



Kent Community
Rail Partnership

Summer 2026

NEWSLETTER



Class 375 at Gillingham station
Courtesy of AV



Class 395 at Gillingham station
Courtesy of AV



Class 375 at Gillingham station
Courtesy of AV

New Planters at Maidstone West

Our fantastic station adopters, Maidstone CAN made a huge step forward with their plans to improve the station environment for passengers and the local community. On Sunday 19th April, we joined volunteers from Maidstone CAN to receive delivery of the planters, move them across the tracks to platform 1, followed by the soil and compost before planting.



Maidstone CAN will keep up regular watering until the plants are established and manage their ongoing care. They hope to use the space in the future to educate people about nature and the environment.

Low Carbon Birding

Our first trip was to Old Park Hill, Kearsney Abbey Gardens, Russell Park and Bushy Ruff, a wildlife reserve and series of managed park spaces near Kearsney station. We encountered Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Chiff Chaffs and Black Caps. Participants said:-
"A comfortable journey and a lot less stress compared to driving"
"Very enjoyable, nice to be able to talk to friends, enjoy the views and relax on the train – not always possible in a car journey."
"Has given me ideas for a repeat experience with other friends."



Strood Station Adoption Meeting, June 2026

During Community Rail Week, we met with Strood station manager, Bev Rickwood and Charlotte Morris from City of Rochester School to discuss our latest station adoption. City of Rochester school are keen to involve their students in caring for the planters, creating new artwork for the station and litter-picking areas on the approaches. We had some really positive discussions, with Bev keen to see that planters and artwork in the staff areas are included, and to look at developing work experience opportunities for students. It has been fabulous to connect City of Rochester school with opportunities from Southeastern, we are excited about getting this started and watching it grow.



Garden of England Art and Planters, Ashford International Station

After completing their inspirational 'Welcome to Ashford' pots at the front of the station and Railway 200 decals in the underpass it was time for the primary pupils and college students to turn their attention to the platforms. The theme of the project was, 'The Garden of England', inspiring students to enter the college art competition to design artwork to enhance the station. The once dull and dingy 8 meter long electrical box is now the perfect location for stimulating art pieces submitted by the winners Liz and Jack. "I'm so happy that it's up what a beautiful display." Liz Quinn – Flower art piece. "I was a bit nervous as it's such a big responsibility. I'm proud of what I've achieved." Jack Pellet – Kent countryside with Windmill art piece.

Primary school children from East Stour Primary School submitted 400 individually coloured butterflies which adorn the once dull and grey passenger shelter. Mrs Sadler, teacher said, "We are a really proud community to be asked along with our partners Ashford College. Their butterflies will live on for many years. The children are so happy."

Our thanks go to:

Jo Brown Assistant Principal Ashford College and Kyle Miller Ashford International's Station Manager.

Community Rail Network for funding the art through a Community Rail Development Fund grant of £5,262, and the launch event including the giveaway produce and some of the plants through a Small Grants Fund of £1,000.

Southeastern for the £350 Customer and Community Improvement Fund contribution towards soil and plants.



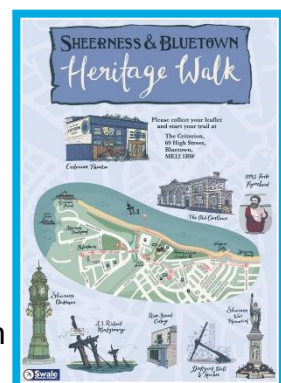
Festival of Sheppey and the Sheppey Shuttle, June 2026



Sustainable tourism by rail brings an economic boost to the Isle of Sheppey. The "Sheppey Shuttle" became launch event for the month long "Festival of Sheppey" and for our own Community Rail Week activities. Kevin McKenna MP, civic dignitaries and other invited guests met at Sittingbourne station where Bruce Horton, Sheppey town crier, gave a rousing welcome to one and all. Big Fish Arts provided musical

accompaniment for our journey, with Bruce announcing the new arrivals we gathered at each station stop. Speakers from museums outlined events and activities taking place in the festival, before we were treated to a guided tour of heritage sites in Sheerness and Blue Town

It was wonderful to see so many of Sheppey's community groups coming together to celebrate everything that's good about the island in a month long "Festival of Sheppey".



Annual Stakeholder Event



We were delighted to welcome our stakeholders, partners, members and volunteers to our Annual Stakeholder Event, on Monday 27th April at Maidstone Town Hall. The event provides an opportunity to showcase our achievements to our stakeholders, and to celebrate the contributions of our volunteers. Colin Burcombe from Community Rail Network gave a presentation reminding us of how we are a part of a larger movement. There are 76 Community Rail Partnerships and over 1,200 station adoption groups making a difference to people's lives up and down the country. Community Rail is about people and places, using the four pillars of Community Rail to bring together diversity and variety from the different communities each partnership serves.

Clare Dowling, Senior Project Manager for Walk Wheel Cycle Trust talked us through the successes of the last twelve months, with over 2,600 volunteer hours contributed to help community rail to flourish along our lines. 78 events, 31 station birthdays marked, growth in passenger numbers and positive feedback from participants and stakeholders. Our Annual Report demonstrates that our work is impact led and evidence based.

It was great to have a room full of enthusiastic and passionate volunteers and stakeholders to celebrate the successes of the year and recognise those who have made it happen. Chris Fribbins, Chair of Kent CRP highlighted Dominic Noades "Outstanding contribution to Community Rail" award at the national Community Rail Awards 2026. Our Volunteer of the Year award for 2025/26 went to Linda Brinklow, outgoing volunteer Chair of our Swale Rail Line, in recognition of her pivotal role in bringing the community together for Railway 200 celebrations in Swale. Linda was also presented with a framed print to mark her two terms in office as volunteer Chair of our Swale Rail Line and over 20 years dedication to Kent CRP. Linda gave a fabulous account of our Railway 200 activities across the Swale Rail Line, including events marking Queenborough station's 165th birthday in July, and a September heritage day; both bringing diverse groups together to celebrate the Island's railways. Linda praised everyone involved, particularly former line officer Vicky Wright, whose enthusiasm and energy overcame all obstacles. The impact was such that the activities were shortlisted for a Railway 200 Legacy Award at the Community Rail Awards 2026.

Southeastern's Matt Fraser provided updates on new services being introduced in May and December between Maidstone East, Ashford and London terminals which will have benefits for many of the major stations along the line. December timetable changes will see two trains per hour all day, seven days per week on Swale Rail which will make rail journeys much more attractive to locals and visitors.

Ashford College ESOL Students, Train Travel Training and Guided Walk

Working in collaboration with Kent Downs National Landscape, Kent CRP managed train travel training and a walk on the North Downs Way for 14 Ashford College students whose first language isn't English (ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages) and 4 of their tutors. Together we aim to bring more sustainable tourism to the area and extend the typical summer tourist season to all year round by bringing participants in by train.

Our Train Travel Training began at Ashford International station and continued during the journey to Lenham station. We walked up onto the North Downs Way for the four mile trip to Harrietsham station. The weather was dull and drizzly with some heavy showers however; it didn't dampen our spirits. The 20 walkers (including Therese Hammond as walk leader and Sarah Moon as back marker) enjoyed sweeping vistas of the Downs from the trail. The gentle route took in many places of interest including the Lenham chalk cross, Percy the Pilgrim statue and Stede House. The route descended into the back of Harrietsham station via the stunning cherry tree lined paths in readiness for our return journey back to Ashford International.

Students gained confidence in travelling by train during this trip and previous trips, some of whom are now independent train travellers. All said they enjoyed participating in the walk despite the weather! Train Travel training is a valuable tool to bring students onto the railway, enabling them to have greater access to education, employment and leisure.



Five Acre Wood Train Travel Training Trip to Travel Safe Travel Smart, Margate



Nic and Caroline at TSTS delivered an amazing rail safety session. The students saw rail safety videos, had refresher learning on using departure screens, matrix boards and help points. They were told how to identify staff on trains and at stations and reassured that help would always be available if they were concerned about their journey. An empty train waiting in the station provided an opportunity to try out opening the doors and being careful to mind the gap getting on and off. Trains are always running, the power is always on. Use the railway properly, keep off the tracks and you keep away from the danger.



Keep up to date! Visit our website: kentcrp.org

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