



SUNDAY 2 APRIL 2017

“I’m catching the first train”
#Ilkestonstation






DERBYSHIRE County Council

AC:RP
New life for local lines

Association of Community Rail Partnerships
ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17
Supporting the community rail movement to flourish

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Cover image: Stan and Fred Thorley catching the first train from the newly opened Ilkeston station | Alastair Morley

From the chair and chief executive

Community rail is an inspiring grassroots movement. Partnerships and groups around the country are working to build positive connections between local people and their railways. Their work is varied, but serves the crucial purpose of making sure people can get the most from their railways and have a stake in their development. This makes a vital contribution to mobility, sustainability, prosperity, and wellbeing.

2016-17 was a big year for ACoRP, which represents and supports the community rail movement. Following increased funding from industry and government, we underwent major reorganisation and doubled in size. New staff, including myself, are bringing fresh thinking and a broad range of third sector skills. Alongside the extensive experience of longer-serving team members, we are in a stronger position to help the community rail movement to flourish.

Despite the changes, we remain clear that we are here to support our members to benefit their communities. Our new strategy states our commitment to listening to and serving members in light of their diverse priorities. It makes clear our belief in community rail to continue to make a huge difference to our railways and ultimately the people they serve: something we think is more important now than ever.



Jools Townsend
Chief executive

Last year's annual report wrote of coming changes at ACoRP. By now members will be acquainted with those new faces, especially chief executive Jools Townsend. Since her arrival Jools has built an efficient team of dedicated professionals, melding existing staff with new arrivals and maximising skills and knowledge of both.

At the same time as the expansion of our staff we bid farewell to long time friend and colleague Neil Buxton after many years with us as general manager. Neil's successes were many, his crowning achievement the renovation of our offices in Huddersfield. Under Neil's leadership our standing with governments and industry was much developed and he laid firm foundations on which Jools and the team are building.

Each year I acknowledge that much of what ACoRP does is due to the support of governments, the rail industry and our sponsors. Equally I recognise the valued contribution of ACoRP's board without whose support our accomplishments would be less. Our thanks to all once again.

Many pleasant memories come to mind of the 2016 awards at Southport last September. The range of entries gets better each year. How far we have come from that first awards event held in Norwich in 2005.

These continue to be challenging times for some members. But rail franchises are required to incorporate provision for community rail in their plans. So take heart from what the sector has demonstrated that it can achieve. There is much to take pride in, bringing rail into the

community and the community into rail. ACoRP is here to support and help you with expanded team, new ideas and great enthusiasm!



Peter Roberts MBE
Hon. Chairman

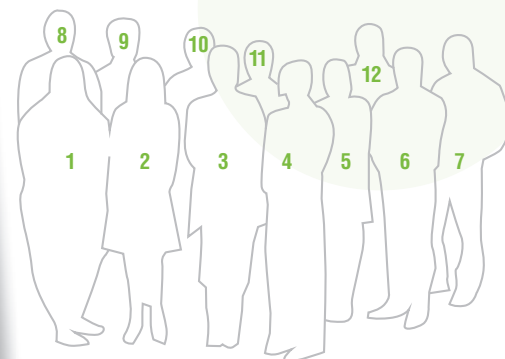
ACoRP in numbers

11 staff members, up from **5**
163 members, of which **57** community rail partnerships
+ 86 station friends groups **+ 20** other groups and individuals
11 events run, attended by **653** delegates
151 entries to our awards, with **15** winners recognised
730 subscribers to our news bulletin
£552,073 annual turnover

Our reorganisation

2016 saw ACoRP double in size and I had to make sure we were ready for our new team members to be able to hit the ground running. As well as arranging IT equipment and support, our meeting room had to be made in to an office for four people. Fortunately, one of our partners had desks and drawers they no longer needed, although a delay in getting these meant even this proved complicated. But we pulled together and made it work. I remember the day after the new team started. For four years I'd opened the door and walked into an empty meeting room. It was weird walking in that morning to see four faces looking at me! A few weeks later, it was as if we'd worked together for years.

Dawn Wolrich, admin manager, ACoRP



- 1 Alice Mannion, tourism & heritage officer
- 2 Gemma Langford, admin assistant
- 3 Dawn Wolrich, admin manager
- 4 Jools Townsend, chief executive
- 5 Hazel Bonner, events & fundraising manager
- 6 Martin Yallop, community stations manager
- 7 Peter Roberts, chair
- 8 Anders Hanson, senior commercial manager
- 9 Ian Davis, operations officer
- 10 Nik Schofield, communications & marketing manager
- 11 Paul Webster, operations manager
- 12 Brian Barnsley, senior operations manager & deputy chief executive



Engaging community rail partnerships

Community rail partnerships, now numbering 57 across Britain, form the backbone of the community rail movement.

Working along whole or multiple railway lines (or sections of them), they bring together a range of public, private and third sector partners at a local level to engage communities in their railways. They improve understanding of and access to the railways, and ensure the communities' needs are considered in the railway's development.

Supporting, engaging and sharing good practice between community rail partnerships is central to our work, and we stepped this up considerably in 2016-17. Our operations team provides our 'frontline' support, visiting and advising partnerships, engaging them in 'line planning', and building links between them. In 2016-17 it grew to four team members, and renewed its focus on sharing examples and lessons between our members. Our new operations staff have brought additional expertise in digital communications and social inclusion, increasing our ability to advise members on these topics (see p8 and 9).

We also continue to support embryonic community rail partnerships to become established. At the end of 2016-17, we were working with 12 emerging partnerships, helping them to get on a firm footing.

Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership

One of our longest-running members, Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership, promotes local lines in synergy with the public sector, rail industry, and local groups and businesses. Based at Plymouth University, its three staff combine expertise in communications with an understanding of the region, especially related to tourism. Drawing on our network, the partnership continues to develop. Using journey data, insights from research and partners, and examples from our other members, it has improved its planning, now drawing up robust annual plans for promoting and developing the lines. Its work ranges from:

- managing a carnet ticket scheme on the Tamar Valley and Tarka Lines to enable affordable part-time travel;
- running promotional campaigns to enjoy local scenery by rail, including locations from TV series Poldark;
- advising the train operator and local authorities on service improvements, such as a hugely successful half hourly service on the Falmouth Line that saw passenger numbers double in three years, and promoting such improvements.

The partnership is switched on to emerging trends. It is developing 'foodie guides' highlighting independent outlets along the lines, to be promoted in electronic and traditional formats. It continues to showcase its work through our events, like Community Rail in the City, and our awards.



East Suffolk CRP



Supporting station friends

There are 86 station friends groups (or 'station adopters') that are members of ACoRP and supported by us: a number we anticipate rising in future.

Their activities range from improving the environment within stations, such as through gardening, to larger scale projects to transform stations and their place in the community (see p6). These examples give a flavour of the huge range of activities undertaken in 2016-17:

- Friends of Glossop Station, Derbyshire, organised a range of projects, such as its Poetry Platform, regular art displays in its waiting room, a Santa's grotto and Christmas lights, as well as the installation of replica heritage LED lamps to brighten up the interior of the station.
- 104 station groups celebrated the Queen's 90th birthday in June 2016 with projects at their stations to bring local people together. This led us to introduce a special category at the 2016 Community Rail Awards, which included recognising a series of events by Friends of Gillingham Station in Dorset, such as plant stalls, pop-up museum, bands and refreshments.
- Friends of Hindley Station near Wigan are one of the leading examples of a friends group that has maintained exceptionally high standards in tending and extending its gardens and improving its overall environment.

Friends of Market Rasen 10th birthday

Market Rasen is a small market town in Lincolnshire. Its station adoption group was set up in 2006 by John Skelton, who wanted to create a safe, welcoming space for visitors and local people and started, one day, by simply picking up a broom. He began tidying platforms, removing graffiti, making repairs and making the place more attractive. He was gradually joined by more volunteers. The group now meets every weekend in addition to carrying out daily patrols. Over the years, they have raised funds for planters and large scale paintings to brighten the station and make it feel more homely.

Last year, they received a visit and support from ACoRP for their 10th birthday celebrations. John said: "We were delighted with the visit for our birthday celebrations, and are glad to have benefited from ACoRP's small grants fund on several occasions. We are pleased to be part of the ACoRP family, which connects us with the rest of the community rail world, and means support is there when we need it."

We continue to support station friends through our events and station adoption handbook, as well as direct advice through its operations team and by phone. We are now starting to bring community rail partnerships and station groups together for more seminars and training to encourage greater interaction and sharing.



The Friends of Olton station and pupils from St Margaret's Church of England School come together for community collaboration

Developing community stations

A growing trend in recent years has been the emergence of 'community stations' projects. These initiatives vary greatly but aim to rejuvenate and reinvigorate stations for the benefit of local people, bringing stations back into the heart of communities.

Often, they seek to restore unused and dilapidated station property for the good of local people as well as passengers.

In 2016-17 our dedicated community stations development manager, and the wider team, supported 43 community stations projects over the course of the year. This ranged from advising on funding sources, to supporting project planning, to reviewing heritage features and suggesting opportunities for restoration.

We also delivered three workshops on the topic (in Birmingham, London and Irlam) attended by more than 50 delegates. We also carried out work commissioned by a train operator to identify opportunities for further projects at their stations, and started work on a report with Rail Delivery Group, showcasing good practice: see bit.ly/CStaR17.

Projects that developed with our support in 2016-17 included:

- **Millom, Cumbria** – the transformation of this historic station on the Cumbria Coast Line has brought a dilapidated building back into the heart of a community that has suffered economic decline. Led by Community Rail Cumbria, the redevelopment means every part of the station is now in use, including a locally-run, thriving café, craft shop, and impressive heritage centre enabling school children to learn about local industrial (and rail!) heritage.
- **Alresford, Essex** – with advice from ACoRP, progress has been made towards redevelopment of a boarded-up station building, which it is hoped will provide space for a café, meeting facilities for retired people, and an arts installation.
- **Banner Repeater, London** - a not-for-profit, community-run arts organisation committed to broadening access to the arts, Banner Repeater is a gallery and art library on the platform at Hackney Downs. As well as engaging passers-by, it works with schools and colleges across London.

Kilmarnock Station, Ayrshire

Kilmarnock is an outstanding example of a multi-use, staged approach to community stations development, with the station becoming an attraction in its own right and increasingly central to the community. Kilmarnock is a large industrial centre, but has faced economic decline.

In 2014 The Kilmarnock Station Heritage Trust formed. They secured £500,000 investment from a range of sources, enabling station rooms to be renovated for community use. Rooms initially brought back into use include: a giftshop showcasing local arts and crafts; a coffee shop; a bookshop; a community rail partnership office; and The Tower Room, a nerve centre for community projects and developments offering shared office and meeting spaces.

There is a focus on providing space for community, rehabilitation, media and music projects. An 'active travel hub' is developing, and a 'living museum' is being developed in the underpass. There is evidence the initiative has led to passenger growth, and an expanding number of individuals, community groups, schools, colleges, artists, historians and businesses are getting involved.



Kilmarnock Station

Promoting green tourism

While some of our members have been promoting sustainable tourism by rail for decades, there is scope for greatly developing this in many areas.

Our recruitment of a dedicated tourism and heritage officer in 2016 is now enabling us to provide specialist advice and knowledge on this topic.

In the last quarter of 2016-17 our tourism and heritage officer started working closely with 11 partnerships in the Northern area. Due to the diverse mix of tourism opportunities and knowledge within each, support is being individually tailored, but with an overall push to develop community rail's profile in the tourism sector.

A major element has been encouraging the development of partnerships with organisers of local events and festivals (see right), and advising on opportunities to promote community railway lines through local tourism websites and information centres.

South Fylde takes to the skies (and seas!)

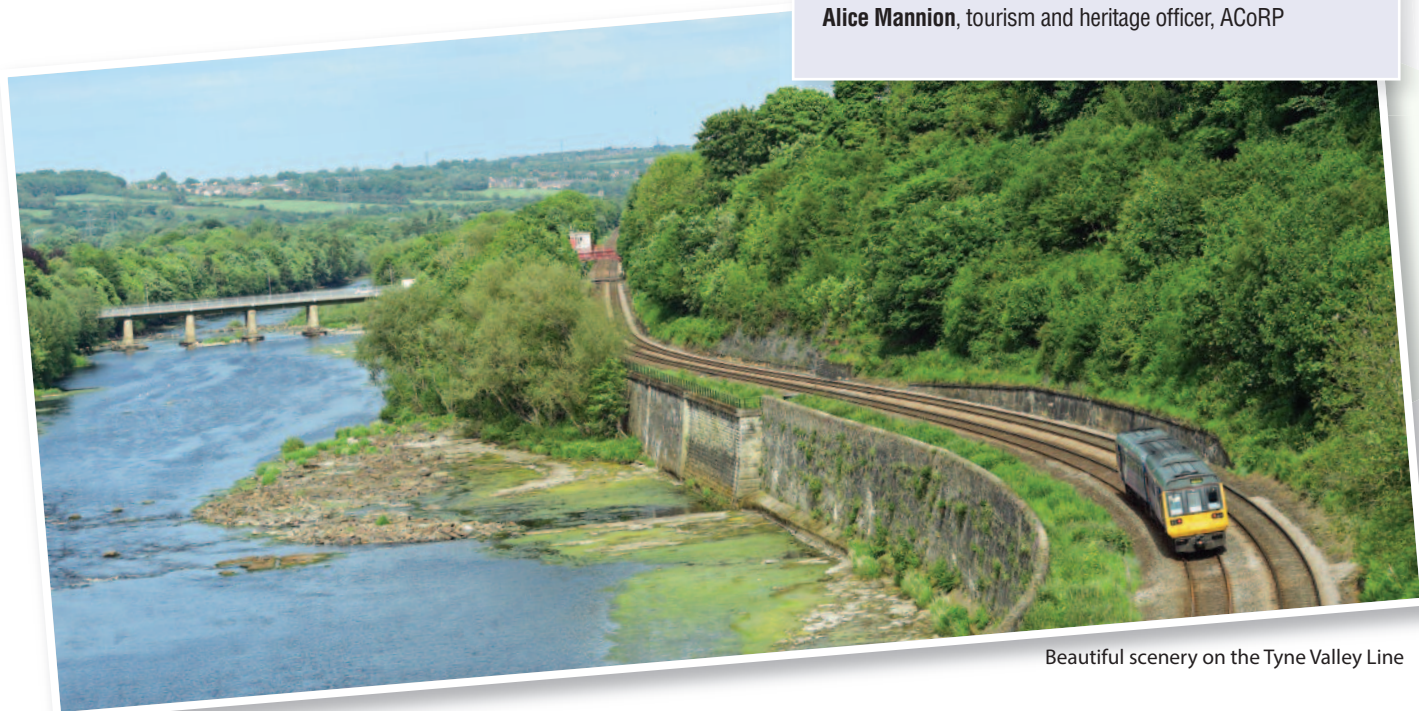
“An exciting project I have been supporting involves the South Fylde Line developing links with the St Anne’s International Kite Festival and month-long Festival of the Seaside.

This is enabling the partnership to capitalise on increasing visitors to the area, raising awareness of the line and community rail to an established visitor audience. The hope is this will boost local tourism and leisure, and help people understand how they can access local attractions by rail.

I have been helping to identify various opportunities to promote the line, and supporting the creation of content and materials that will appeal to a tourism audience. It’s been fantastic to see the project moving along.”

Alice Mannion, tourism and heritage officer, ACoRP

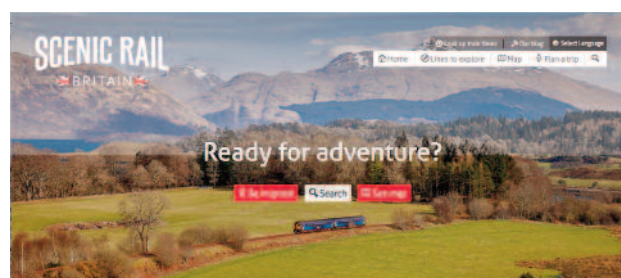
ACoRP’s Alice Mannion and Nik Schofield at St Annes



Beautiful scenery on the Tyne Valley Line

Another major project developed in 2016-17 is a website aimed at international and domestic visitors, **ScenicRailBritain.com**. We worked closely with members to gather information on Britain’s community railways, their scenery, attractions and quirks, and build this into the site.

It therefore acts as a showcase for day-trippers and tourists, helping them to explore Britain’s lesser-known gems via sustainable travel, and channels traffic to members’ sites. We will be continuing to push the site more widely in 2017-18.



Social inclusion, wellbeing and skills

More and more community rail partnerships and groups are linking up with a range of partners and engaging widely across their communities to improve social inclusion, wellbeing and opportunities, and to develop access to rail.

An impressive array of innovative projects of this kind are being initiated and led by community rail partnerships and station groups, in tune with local needs and aspirations. ACoRP is facilitating their development, bringing increased expertise in this field, brokering links with relevant third sector and industry organisations, and sharing good practice across our members.

This is an area that ACoRP is expanding to provide greater benefit to our members and ultimately the communities they serve. A few examples of members' initiatives we have supported, encouraged and promoted in 2016-17 include:

- Community Rail Cumbria is working with the charity Turning Point to engage people recovering from substance abuse in rail-related volunteering, benefiting both volunteers and stations. This has seen them work to improve the environment on local stations, such as gardening and maintenance, providing new skills and boosting confidence and social interaction, helping with reintegration.
- ACoRP has started working with the British Transport Police and Alzheimer's Society on suicide awareness, and is leading on bringing together various groups to spread this important message via the community rail network. We are working to develop a bespoke training module to help community rail volunteers identify suicide risks on the railway.
- Many community rail partnerships work with local schools and colleges to improve understanding and confidence using rail among children and young people, but a great example is Community Rail Lancashire's Down the Line programme, further developed in 2016-17 to include a new website of curriculum based materials (downtheline.org.uk). The programme ranges from early years awareness through to skills-based volunteering for college students.

Bentham Line - benefiting the community

"Since joining ACoRP last year I've been privileged to work with many fantastic people delivering inspiring work to benefit their community. A highlight has been working with our members on the Bentham Line, part of Community Rail Lancashire. They are working on a project to make stations along the line dementia friendly, and to use the line to give dementia sufferers and their carers a chance to take supported, nostalgic days out to Morecambe. I'm really excited to see this project develop further."

Ian Davis, operations officer, ACoRP

- Severn Dee Travel is a not-for-profit organisation run by volunteers and the community rail partnership. At Gobowen Station it provides ticketing and a station café that offers work experience opportunities to students with special educational needs from Derwen College. The café sells local produce, benefitting the local economy, and has given the station a new lease of life. The project was recognised at our 2016 awards.



ACoRP's Ian Davis visiting Community Rail Cumbria volunteers at work

Spreading the word

2016-17 saw a major step up in our work to spread the community rail message as we recruited a dedicated communications and marketing manager.

We increasingly make use of a range of off- and online channels, with social media demonstrating a major increase in followers and interaction, and work undertaken to sharpen up our online profile and e-newsletter. We also enjoyed some great industry media coverage around the 2016 Community Rail Awards and the intake of new staff.

However, we recognise that there is more we can do to share the great work by our members to wider audiences, and will be focusing on this moving forward. This will include taking our PR work up a gear to raise the profile of community rail, and helping our members to be well equipped to spread the word locally.



Stan and Fred Thorley catching the first train from the newly opened Ilkeston station | Alastair Morley

Supporting members to go digital

Our operations manager Paul Webster spent time with Sussex Community Rail Partnership to talk through their use of online and



ACoRP operations manager Paul Webster and representatives from Sussex Community Rail Partnership

e-communications, following on from attending the partnership's steering group meeting. They went through using Mailchimp as a free, easy way to send professional-looking email bulletins, and using Wordpress for managing websites. Angie Lowen, community education officer at Sussex, fed back: "I just wanted to thank you for your time on Wednesday to go through MailChimp, I found it very useful. Not to mention the added information about Wordpress for which I am very grateful."

To summarise our work in 2016-17 communicating community rail:

- **Community Rail in the City** – our annual event with community rail partnerships running promotional stands at city stations last year involved 18 members at nine stations around Britain.
- **Twitter** – a sharp increase in activity, including over the year: 450% increase in ACoRP tweets; 160% growth in followers; 418% increase in interactions, from 6,326 to 32,800 a month; and 468% increase in profile visits from 383 to 2,174 per month. We have also positively encouraged use of #CommunityRail, a handy device for bringing the network together and enabling members to share and interact, helping us retweet posts by members and partners to wider audiences.
- **Facebook** – interaction has increased, with page likes rising by 19%. Our posting now provides a daily flow of content, signposting back to the ACoRP website. Content is usually derived from news stories about member activities and ACoRP and partner events.
- **E-News** – ACoRP's e-newsletter "Train On Line" has seen a complete redesign, with an emphasis on user-friendliness and building a sense of community. Subscriptions have risen by 17%, to 730 readers, with a high open rate.
- **Website** – We have made numerous improvements, with the homepage refreshed with new visuals and membership information added. In 2017-18, we will be undertaking a major overhaul to make the site a more useful hub for members and help to convey community rail to wider audiences.
- **Media** – We issued five press releases, such as for the Community Rail Awards and the new intake of staff. Coverage was mainly generated in rail industry and local press.

Sharing good practice

As the many wonderful examples in this report show, sharing good practice is at the heart of ACoRP's work. Our growing network of members across Britain means we can share lessons, information, ideas and inspiration across the community rail movement, encouraging its further development and impact.

One of the main ways we share good practice and enable our members to come together is through our events, particularly our annual Community Rail Awards. In 2016-17, we ran 11 events, attended by 653 delegates in total, including seven larger seminars, three small workshops, and our Awards.

This included our highly successful Community Rail Seminar in partnership with the Department for Transport, this year in Lincoln in March, attended by 101 delegates, who rated the event 4.3/5 overall.

Our Awards, hosted in 2016 in Southport by Merseyrail, were a runaway success, attended by 408 members, volunteers, partners and decision-makers, and with 151 entries. As well as winners highlighted throughout this report, the Awards recognised:

- **Lanarkshire Adopt a Station Projects** (NHS Lanarkshire Occupational Therapy & Mental Health Teams and Clydesdale Community Initiatives), reinvigorating stations while empowering people facing barriers to social inclusion and employment, due to learning disabilities, mental health issues or other circumstances;
- **Edenbridge Town Station Underpass Art Project** (West Kent Extra, Edenbridge Town Youth Club, Edenbridge Churches Youth Group & Graham Upton), a mural that celebrated the local town's sites, created by local youth groups;
- **TransWilts CRP and Great Western's Weymouth Wizard** campaign, which used social media and advertising to encourage more people to use the train to have a great day out at the seaside;
- **Sevenside Community Rail Partnership's** work at Severn Beach, including new shelters, seating, sustainable planting, and information boards about local history.

All winners are in our booklet at bit.ly/CRA16wb.

In 2017-18 we are expanding our range of events further, adding webinars on specialist topics into the mix, aiding access for smaller groups. We also continue to use our monthly email bulletin Train On Line to share good practice case studies, which anyone can sign up to at bit.ly/tol17.



The Bentham Line win 'Best Community Engagement Event' at the 2016 Community Rail Awards

Working with partners

Partnership working is inherent in the community rail ethos, since the movement depends on effective collaboration with the rail industry, local and national government, and other public, private and third sector partners.

The importance of joined up working is evident across our members' activities, perhaps most so when it leads to major improvements to railways that better meet communities' needs. Aside from the many other examples in this report, initiatives that have progressed in 2016-17 with our support include:

- **TransWilts Community Rail Partnership** came out of a campaign to reinstate a regular rail service to the town of Melksham. The Partnership formed to support a three-year trial, and with their active involvement and publicity, passenger numbers exceeded targets. This resulted in a roughly two-hourly service, instead of one train per day, becoming part of the franchise. With funding from the train operator and council, the Partnership continues to raise awareness of the line and collaborate on further improvements, including considering how the line can help to boost local tourism.
- Following partnership work between the train operator, local authority, community rail partnership and local station friends, from May the **Derwent Valley Line** now has an extra four trains every Sunday and much-enhanced stations. This provides a better service and warmer welcome for the area's visitors, and a boost to communities and businesses along the route.

ACoRP's role in aiding effective collaboration within the community rail movement is partly sharing examples of good practice to show what can be achieved through working together. We also often directly facilitate relationships, such as by attending meetings, making introductions, and working with national organisations so we can advise members on engaging with their local branches.

We continue to have a strong focus on working with national and devolved governments to advise on how community rail can be further nurtured to deliver greater social and economic value. Our biggest funder, the Department for Transport, works with us throughout the year, including recently engaging us in developing a new national community rail strategy, due to go to consultation in 2017-18. We also liaise closely with the Welsh and Scottish Governments, and continue to develop relationships with regional and city authorities.



Cromford station adoption group, on the Derwent Valley Line



ACoRP's Ian Davis (right), with representatives from the historic Bishop Line and Northern

Providing grants

ACoRP continues to provide its members with access to two community rail grant schemes, thanks to Department for Transport funding: a small grants fund and the Designated Community Rail Development Fund (DCRDF).

Many of the case studies in this report have benefitted from these funds, and accompanying advice from ACoRP. Information on accessing these funds is provided to our members.

A more detailed report will set out how DCRDF funds were used, but in summary:

Designated Community Rail Development Fund - £233,741 awarded in 2016-17, such as to: High Peak and Hope Valley CRP for a website upgrade; Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership for a Maritime Line Foodie Guide; Severnside CRP for Avonmouth Station improvements; Hereward CRP for a marketing and tourism plan; Community Rail Lancashire for an I Spy booklet.

Small grants fund - £33,848 awarded in 2016-17, such as to: Lakes Line CRP for a customer information screen at Kendal Station; Derwent Valley CRP for an entrance planter at Matlock Station; Isle of Wight CRP for Gaslight Café clear-up and community rooms refurbishment; Friends of Brighouse Station for gardening equipment; Friends of Marple Station photography competition.



Our vision is...

A flourishing community rail movement, connecting communities and their railways, and enhancing the wellbeing, sustainability and development of communities and railways across Britain.

Our mission is...

To empower, support and champion the community rail movement, helping community rail partnerships and groups to:

- Enhance the railways' contribution to local sustainable development and community wellbeing, including by maximising access to and use of the railways
- Ensure the community has a voice and plays a part in the development and improvement of our railways, so this meets community needs and aspirations and delivers maximum social benefit
- Communicate the development and importance of our railways to local communities, enhancing understanding and pride, and promoting rail as a key part of sustainable, healthy travel.

Community rail is...

A grassroots movement made up of community-based partnerships, groups, organisations, enterprises and volunteers seeking to benefit their community, through connecting people with, and engaging them in, the railway.

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