreham and Eynsford stations in 1950s British Railway green colours and the imminent construction of a footpath along the A225. Both of these projects are now scheduled for completion in the coming year.

We have maintained our exciting partnerships with Kent Downs National Landscape, Swanley music academy SupaJam and Swanley's Broomhill Bank School, organising gardening teams, trips by train, group walks and musical activities. We have also continued our extensive horticultural work across all stations. At Otford we have

improved our shade garden further with the installation of new paving stones and we were delighted that our volunteers were rewarded with a Gold Level of Excellence in the 'It's your station' category at the Community Rail Awards held in Derby.

None of the things we do would be possible without the generous financial support we receive. Once again, I would like to thank Southeastern Railway for our core funding and for the ongoing assistance provided by Matt Fraser; GTR Thameslink, particularly Andrew Chillingsworth; Sevenoaks District Council; Swanley and Sevenoaks Town Councils; and the Parish Councils of Eynsford, Shoreham and Otford. We are also grateful for the excellent guidance and advice provided by the national Community Rail Network.

Finally, I would like to thank all members of the Steering Committee, and especially our Deputy Chair, John Saynor, for their steadfast support throughout the year. I would also like to express my particular appreciation to Sarah Newman, our brilliant Rail Officer, whose commitment and hard work contributes greatly to our success.



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

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 2025/26 are shown in the table and as with the previous year, have been adjusted for a financial year running from 01 April to 31 March. The table also provides an indication of the proposed budget for 2026/7.

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

	Year 5 Actual 2023/2024	Year 6 Actual 2024/2025	Year 7 Actual 2025/2026	Year 8 Budget 2026/2027
Balance Carried from previous year	£177,831	£155,685	£166,518	£128,988
Income	£42,836	£92,458	£14,328	£43,703
Expenditure	£67,958	£81,618	£51,858	£135,000
Balance to carry forward (Including reserve)	£153,520	£166,525	£128,988	£37,691
Committed expenditure to carry to next year	£109,160	£98,453	£86,000	

1. The DVCRP successfully applied for a grant from Southeastern of £30,000 and from GTR Thameslink of £6,600 for the financial year 2025/6 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.

PASSENGER FIGURES

Passenger entries and exits: Darent Valley Line stations 2023 – 25 (Office of Rail and Road stats)

Station	2023/2024	2024/2025	% increase on previous year
Swanley	1,334,974	1,523,582	13%
Eynsford	143,286	155,580	9%
Shoreham	68,866	82,766	20.1%
Otford	400,674	445,500	11.2%
Bat & Ball	205,726	218,476	5.8%
Sevenoaks	3,480,770	3,741,030	7.4%

Note: passenger figures in Great Britain overall in Quarter Two of 2026 finally exceeded those of the peak pre-Covid, with 466m journeys in 2026, against 461m in 2019.



REVIEW OF EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES 2025/6

I. Providing a Voice for the Community

In 2025 we carried out 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. Travellers were surveyed at rural stations and in the villages nearby, with the results published recently. We held our annual AGM in 2025 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 two more Try the Train expeditions with local music academy SupaJam and sound artist Paul Cheese. The excursion to Otford was a great success and we were kindly given special access to the partially restored Archbishop's Palace tower in the village, making plenty of echoey noises in the circular stone space. A lunch stop at The Olive Tree Café also proved a big hit. We were very pleased to have obtained more funding for the project from Siemens, a contact suggested by Community Rail Network, giving us the potential to develop even more collaboration over the coming year.

Timequest/PuzzleLine: This collaboration with escape room specialists Timequest, funded by Sevenoaks District Council through UK Shared Prosperity Funding, produced a set of challenging questions for visitors to our six stations to solve, challenging all visitors to the six stations. Using clues within the stations and in amongst surrounding attractions or villages, participants have downloaded a leaflet or answer questions online at www.puzzleline.org loading answers as they go. Take up has been significant and a competition before December resulted in a reward. An app for the challenge is about to be launched, offering more digital opportunities for interactions. And it is 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 hosting Rail Safety briefings with local primary schools, funded by the DVCRP.

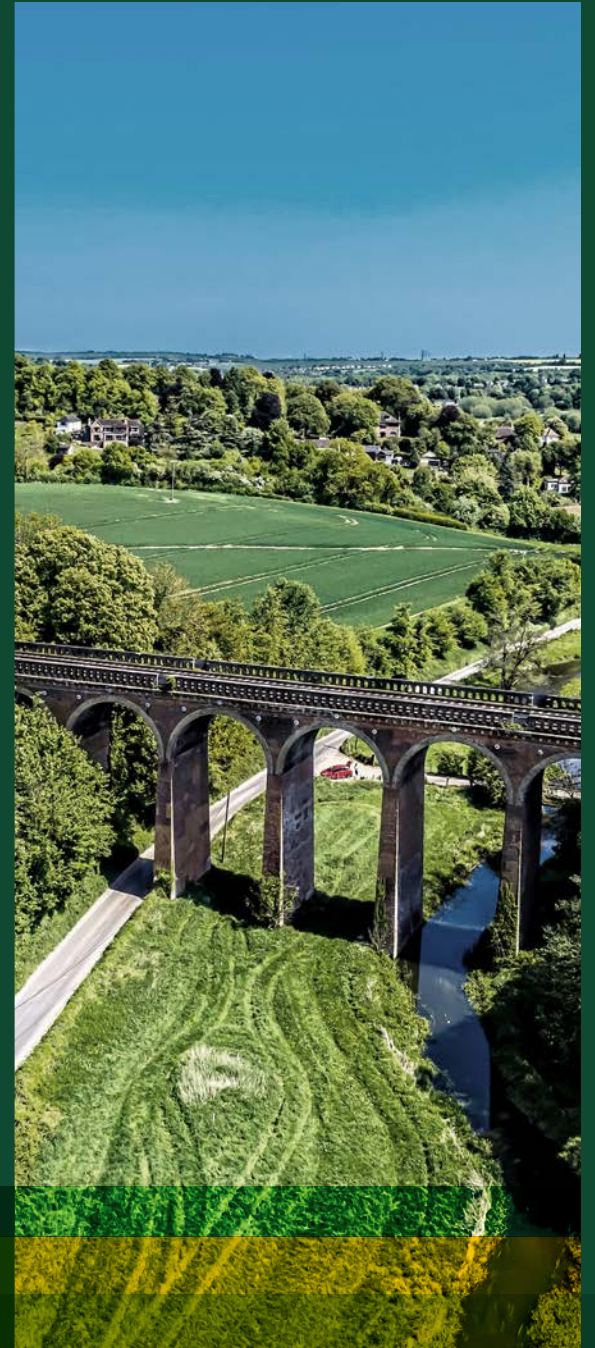
We continue to work in cooperation with Sevenoaks Camera Club updating photography galleries in the waiting room at Otford and in Swanley, exhibiting photographs, with rotating participants from, for example, West Kent MIND and from locals.

At Swanley the volunteers from West Kent Housing Association are maintaining the new planters, while other student volunteers from Broomhill Bank School (a school for students with special educational needs) enjoyed seeing their bulbs come to life to the left of the new cycle storage hub at the south entrance. We arranged a career talk from Southeastern at Broomhill Bank School – with possible recruits – and arranged a visit to local nursery Provender, picking up plants for the station in the process.

We have continued to work 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. We continue to realise our 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. These will 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 and Sevenoaks town being nominated for the final of Britain in Bloom, achieving gold awards. We used funds from a Green Grant from Network Rail at Eynsford station, and having added self-watering window boxes, finally installed a large new water butt. 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 and paving to give better access for visitors. We collaborated again with Otford Fete to promote our work, in 2025 using a Railway 200 theme for the Fete poster, with train-themed stalls as well.

Gardeners at Shoreham (thank you to Shoreham Society and others) all continue to plant and maintain the planters and garden areas.



PUZZLELINE
It's FREE to play!

Play Anytime
Take part at gardens e.g.

Swanley | Eynsford | Shoreham | Otford | Bat & Ball | Sevenoaks

Sevenoaks
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Explore the
around the:
Take part at

Solve the puzzles at each station on the Darent Valley Rail Line to complete your secret mission!
Swanley | Eynsford | Shoreham | Otford | Bat & Ball | Sevenoaks

4. Supporting Social and Economic Development

We continue to restore the four Victorian station buildings along our line, working with the train operators, UK Power Network, local businesses and others. With funding from the Railway 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. The dilapidated roof at Eynsford has finally been repaired by Arch Co (following a request from us and Railway Heritage Trust) and the exterior is being painted in preparation for our further work.

We continue to focus on Shoreham and Otford stations, with further survey work being carried out at Shoreham station with a view to a local business moving in. We have quotes for the costs of repainting the exterior of Shoreham and await the commencements of works. We are also looking at options for sprucing up Otford and Bat & Ball stations.

Although the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership has formally finished, we agreed to keep a number of initiatives going, 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. We inherited some beautiful reprints of the artist Samuel Palmer's Shoreham works from the 1820s and 30s, and hope to exhibit these at Shoreham station in due course.

We 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 new cycle ramps at Shoreham and Eynsford stations have enabled cyclists to use the stations and replace the car economy with the healthier, low carbon footprint with alternatives. We worked with Southeastern on adding further parking spaces for car club rental vehicles at Otford and Sevenoaks, launched earlier in 2026. With cars for rent at Bat & Ball station too, this means three stations have onward travel options for individuals and the tourist economy of the area.

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. Our joint work pushing for a new footpath between Eynsford station and the existing valley footpaths, along the A225, to create safer access has recently been given the go-ahead and our funds will help make this possible. We also contributed significant funding to a feasibility study for a footbridge at Swanley station, a solution to ongoing challenges for disabled access on both sides of the station.

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 cafe) 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 600 posters and greeting cards. We are planning to add a further mural at Swanley station, to join the well-loved ones at Sevenoaks and Bat & Ball stations.

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 Lilia's Kitchen 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 have installed cycle ramps at two of our stations, with a third at Otford being explored.





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 4K views with over 1300 accounts reached.

The Officer continues to give several presentations about the CRP's work to councils, including a report to Sevenoaks District Council's People and Places committee, in the main Chamber. Articles about the DVCRP and attractions accessible by rail featured in several local publications. The Rail Officer reattended the West Kent Expo in Tonbridge, promoting rail travel in the Darent Valley, making useful contacts with businesses in the area. And prominent Instagram influencers keep featuring walks from our stations in their posts.

TRAINING

Training: The Officer has been attending further training sessions, including tourism and social media interactions, but also sustainability conferences, learning about how organisations can come together to promote biodiversity and eco-travel, all of which feeds back into the work of the CRP as a whole.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS

The Darent Valley CRP worked with a whole range of other CRPs 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. Earlier this year, the rail officer, working with GTR, was instrumental in bringing singers together from all over the south east, devising a medley for everyone to sing and working with community groups and choirs to create a glorious sound at London Kings Cross on Saturday 7 March 2026.



PROPOSED PROJECTS FOR 2026/27

Our First and Last Mile projects are:

- Starting work on the footpath on A225 near Eynsford station
- Finalising the cycle ramp for Otford footbridge
- Publishing and discussing travel survey for the rural stations
- Further promotion of the car club and solutions for 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 further "Chorus for Change" choirs (a GTR and MIND initiative)
- Working with SDC/Timequest to promote the PuzzleLine app
- Working with Otford Fete and other community events
- Rail Safety Awareness training

Our Marketing and Communications projects are:

- Continuing poster/greeting card sales, collabs with shops
- 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
- Swanley station mural

Our Station Facilities projects are:

- Gardening at all stations
- Eynsford station Porters Lodge Window Museum
- Shoreham station redevelopment
- Shoreham poster display stand
- Otford/Swanley Photo Galleries – upkeep/small changes
- Painting Eynsford, Shoreham and Otford in heritage colours



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

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



DARENT VALLEY
COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP



SWANLEY
TOWN COUNCIL

southeastern

ThamesLink /



Darent Valley CRP is hosted by Sevenoaks District Council
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