

Community Rail Partnership Fund Proposal to Southeastern

A New CRP – White Cliffs Community Rail Partnership

The stretch of railway between Folkestone via Dover to Sandwich is situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty and historic value, where coast meets countryside. As the UK's gateway with Europe, the area provides the first welcome for millions of international visitors. Four heritage towns (Folkestone, Dover, Deal and Sandwich) are served by nine stations along the line; well over 100 tourist attractions are within walking or cycling distance for rail passengers, along with remarkable Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the internationally famous 'White Cliffs Country' coastline. Alongside all these riches, the district has some isolated communities and pockets of deprivation (over 20% of Dover's children are living in poverty, for example, and parts of the town are in the top 10% most deprived areas of the UK) and children whose futures are limited. It is an area that has so much to offer but is so often overlooked.

Establishing a Community Rail Partnership along this stretch of the line would tie into Dover District Council's new Growth and Tourism Strategy and bring together local communities, volunteer groups, local councils, businesses and other interested parties to work together on initiatives to give a voice to local people, build community cohesion, help improve health and wellbeing, boost economic regeneration and increase the use of sustainable travel. A new CRP would play a key role in facilitating travel by rail to the area and within it, by persuading more people to walk or cycle to their local station.

Visitors to the area

Dover, Deal and Sandwich are served by hourly High-Speed trains to London St Pancras, yet a 2018 Visit Kent survey found that 66% of visitors to Dover travelled by car and only 12% by rail; 82% of visitors travelled to Deal by car and 8% by rail; and 62% travelled to Sandwich by car and 6% by train. Over 80% of visitors come to walk along the coast or into the countryside.

Regeneration

The local economy has suffered in recent years due to the closure of traditional industries (including the Kent coal mines), the impact of the Channel Tunnel on the cross-channel ferries, the run-down of the area's Army bases and the loss of major employers such as Pfizer R&D at Sandwich, and there are many and complex issues around education and poverty. The Covid-19 lockdown has further damaged the local economy. The well-timed launch of a new CRP, with a focus on reviving green sustainable tourism post-Covid-19, would enhance other local initiatives to kick-start the recovery of local businesses and employment and support local people. It would help to address local problems of economic change, the impact of climate change, road congestion, air pollution and social isolation. The partnership will make the most of the historic legacy of the stations and the railway line and promote social inclusion and sustainable, healthy green travel. It will also help to foster a joined-up approach to tourism and travel to major events in the district, such as the 149th Open Championship at Sandwich in July 2021 and the Folkestone Triennial in September 2021, helping the area realise its potential for dynamic tourism growth, enhancing Dover District Council's current campaign 'We'll Meet Again in White Cliffs Country'.

Working together

The new CRP will be hosted by Dover District Council who will work with partners in Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Kent County Council, the parish and town councils, local chambers of commerce and various volunteer groups to bring about improvements alongside the train operator, Southeastern.

“F&HDC are very supportive of the bid and keen to be in the partnership. Should the bid be successful we look forward to working with partners to develop a coordinated plan for the White Cliffs Community rail partnership area. We think there is huge opportunity to deliver significant benefits to the local community via this partnership. The local cycling campaign group, Cycle Shepway are also keen to be involved. This group have played a pivotal role in improving cycling infrastructure in the district over many years and have many ideas and years of experience to contribute to the partnership.” (Email from Alex Sansom, Communities, F&HDC) F&HDC will be joined by SPOKES, the East Kent Cycling Campaign, and Cycle-Friendly Deal, whose members also have long experience working with local councils on cycling infrastructure issues.

Kent Community Rail Partnership has advised us of their proposal to adopt the Teynham to Dover Priory line which has stations within Dover district – Kearsney, Shepherdswell, Snowdown, Aylesham and Dover Priory station where there is a common interchange. DDC has offered to work closely with them on their plans for these stations and this stretch of line, including East Kent Railway and other heritage projects, and Kent CRP has kindly pledged to act as a mentor to our fledgling CRP if our respective bids are successful:

“I can confirm that we would be happy to offer advice, guidance and share ideas. We can offer this through myself and our KCRP Officers. I am sure our Chairs and Vice Chairs would be happy to offer support and advice as well. We can offer this regardless of whether or not we are successful in our bid to extend our line from Teynham to Dover Priory.” (Email from Helen Kellar, KCRP)

The White Cliffs CRP line

Each station covered by the White Cliffs CRP has the potential to function as a gateway and shop window to welcome visitors to its catchment area and create a sense of identity, pride and place for local people.

Westenhanger – a key transport feature of the new Garden Town development at Otterpool Park where the CRP will encourage new residents to use the train and non-car transport. Access to the villages of North Downs including Sellindge, Port Lympne Animal Park, Saxon Shoreway

Sandling – the main station for Hythe and surrounding villages, access to Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway (a 90-year old steam heritage railway from the 1930s) and via this to Romney Marsh and Dungeness, Hythe Beach, Royal Military Canal, Hythe High Street, shops, restaurants and cafes, Brockhill School and Brockhill Country Park

Folkestone West – key commuter station, access to Cheriton, Harvey Grammar School and Folkestone School for Girls, serves new housing development at Shornccliffe, access to Sandgate coastal village with its bars and restaurants

Folkestone Central – Folkestone Town Centre, The Leas, Coastal Park, Folkestone College, The Creative Quarter, Harbour Arm, East Cliff, pubs, restaurants and new urban Skate Park, F51 (due to open this summer), seafront development, Mermaid Beach and Sunny Sands, Folkestone Harbour, WW1 Memorial Arch, Folkestone Artworks and a thriving annual events calendar including Folkestone Triennial with art installations often by famous artists around the streets inviting visitors to wander from the station and explore

Dover Priory – Dover Town Centre, Dover Castle (English Heritage), the Port of Dover, Dover Cruise Terminal (England’s second busiest), Dover Waterfront, Dover Sea Sports Centre and Dover Sea Safari, the White Cliffs of Dover (including National Trust Visitor Centre, South Foreland Lighthouse and Fan Bay Deep Shelter), Dover Museum and the Bronze Age Boat Gallery, the Roman Painted House, Crabble Corn Mill, the newly-restored Kearsney Parks, Dover Film Festival, ChalkUP21 arts trail, Bluebird Heritage Trail, North Downs Way, Kent Downs AONB, Dover Transport Museum, Dover Western Heights, Drop Redoubt, The Grand Shaft, Dover Athletic FC, Fort Burgoyne, Dover College, Dover Grammar School for Boys, Dover Grammar School for Girls, St Edmunds Catholic School, Astor

College, Dover Technical College (EKC), Samphire Hoe, Get Lost Escape Rooms, Waterfront Spa, Lydden Hill Race Circuit, great cafes, bars, pubs and restaurants

Martin Mill – access to iconic countryside (North Downs AONB) and villages including the Langdons, St Margaret’s-at-Cliffe and St Margaret’s Bay, the Pines Calyx, St Margaret’s Museum, South Foreland Lighthouse (National Trust), Hell Fire Corner, the scenic Bluebird cycle trail to Walmer and Deal offering breath-taking views to the sea (and country pubs in normal times)

Walmer – Walmer Castle and Gardens (English Heritage), possibly where Julius Caesar arrived in Britain, beautiful stretch of beach, Kingsdown, Ripple, Ringwould, Solley’s Ice Cream Parlour & Farm, Walmer & Kingsdown Golf Club, Walmer Lifeboat Station, Walmer Green, Walmer Band Stand (including an annual performance by the Royal Marines Band), Walmer Paddling Pool, great pubs

Deal – Rich nautical heritage, Deal Museum, Timeball Tower Museum, Deal Castle (English Heritage), independent shops/thriving high street, art galleries, seafront and promenade, lovely stretch of beach, Deal Pier, Goodwin Academy, Deal Adult Education Centre, Kent’s mining heritage, Kent Museum of the Moving Image, Astor Theatre, Deal Music & Arts Festival, Deal Regatta & Carnival, The History Project, Royal Marines Heritage Trail, Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club, Betteshanger Park, Kent Coast Volunteering (Dover District Hub), many wonderful cafes, bars, pubs and restaurants, Mike’s Bikes Cycle Hire, Sandown Castle Community Garden, Chequers Kitchen Cookery School, The Wild Kitchen

Sandwich – one of the most well-preserved medieval towns in Britain, the Guildhall & Museum (including an original Magna Carta and Charter of the Forest), the Quay, St Peter’s Church & Haven Heights, the golf courses at Royal St Georges and Princes, Sir Roger Manwood’s School and Sandwich Technology School, Richborough Roman Fort (English Heritage), River Bus & Seal Spotting, Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, Sandwich Bay, Pegwell Bay, White Mill Rural Heritage Centre, Sandwich Folk & Ale Festival, Sandwich Food Fayre, USN P22 Gunboat, great cafes, pubs and restaurants

White Cliffs CRP objectives

NB these are broad objectives of the CRP but would be refined once all partners are on board.

1. Facilitate community-led partnerships and bring people together to support diversity and inclusion, particularly socially disadvantaged groups and those with special needs.
2. Support social and economic development through collaborative working.
3. Implement projects and support the work of others to improve community safety, reduce crime and the fear of crime on local lines.
4. Encourage and implement the integration of other forms of sustainable transport.
5. Develop close working relationships with transport providers and other relevant organisations.
6. Coordinate and develop improvements to train services and station facilities via various activities.
7. Educate and inform the public about the work of the CRP and integrated transport.
8. Coordinate and develop resources to achieve the objectives.

White Cliffs CRP outline plans

NB These draft plans outline the intentions of the new CRP to be discussed, refined and scheduled if the proposal is successful.

Communities – inspire and coordinate efforts to bring stations back to life at the heart of their communities by engaging with local people in the catchment area, even if they are not regular rail-users. The CRP will work with local schools and voluntary groups to develop an appropriate sense of

place and foster local pride, including station-adoption schemes where volunteers are permitted and encouraged to enhance run-down railway property, following the example of the Deal Station Garden group.

We will address the needs of students in small towns and rural areas in accessing education, including secondary and further education. With many secondary schools within walking and cycling distance of several stations, there is potential for more children to travel to school by train. Local students could be surveyed about their travel issues and we would look to involve the local Youth Action Group and youth councils.

The needs of children with special needs, the elderly and disabled people will be identified to enable them to make best use of the railway. The CRP will seek to work with other organisations, such as Sky Badger, and gather the experiences and suggestions of various groups to identify problems in accessing stations and using trains and develop projects accordingly.

Sustainable travel – the local trains all permit passengers to take cycles, so are well placed to bring more visitors into the countryside, relieving congestion on narrow rural lanes. Our CRP will work to improve and waymark safe and sustainable routes from stations, working with local countryside projects, National Trust, English Heritage, hospitality businesses and voluntary cyclists' and walkers' groups.

Dover District Council is working with Kent County Council towards the introduction of a Dover Fastrack Bus Service that will see Whitfield linking with Dover Priory train station. This flexible and reliable mode of transport will help to transform people's journeys for work and leisure and encourage connectivity between bus and rail services. The CRP will also work with partners to improve walking and cycling routes connecting other new housing areas in Deal to the station and on the cycle route from Sandwich to Discovery Park and to upgrade and waymark walking and cycling routes between station in and around the town, building on the legacy of the station improvements for the 149th Open Championships. Sustrans has produced reports for DDC on sustainable travel in Dover, Deal and Sandwich and these reports would be used to shape projects. Activities could include a programme of guided walks and rides.

Tourism and the Visitor Economy – complement and magnify the impact of existing tourism initiatives by collaboration, sharing promotions and encouraging passengers to visit our destinations, attractions, places of leisure, hospitality providers and town centres. A new CRP would help us maximise the opportunities for this area by:

- working with Southeastern to develop a distinctive brand for the line to complement and develop local tourism promotions (including DDC's 'We'll Meet Again' campaign)
- increasing footfall, dwell time and spend across our destinations, attractions, places of leisure, hospitality providers and town centres from each station
- Developing 'travel, stay and experience' opportunities to new potential markets along the trainline; and extending the tourist season, year-round
- linking the use of the train to other green forms of transport (walking, cycling and buses), working with residents, visitors, local bus companies, cycle hire businesses and taxis to identify and address 'first/last mile' issues, starting with station access and signage and mapping of routes to key destinations.

The green agenda – in the context of widespread concerns about climate change, the CRP proposes to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the electrification of the Kent Coast Lines, which reached Deal in 1962, providing a legacy of clean, quiet, energy-efficient transport.

Where railway property is under-used or redundant, the CRP will support new uses (seeking additional funding), such as solar power.

The impact of Covid-19

The use of public transport has dropped significantly due to the lockdown and social distancing measures. As the lockdown eases, more people will start to use public transport, but public confidence and regulations are likely to limit what is possible for some time. It is impossible to guess how long it will be before trains are in full use again and local tourism businesses will continue to be hard hit by restrictions on travel and social distancing. Where possible we will link to online information about which businesses have reopened, such as country pubs, cafes and shops and tourist venues, supporting local economic recovery.

It is currently difficult to hold public meetings and fact-finding visits, but we will use other methods to constructively prepare CRP plans for when the pandemic is over.

Outline proposals for Year 1

(1 Jul 20 – 31 Mar 21)

Set up a steering group and establish the CRP

To get things started during Covid-19 restrictions and the evolving situation, the first task would be to establish a steering group and meet virtually. The group will seek to form an unincorporated partnership and agree the Terms of Reference for the CRP. It will also investigate further sources of funding (for example, from KCC).

Long-established Kent CRP has pledged guidance and support and we will also seek advice from Community Rail Network. The White Cliffs CRP will be established by 31st March 2021.

DDC will host a part-time Community Rail Partnership Officer to coordinate steering group members and volunteers and help deliver the plans and activities agreed by partnership members.

The CRP will set up and maintain a website and establish regular communication with partners, local groups and the public.

Support existing initiatives

While the CRP is being established, support will be given to Deal With It, which has been the Station Adoption group for Deal since Oct 2011 running three linked projects run by volunteers at the station – a station garden, a clean-up crew and the Triangle Project. (Their plans include water harvesting from the station buildings, additional planters and establishing a water source on platform 2.) We also hope to link up with and support initiatives by Cycle Shepway in Folkestone and Cycle-Friendly Deal.

The History Project is setting up a Community History Hub and Visitor Information Centre at Deal Station. The CRP would support their efforts.

Deal Town Council and Network Rail are working on plans to improve accessibility at Deal Station (with Access for All funding and a contribution from the town council). The new CRP will assist with this scheme to enable disabled passengers to use the trains and encourage more walking and cycling to the station.

Place-making and signposting

The steering group will prepare for a launch of the CRP by creating poster maps for each station (working with White Cliffs Country – Dover District Council's Tourism & Visitor Economy Department). These will be prominent at each exit showing popular local places to visit with recommended sustainable transport routes (cycle, walking, bus, taxi), based on local research and checked by KCC Highways, with smartphone contact links (where relevant) to information about cafes, pubs and shops open locally and post-lockdown updates. The maps will also show cycle routes into nearby protected countryside areas and links to longer distance paths, including routes to other stations. We will involve local walking, cycling and age-based groups in evaluating recommended routes. Where and when possible some guided walks and cycle rides from stations will be part of the plan.

We will also consider improving and developing local signage and route improvements (assessing any problems) to facilitate the way-making.

Post Covid-19 project to engage schools

An initial project to engage local school children could be a competition to design a public transport face mask (depending on the Covid-19 situation in September regarding schools and travel).

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVE	MEASUREMENT	BENEFIT TO COMMUNITY	STRATEGIC AIMS FIT *
Develop branding for CRP	Increased awareness of railway and CRP	Branding agreed and implemented	Builds strong sense of identity	2, 3, 4
Develop and manage a CRP website	Increased awareness of CRP and railway activities; encourage people to get involved	Website produced and managed	Facilitates greater communication	1, 2, 3, 4
Support Deal Station Garden Group and The History Project	Supports local groups, builds strong foundations with local volunteer groups, further improves Deal Stn	Various projects completed and Deal Station further improved	Better station facilities, community involvement	1, 2, 3, 4
Support Deal Town Council in its scheme to improve accessibility at Deal Station	Remove barriers to disabled people, encourages more people to walk/cycle to station	More disabled passengers, better flow of people at the station, more cyclists, etc	Accessible station fit for purpose, cycle-friendly, station better to use	1, 2, 3, 4
Support existing cycle initiatives in Folkestone and Deal	Increased use of cycling to and from stations and within the areas	More people cycling	Health and wellbeing, fewer cars on the roads, etc	2, 3, 4
Create poster maps for each station	Provide information to rail users about local area	People access online information via QR code	Better publicity for local places of interest and businesses, place-making, etc	1, 2, 3, 4
Schools competition	Raise awareness of safe travel on trains	Engagement with project	Social inclusion	1, 2, 3, 4

***Key pillars of the Government's Rail Strategy:**

1. Providing a voice for the community
2. Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel
3. Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion
4. Supporting social and economic development

Outline proposals for Year 2

(1 Apr 21 to 31 Mar 22)

Accessibility

Arrange site meetings with local people, special needs groups, council representatives and Network Rail to review and update access arrangements at each station and put in place monitoring to review progress.

Look at hosting experimental group train trips, such as children with special needs, to collect feedback on barriers to and issues with rail travel.

NB Walking and cycling audits – commissioned by DDC’s tourism team and researched and delivered by Sustrans, proposing last mile solutions with train stations, attractions and town centres – have already been carried out for Dover, Deal and Sandwich.

‘Visit by train’

Promote travel by rail to the large tourist attractions along the line by using venue-specific publicity encouraging people to visit again and extend their stay, but to use the train next time, with scannable barcode vouchers for rail travel and entry to the attraction, plus a map of the key recommended walking and cycle routes from station to venue.

Station enhancements

2021 sees the 149th Open Championships coming to Sandwich in July and the Folkestone Triennial in September. Both are huge international events attracting thousands of visitors to the region and the stations in both towns have benefitted from improvements for these major events. The CRP would seek to implement station improvement projects at Dover, Walmer and Deal stations to support the visitor experience and bring further benefits to the area. Each station should raise the arriving visitor’s awareness of the character and history and opportunities of the area it serves and help foster a sense of pride in local people. We will look at activities such as local school artwork projects and station gardens and landscaping, drawing on the expertise of the Deal Station Garden group.

Celebrating a sustainable future

We will consider marking the 60th anniversary of Kent coast electric trains in 2021 with a special event. Each station could have a poster explaining the benefits of travel by electric train (compared to an equivalent number of cars). If possible, the latest Hitachi electric train could tour the line. School groups could be offered a visit to the cab of a current high-speed electric train, perhaps as a competition prize. Deal Carnival has pledged support to mark the anniversary at the next carnival in July 2021. Over 20,000 people attend annually – special excursion trains used to run to Deal – so this would be a great opportunity to publicise CRP projects.

Develop strong community relationships

Set up regular meetings with British Transport Police to find out patterns and hotspots of problems on stations, trains and railway property; discuss possible interventions within the scope of CRP, including how to target work with local schools. Involve the district councils’ community safety units. Work with local schools to identify possible projects, including train-travel familiarisation trips, station gardens and artworks, station displays, etc. Survey and visit colleges to discuss students’ issues with travel to school/college. Link up with DDC’s Inspire project to encourage more children to travel by train. Encourage locals and groups to become involved in local railway developments and have their say (raising issues of concern and suggesting improvements) by maintaining and interacting with a wide-ranging mailing list.

Regular audits

Research any outstanding gaps, public needs and potential of under-utilised railway resources to form the basis for future work plans. Throughout all activities, the CRP will respond flexibly to its changing, evolving and diverse communities.

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVE	MEASUREMENT	BENEFIT TO COMMUNITY	STRATEGIC AIMS FIT *
Site visits to all stations to assess facilities	Public and group engagement	Amount of feedback/input	Community voice, empowerment	1, 2, 3
Projects to improve accessibility	Partnership working, improve access	Improved access to station and trains	More people able to travel by train	1, 2, 3, 4
Visit by train project	More people visit local attractions by train	Increased visitor numbers using rail	Fewer cars on the road, improved air quality	2, 4
Station improvements at Dover, Walmer and Deal	Improved accessibility and user experience	Good flow of passengers, clear signposting, etc	Fewer cars, clear signage, happy visitors using local facilities, sense of place and pride in local area	2, 3, 4
School artwork project	Increased awareness of CRP and railway activities; encourage people to get involved	Children take part in competition, lovely artworks to display	Improved sense of place, pride in area	1, 2, 3
Station garden projects	Public engagement, better station experience	Various projects completed and stations improved	Better experience using stations, increased health and wellbeing	1, 2, 3, 4
Kent Coast Electric Train anniversary event	Community involvement; promote green transport	People taking part, increased rail users	Increased knowledge and sense of history	2, 3, 4
Community railway safety meetings	Greater awareness of safety issues and better conversation	Fewer crimes committed on the railway	Empowerment and increased safety	1, 2, 3, 4
Student surveys	Enable more to travel by train to school/college	More children travelling to school/college by train	Fewer cars on the road, improved air quality, empowered independent children	1, 2, 3, 4

White Cliffs CRP partners (provisional list)

On board	Dover District Chamber of Commerce
Dover District Council	Folkestone Triennial
Folkestone & Hythe District Council	Creative Folkestone
Cycle Shepway	Kent Wildlife Trust
Destination Dover	Dover Walkers are Welcome
Deal Town Council	Dover Museum
Cycle-Friendly Deal	Port of Dover
Deal With It/Transition Deal	Samphire Hoe
Sandwich Town Council	Parish councils
Kent Community Rail Partnership (advisors)	White Cliffs Countryside Partnership
The History Project (Deal)	National Trust
To be approached	English Heritage
Kent County Council	Dover Arts Development
Dover Town Council	Deal & Walmer Chamber of Commerce
Dover Society	Sandwich Chamber of Commerce
Deal Society	
Sandwich Society	