



Making a difference

Community Rail Report 2025



NORTHERN

Go do your thing

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Welcome

Community Rail: 200 years of championing our local areas and people

As we celebrate Railway 200 in 2025, marking two centuries since the birth of modern rail with the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, we can reflect on the enormity of its impact. It's shaped our economy and way of life by increasing mobility and fuelling cultural change.

More locally, our stations have been a valued focal point for communities. And that's still the case 200 years later, with 22 Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs), almost 300 station adoption groups and hundreds of volunteers across the Northern network from Nottingham to Carlisle and Liverpool to Hull.

While many volunteers work tirelessly to keep stations bright and attractive, their work goes beyond that. Many of our groups have joined with expert organisations to tackle the challenges of modern life evident in our communities, including social isolation, the impacts of climate change and limited access to opportunity. This report includes many surprising and inspirational projects.

To continue this impactful work, we need to plan for the future. We recognise that many of our committed volunteers, including our Chairs and Board members, have joined the railway family later in life. To bridge generations and backgrounds and find new volunteers, our CRPs and station adopters have been busy involving and inspiring younger generations and diverse groups, demonstrating the value of the railway, not only in getting from A-to-B but in supporting their communities and the people who live in them.

Alongside securing the next generation of volunteers, we know funding security is another priority for our network's community rail partners. We are proud to continue our significant financial support for community rail, providing £1.2 million over the past year. We are also working with CRPs to help them diversify their income streams for future sustainability.

And our support goes beyond the financial. Our community managers work closely with all our community rail partners, linking to the wider business and connecting community rail groups with other local organisations. We are also making the most of our supply chain ensuring businesses are aware of the opportunities to support community rail through our supplier hub.

Rail reform and regional devolution also bring opportunities. Great British Railways wants to ensure national rail policy aligns with local community needs. And devolution through Mayoral authorities, already established across swathes of the Northern network, is empowering local decision-making and investment.

With this local focus, community rail is well-placed to demonstrate the impact it can have. It must work smarter, agreeing on shared priorities and collaborating even more closely.

At Northern, we're incredibly proud of our community volunteers. They never fail to amaze us with their commitment, ingenuity and energy. This report showcases highlights across our network, from initiatives that bring heritage alive to those that better connect communities. We hope you enjoy reading this as much as we enjoyed compiling it.

Tricia Williams

Tricia Williams
Managing Director



Local initiatives, nationally recognised

We did it again! The **Community Rail Awards 2024** showed how rail in the North is about much more than train travel. We're using our experienced colleagues, committed volunteers, willing partners and perfectly placed assets in the heart of communities to foster pride, create memorable experiences and connect people to opportunity.

Projects, groups and partnerships on our network either won or were highly commended 12 times on the night.

Days out with a difference were a big winner. **Community Rail Lancashire** took first place for its 'Feel Good Field Trips,' giving over 2000 disadvantaged young people – some who'd never travelled on a train before – unique experiences at locations across the network.

On the same theme, **Furness Line** and **Lakes Line CRPs** were recognised for their 'Mindful Days Out.' They link with special needs schools and mental health charities to offer people a guided public transport experience, boosting their confidence to get out and about independently.

Creating a proud sense of place was the focus for **Leeds-Morecambe CRP's** top award. It worked with primary school pupils to creatively depict the connected 120-year histories of Heysham Port and rail station to coincide with a terminal refurbishment and a new state-of-the-art vessel. And local pride was evident in the award-winning photos of **Goostrey** Beavers helping keep their Cheshire station spick and span.

Two projects originating from **Community Rail Lancashire's Education Network** won the highest accolades and were praised for their engagement and impact. The 'pick a path' rail safety adventure book 'Arlo's Adventures' is now used as far away as Australia. And materials featuring 'Daffnee Green,' a flower explaining how the railways are helping tackle climate change, have been featured in a Learn Live broadcast.

There's no shortage of passionate partnerships or superb schemes with an eye on the top spot in the 2025 awards in Newcastle – the 20th anniversary of the Community Rail Awards. Forty projects across the Northern network have been shortlisted. Watch this space!



Initiatives

Pride in our Northern network communities

Our Community Rail Report 2024-25 is bursting with projects. It's a showcase of colour, innovation and sense of place across the Northern network. Our 22 Community Rail Partnerships, nearly 300 station adopters and hundreds of volunteers, together with Northern and a raft of partners, have been incredibly busy in projects big and small, from ensuring our stations offer a shiny, warm welcome to helping transform the lives of people in the communities we serve.

As we start year-long celebrations to mark the 200th anniversary of the modern railway, we're proud to reflect on what we're achieving together through a collective understanding that rail is about much more than getting people from A-to-B. It brings opportunities for fun, laughter, learning and connecting.

We hope our wonderful rail community and volunteers inspire you to get involved in yours. Happy reading!

Marple station

A sense of place

Bringing local character and personality to our stations

Our CRPs and station adoption groups thrive on local pride, encouraging our communities to showcase what makes them unique in a host of creative ways, from art installations to events.

Artistic communities

Telling our communities' stories through art is a popular pastime across our network.

A community art project has transformed the rundown Edgeley approach road to **Stockport station** into an intriguing 175 m-long art display featuring the borough's people, landscapes and cityscapes across 50 separate works. Led by Stockport-based artist Eamonn Murphy, working with community art workshop provider ARC, 'A View from a Train Window' includes artwork by numerous groups and individuals, including service users from the local sight and hearing loss charity Walthew House. Stockport Council sought the support of **South East Manchester** and **Crewe2Manchester CRPs** for the area's transformation.

Young and old came together to immortalise Goostrey and its surroundings in an embroidered wall hanging to celebrate King Charles' Coronation in a project led by the **Friends of Goostrey Station** and a local artist, supported by **Crewe2Manchester CRP**. Goostrey pupils – and those visiting from their twinned school in South Africa – were asked to draw what the village means to them, inspiring the wall hanging's designs.

And Shildon station's footbridge is positively unrecognisable thanks to **Bishop Line CRP**, the station's adoption group, the nearby railway museum and 200 pupils. Working with a local street artist, they've adorned the bridge with inspiring words and local imagery, turning it into a bright, safer-feeling route for locals and visitors to Locomotion, which celebrates Shildon as the world's first railway town.



Moss Side station

Destination stations

Forget just getting from A-to-B; many of our stations offer valuable, intriguing community spaces where you can spend quality time.

Bolton station's trailblazing P5 Gallery and its exhibition of poetry 'On not being Observed' by Dave Morgan and illustrations by Alison Timmins featured in the Big Bolton Arts Trail as part of its Town of Culture celebrations. Students in their early twenties to poets in their late seventies jumped at the chance to quiz Dave about his work and get advice on theirs in a special evening event. The **Bolton Station Community Partnership** is now after a Community Rail Award to display!

And delicious coffee and fresh food with a railway view are on offer at **Haltwhistle station's** new dog-friendly café and events space – a transformed water tower dating back to 1861.

Developed by **Tyne Valley CRP** to help secure its financial future, the café builds on other station improvements, providing grab-and-go coffee or cream teas for those on a more leisurely timetable. As Haltwhistle is an unstaffed station, the café provides visitor and journey information and rail merchandise. It also hosts events like Heritage Open Days and toy fairs.



Quirky characters

Being quirky and oozing local character cements our stations at the heart of community life. Whether waiting for a train or just passing through, there's always something to give you a sense of place.

Catching the train is a memorable experience at **Westhoughton station**. The Friends group has a talented carpenter who lovingly crafts wooden figures and bright bird boxes, which you can spot among the beautifully kept beds and planters. And it wouldn't be Westhoughton without homage to the local legend of the cow head stuck in the gate, with the station's own cow in a gate!

Cononley station prides itself on its rural country feel, which the Friends group works hard to reflect in the station's surroundings. And it now has an official mascot... an otter! They've been spotted in the river nearby and captured by a wildlife photographer and rail regular whose picture takes pride of place on the platform.

Meanwhile, at **Moss Side station**, a four-legged local has been immortalised in new murals masterminded by the **Friends of Fylde Country Stations**. Hector, who lives in the ex-station master's house and is a common sight around the estate, has been honoured with a painted pooch portrait!

And there was a teddy takeover at **Glossop, Hadfield and Guide Bridge stations**. Over 80 families, many first-time station visitors and some entirely new to rail travel, got a taste of where the train can take them by travelling between the three in the annual Friends-led Teddy Bears' Picnic.

Families who brought their cuddly toys could travel for free, enjoying bear-themed activities at each station. There was also a chance to explore each station, such as Guide Bridge's memorial garden and the soon-to-be-opened station-based Woodhead Railway Museum, as well as get quick and easy access into Glossop and Hadfield.



Westhoughton station

Stronger together

Bringing people from all backgrounds and abilities together to do great things

From developing skills and boosting confidence to sharing experiences or just making people smile, our CRPs and station adoption groups celebrate differences while looking for opportunities to unite us all.

Support to thrive

A new not-for-profit café in Rochdale is dishing up tasty treats alongside hospitality skills training, preparing asylum seekers for the workplace while they wait for permission to stay in the UK. In a project supported by government funding and led by **Calder Valley CRP**, Rochdale Council and the New Pioneers employment programme, they learn to craft coffee like a true barista and work towards obligatory catering certificates. One trainee is now working in a local school.

Meanwhile, another Greater Manchester rail station is not to be sniffed at. With support from the **Friends of Hindley Station**, the young people and adults with additional needs at Thrive CIC have transformed its platform-grown lavender into soy wax melts sold at Thrive's café and craft fairs. They even became the talked-about gift for everyone attending Northern's annual conference! Scent lovers will be pleased to know new varieties are planned for 2025...

Stations transformed

Meanwhile, stations across the Northern network have been transformed thanks to the dedication and care of young people and adults with special educational needs and disabilities or those facing other life challenges.

Young people and adults supported by West House have been hard at work at **Harrington station**, giving it colour and personality and making it an attractive home for wildlife through planters, bug hotels, bird boxes, coloured stones and a mosaic.

The Rotary Club of St Helens' beautifully blooming new planters at **St Helens Central station** have been a double success. They were built by Buzz Group St Helens CPD before then being seeded by Sexton Avenue Community Allotment Garden.

It's an eyesore no more at **Knaresborough station**. The Friends group was desperate to tackle an ugly concrete outcrop and Henshaw's Specialist College transformed it with a mosaic mural featuring the famous local viaduct.

And it's been a right community affair at **Blackburn station**. It's now a welcoming space thanks to new planters and patchwork art. Local primary schools, homeless charity Nightsafe, disability support service Purple Patch, autism support service CANW, and local makers and suppliers have all supported **Blackburn BID** to freshen up the station, helping it achieve an RHS top-level 'It's Your Neighbourhood' award.



Harrington station

Sharing experiences

We're proud of the innovative ways our volunteers and local groups use our rail-based places and spaces to bring diverse groups together... including through cinema! Arts organisation Metal, based in **Edge Hill's** renovated former engine house, marked the 30th anniversary of the end of apartheid in South Africa through a 4k restoration of the film 'Mapantsula'. Filmed in Soweto in 1988, it was the first anti-apartheid feature film made by, for, and about black South Africans. It was made in secret to avoid censorship.

Thirty-five guests watched the film before a panel discussion about what has and hasn't changed in the three decades since. The project, made possible by a raft of creative partners, was funded by Liverpool City Council and Arts Council England.

Projects at our stations have supported unlikely friendships to blossom, creating opportunities for people whose paths may never typically cross to learn about each other and share their passions.

'Hong Kong Volunteers in Manchester' joined the **Friends of Patricroft Station** for an intensive station spruce-up, leading to monthly get-togethers, station art improvements and even a joint trip on a vintage bus to St Helens' transport museum!

Meanwhile, **Kendal station** got some much-needed 'youth, vigour and muscle' to support **Lakes Line Rail User Group** members in removing, replacing and seeding new planters. The **Lakes Line CRP** fostered relations with local rehabilitation project The Well Communities,

supporting those recovering from drug and alcohol addictions. The project helped bridge differences in age and background, leading to personal connections and has sown the seed for future collaborations.

The Well Communities, which operates across Cumbria, is also the station adopter for **Barrow station**. The 'Grow Your Own' team has given the beds and planters a new lease of life.

And **Cumbrian Coast Line CRP** has been part of a project 'Beyond the Home' with adult social care organisations and Cumberland Council to support people with disabilities to travel independently. Service users took part in workshops and research trips on the train – some travelling for the first time – to help develop display panels, including Makaton and other visual aids. The displays link across stations, showcasing local walks, cycle routes, nature and heritage. Many of those involved have built friendships and continue to travel together. The project has also helped those involved to confidently travel with minimal support.



Shildon station's footbridge

Inspiring young minds

Bringing fresh, new perspectives to our network

Our stations and rail network are full of learning opportunities for our young people, whether it's a route to delve into history, gain experience in travelling safely and confidently or an inspirational canvas to get creative. And there's so much we're learning from our young people too!



Cherry Tree station

Creating learning opportunities

Bishop Line CRP's education officer and rail partners creatively engaged pupils in rail safety across 73 schools in easy reach of the railway between Bishop Auckland and Darlington. There were concerns the increased profile of the railway around its 200th anniversary could encourage more trespass incidents. From 'Arlo's Adventures' games for pre-schoolers to teen discussions around risk-taking, 3800 young people were involved in the programme's first year, smashing the target by nearly 1300! Nearly 200 young people also got to ride with Northern to boost their safe travel know-how.

Meanwhile, the 120-year-old link between Heysham Port and the rail station continued to be celebrated by **Leeds-Morecambe CRP (Bentham line)**, coinciding with a ferry terminal refurb and the launch of a new vessel for journeys to the Isle of Man. Two 18-foot-long artworks, 'Rail to Sail' and 'Sail to Rail' created by local school pupils, were installed at the station and a third at the terminal building. Working with a professional artist, the pupils developed the backgrounds and all the characters on board the ships and trains. And it seems St Peter's Primary can't get enough of the station; the school's been made its official adoption group with gardening endeavours at the top of its to-do list!



Marple station

Art Inspiration

We have inspirational youngsters working with Friends groups across Northern's network of stations, giving travellers waiting for their train something to ponder, learn or just enjoy.

Marple in the foothills of the Peak District couldn't be further from the jungle, but talented 12-year-old Joseph – who caught the eye of **Friends of Marple Station** during an art trail project – has transformed the waiting room into a myriad of colours with a rainforest mural inspired by its 'Marple Tiger' painting. Young people in Marple Youth Project's holiday club and even children waiting for trains helped complete it.

From countryside stations to our city ones, eye-catching art is everywhere. Competition-winning pieces of artwork by secondary school pupils are on display at **Rose Hill station** and primary school children's depictions of 'hope' can be found on mounted tiles at **Prestbury station**. **Flimby station** is awash with modern designs thanks to local primary pupils and sixth-form students working with local street art and mural makers. And pupils in Hadrian's Wall country have celebrated what makes their area unique through their illustrations at **Bardon Mill station**.

Local pride

And it's not just art. Young people have found various ways to get stuck in at their stations, learning valuable skills and taking pride in where they live.

St Francis Scouts take their role as station adopters at Blackburn's **Cherry Tree station** extremely seriously, keeping the station fresh, clean and inviting through planting, painting and tidying. They've earned badges for their enthusiastic efforts! And Windermere school's gardening club have been helping **Bowness and Windermere Community Care Trust** – the new adopters of Windermere station, by planting tubs and hanging baskets for all to enjoy.

In Bradford, a regular litter pick could be on the cards at **Frizinghall station** with the Friends group, the Neighbourhood Watch Team and local pupils and parents cleaning up the footpath between the station and school. Meanwhile, it was all hands on deck at **Bramley station** in Leeds, where local schoolchildren gave the fences a much-needed lick of paint.

And Tarvin Cubs are getting out and about thanks to the **Friends of Mouldsworth station** and Northern. After a rail safety workshop, the pack travelled to Delamere station for an orienteering session in the car park in the dark! It's got the youngsters enthused about the station, with plans for bug hotels and bird boxes.



Frizinghall station

Out & about

Taking people to great places to explore, rest and play

Seaside holidays, scenic rambles or city escapes – you can reach them all by rail. We're working with our CRPs and station adoption groups to encourage travellers to let the train take the strain when exploring the exciting or beautiful places across our network.

Go explore

Whether it's new services, service improvements or organised days out, our railway partners strive to give customers a memorable and positive experience.

The Yorkshire Dales and the scenic Settle Carlisle line are now within easier reach thanks to the 'Yorkshire Dales Explorer,' a new year-round Saturday service. It runs between Rochdale and Ribbleshead, linking Greater Manchester and Lancashire to breathtaking landscapes.

Almost 2200 journeys were made north of Clitheroe from its summer launch to mid-February 2025. It's proving popular with walking enthusiasts, day trippers and even those seeking out the bright lights of Manchester or travelling to the airport. It's taken a raft of partners to bring **Clitheroe Line CRP/Community Rail Lancashire's** idea to life, including the county council, Northern, the York & North Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authority, rail user group Ribble Valley Rail and Yorkshire Dales National Park.





Sandstone Ridge trail

Ribble Valley Rail also celebrated a landmark anniversary in 2024 – 30 years of the reinstated Manchester to Clitheroe service. It followed a decade of campaigning that started with just 20 local residents coming together and working with the authorities and train companies to make it happen.

And those planning a New Year's Day walk to burn off those mince pies could once again travel to the North York Moors National Park by train – the second busiest day of the year for the area – following a successful pilot of the bank holiday service on 1 January 2024. This year, it ran all the way between Darlington and Whitby. The service, a collaboration between Northern, **Esk Valley Railway Development Corporation**, North Yorkshire Council and the National Park, has been welcomed by families... and their dogs!

Meanwhile, **North Cheshire CRP** wants to get more people enjoying the beauty of the 35-mile-long Sandstone Ridge dubbed 'Cheshire's magical landscape.' Working with The Sandstone Trust and the University of Chester, the CRP surveyed visitors to the Ridge and Cheshire residents, including questions on how they travel there and what mode they'd prefer to use if it was available. As part of the project, the CRP led a trail walk around the Northern hills of the Ridge, showing how easy it is to reach the area through connections at Frodsham and Helsby stations.

And what's better than the scenic view on the Settle to Carlisle Railway? A scenic view with a delicious snack! Providing Northern's only food and drink service, the **Settle and Carlisle Development Company (DevCo)** has invested in new locally sourced lighter, larger catering trolleys to give customers more choice of top-quality drinks and snacks, many from businesses in North Yorkshire and The Lakes.

Staying with the Settle Carlisle Railway, it was the route to a smashing day out for 16 senior citizens organised by the **Friends of East Leeds**. A Northern conductor took the time to point out landmarks on the famous line before the travellers enjoyed a three-hour stop off in Carlisle. All made it home safely! And the **Friends of Sowerby Bridge** gave local people the chance for some Lake District R&R, with a trip to the heritage railways. The trips even resulted in some new recruits to the Friends group.

Gateways to great days out

Many of our stations are busy gateways to tourism hotspots or a way to discover little-known gems. Our CRPs and adoption groups are ensuring visitors get a fitting welcome.

The brand-new adoption group for **Blackpool Pleasure Beach station** is focused on ensuring visitors to the world-famous resort start their stay with a top-class station experience. A host of partners, including **South Fylde Line CRP**, Northern, a local councillor and Network Rail, came together to make it happen.

Keeping with the seaside theme, the **Friends of Seascale station** are getting their young travellers excited about a day at the beach by decorating the station with homemade sealife creatures in a vivid display of colour.

And **Rufford station** is helping promote a local nature reserve. **West of Lancashire CRP** worked with a local artist on artwork showing the way from the station to Mere Sands Wood operated by Lancashire Wildlife Trust. It also encouraged the County Council to continue the route with new official brown tourist signs.



Blooming rail travel

Our volunteers sometimes go to extreme lengths to promote the railway as a way to get about!

A team of volunteers from stations across the **Mid Cheshire Line** beat off professional horticulturalists to win a silver-gilt medal at the Tatton Show for its 'Long Border' display. The CRP-led project took people from a bleak two-dimensional monochrome world through a gate to the colourful three-dimensional railway world. It featured plants with place names highlighting travel opportunities by rail and rail hardware, including sleepers with self-seeding plans mimicking those found along the tracks.

The project's impact went beyond the garden itself. Exhibiting was a way to promote walking tours from each station along the line and give the least green-fingered volunteers new skills. It also brought a burst of colour to stations on the route, with organisers donating surplus plants and flowers. One recipient, **Knutsford station**, was rated 'outstanding' by 'Britain in Bloom' judges.



Mid Cheshire Line, Tatton Show

A step back in time

Celebrating the role of rail in shaping communities past and present

Rail has unlocked opportunities to travel for work and leisure for two centuries, linking industrial towns, rural communities and seaside resorts. Each line and station have stories to tell.

Uncovering the past

The Peak District National Park is one of the UK's most popular and was the first to get national park status in 1951, but few know the story of Ethel Haythornthwaite. Her campaigning led to the park's creation and the saving of a key access route to it – the Hope Valley railway line – after it was threatened with closure in the 1960s.

High Peak and Hope Valley CRP wanted to celebrate this local hero in the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England - Peak District and South Yorkshire's centenary year. With the support of partners and volunteers, 'The Exploits of Ethel' was taken into Year 7 history lessons at Newfield School. A play was also written about her life and brought to life on stage. Pupils performed to wide-ranging audiences, including at Sheffield Hallam University. Whitworks Adventures in Theatre (WAT) is now looking to take Ethel's story to children nationwide.



And there's a new permanent resident at **Bridlington station** – one that links the popular seaside town with its holiday heyday of the 1950s and 1960s. A statue of a 'barrow boy' celebrates the entrepreneurial youngsters who would transport passengers' luggage from the station to their guesthouse for a small fee. More than 150 people – including some ex-barrow boys and girls – turned out for its unveiling. There's been so much interest in the joint **Yorkshire Coast and BID** project that they've commissioned a book on the subject.

Meanwhile, the **Friends of Bare Lane station** have uncovered the history of its last station master, Bradford-born Arthur Herbert, who worked there from 1957 until the position was abolished 10 years later. Working with his son, Ron, and the current occupants of the station house, they've captured the story on a display board for people to read as they wait for their train. Arthur's story has also been featured in the railway press. Some travellers have been surprised to learn that such small stations had resident station masters!

Celebrations & commemorations

Milestones have been marked and celebrated across the Northern network.

Volunteers at **St Anne's station** marked its 150th anniversary by holding a burial... of a time capsule, that is! They aim to give future local history and rail enthusiasts an insight into the station and its volunteers. It includes letters, pen portraits of the volunteers, a memory stick of photos, used train tickets and timetables.

Meanwhile, there was free drink and cake for commuters at **Worksop station** to mark the arrival of the Manchester Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway in the town 175 years ago. The celebrations, organised by the station's Friends group and **North Notts and Lincolnshire CRP**, also saw the unveiling of a storyboard and plaque giving waiting travellers a bitesize history of the railway and station.

And commemoration is a key element of the heritage efforts at our stations, often in creative ways. The **Friends of Nunthorpe station** were rightly proud of their knitted display for the 80th Anniversary of D-Day, complete with landing craft and tanks.



Nunthorpe knitted commemoration

Sustainability

Enhancing and protecting our community environments

Beyond the brick, concrete and track, many of our stations are surprisingly green. Some are already enticing environments for local wildlife, while others are working to boost their biodiversity credentials. And our CRPs and station volunteers are the first to promote rail as a sustainable travel choice.

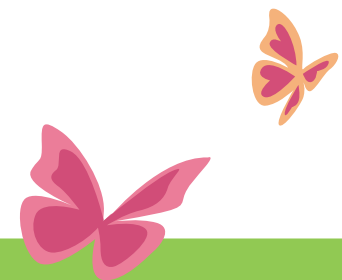
Grow your own

Buxton station became the first of six stations to undergo a 'biodiversity makeover' in a pilot project with Northern and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT). Buxton, along with **Bolton, Hebden Bridge, St Helens Central, Workop** and **Harrogate stations**, used Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping to develop unique plans of action to boost the stations' native animal and plant species.

Buxton's 'biodiversity makeover' has included replanting existing gardens with native wildflowers and pollinator-friendly species to support the local bilberry bee population. Volunteers, including the station's Friends group, have also been trained to help plant and maintain the new species.

Meanwhile, do you know your Wyken Pippins from your D'Arcy Spice or your St Edmund's Pippin from your Blenheim Orange? There are fruitful goings on at **Thatto Heath station**! The Friends group, which also looks after **Eccleston Park station**, is combining creating buzzing wildlife habitats with a heritage project. It's designing apple orchards at both stations to grow up to 20 long-neglected varieties – some dating back to the early 1700s.

The station gardeners are busy establishing the orchards, with plans to promote these heirloom varieties when the trees mature in around five years. This will include workshops on how to cook them and how people can grow their own heritage apple trees.



Buxton station



Showcasing the Hyndburn Greenway

Across the Pennines, the **Penistone Line Partnership** has been busy establishing new connections and partnerships since its successful re-accreditation in Spring 2024. This has included establishing three new station adoption groups – one dedicated to biodiversity. **Brockholes Green Spaces & Station Adopters (BGs)** is working to improve and protect the green spaces and habitats in the Brockholes community while making them more enjoyable for local people and finding ways to celebrate the village and its railway.

The long-awaited 'climate change garden' opened at Brighthouse station after two hard years in the making. Fifteen volunteers from **Friends of Brighthouse Station** transformed the old goods yard and railway siding into a low-maintenance plot, creating a new home for insects, bees and birds.

And it was a case of 'the more we looked, the more we saw' for volunteer bug spotters at **Ansdell and Fairhaven station** over the summer months. The striking six-spot burnet moth was a favourite. There are plans to display photos of the station-loving species for all to see.

The **Friends of Ark Station's** commitment to 'No Mow May' contributed to their success in the 'Cumbria in Bloom' awards. The Friends left areas unmowed in support of the Plantlife initiative and by the end of June, they were awash with oxeye daisies, yellow flowers and bursting with bees.

Meanwhile, the **Friends of the Settle to Carlisle Line** have celebrated all 10 of their stations being awarded in Yorkshire and Cumbria 'In Bloom,' winning 'It's your Neighbourhood' accolades.

And the **Friends of Alnmouth Station** were recognised for their enthusiasm and hard work in maintaining 48(!) wooden tubs at the station, winning best station across all transport modes at 'Northumbria in Bloom'.

Green ways to get about

We value the environment beyond our stations too. 'Travel by train, foot or bike' is the message in station artwork local schoolchildren have created in an **East Lancashire CRP**-led project to raise the profile of the 'Hyndburn Greenway'. It's ripe for exploring by train and an enjoyable, traffic-free and sustainable way to get around, linking local stations and communities from Church and Oswaldtwistle to Accrington and beyond.

Health & wellbeing



Supporting people, bringing them together and creating memorable moments

Our network and its stations are for everyone. They create opportunities to do good – bringing people together, guiding them to the support they need, or simply making them smile as they go about their busy, stressful lives.

Caring communities

Our station groups are finding ways to signpost vulnerable people to the right support and organising activities to build confidence, connections and wellbeing.

St Helens stations were brought into a campaign called 'UnZip The Silence' to target the high rates of suicide in the town – one of the highest nationally. The joint project by **Rotary St Helens** – which helps look after Central Station – the council and NHS included prominently displaying posters with quick links to support.

And **Chapel-en-le-Frith station's** 'seat with a view' is now accompanied by a new display board which shows key points of interest in the station's impressive backdrop. Encouraging people 'to sit and talk, listen, think or just sit,' it includes ways to get in touch with the Samaritans, recognising the role people involved in the railway can play in helping reduce suicides.



Out and about with Edale Station Friends

Meanwhile, 'restoring and improving the soul, mind and body' was the idea behind **Furness Line CRP's** 'Soulful Days Out.' With **Community Rail Lancashire** taking the reins, the initiative focused on encouraging older adults onto the train to help overcome isolation and build travel confidence. Working with organisations like Age UK and the Trefoil Guild, it offered pre-journey workshops where participants could talk about their travel fears and get reassurance about the help available before taking staffed trips on Northern services around Cumbria and North Lancashire.

And showcasing the beauty and wellbeing benefits of the great outdoors has been the focus for **Edale Station Friends**. They've accompanied groups of women asylum seekers and those who've experienced exploitation on rail journeys into the countryside to show them how easy it is to access and enjoy. They've also supported vulnerable women in taking the train to equine therapy, where they can spend time with horses to boost their mental health.

Festive fun

Christmas is about bringing people together and some of our stations go all out to bring festive cheer to the heart of our communities.

Friends of Irlam Station organised a very special Santa visit. As his sleigh was undergoing routine maintenance ahead of the big day, he arrived by train to a crowd of happy children who then got to meet him in his free-to-enter grotto. Not to be outdone, the Friends donned Elf outfits to spread a bit of sparkle around the annual Christmas market.

Meanwhile, there's little more festive than a brass band and the **Friends of Buxton Station** came up with the goods, hosting a carol concert to boost the fundraising efforts for Blythe House Hospice. It followed the charity choosing the station to host a 1.5 metre-high Snowdog – one of 12 around the town inspired by the Raymond Briggs Snowman stories.

And more than 150 people in Bentham came together to create an eye-catching outdoor Christmas station display for less than £100! The **Friends of Bentham Station**, schools, the local extra care facility, voluntary and care groups and 'station twins' at Mytholmroyd were involved in constructing trees from donated pallets and personalising them with bold designs and festive messages. The Friends hope to inspire others and are keen to share plans and designs with other station groups.



Irlam station

Our community partnerships

Working together for BLG impact

Community Rail Network

Community Rail Network (CRN) is one of Northern's key partners in supporting community rail partnerships (CRPs) and station volunteer groups across the region, with its team providing guidance and much-valued core funding.

Campaigns and events

Generating curiosity about community rail was the aim of Community Rail Week in May 2024. The theme, 'More Than a Railway', shined a spotlight on the incredible work of the grassroots movement in bringing people together, increasing access to opportunity and putting railways and stations at the heart of community life.

Twenty CRPs and station groups across the Northern network delivered 34 events and activities. These included **South East Manchester CRP's** Railway Children-inspired guided walk from Strines station, the launch of **Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company's** shuttle bus linking Appleby station and the town centre and a 'music train' hosted by **Mid Cheshire Line CRP**. Posts and retweets with the #CommunityRailWeek hashtag reached more than five million social media users.

CRN joined **Community Rail Lancashire** and Northern in welcoming 24 female students to Newton Heath TrainCare Centre for the campaign's core education and youth engagement event. They enjoyed a tour, met engineers and gained insight into rail industry careers.

In the autumn, CRN's 'Days Out by Rail' campaign saw many Northern CRPs and station groups take advantage of a digital toolkit to promote their tourism, leisure and heritage offer. Delivered through Scenic Rail Britain, the campaign's social media posts promoted sustainable family days out on lesser-known community rail lines and reached four million users.

In an overview of other events, 28 Northern delegates attended the Community Rail Conference and Northern community rail staff and volunteers benefitted from an array of training courses and webinars. These included project management and delivering outcomes, using Canva to enhance design work and social media, Railway 200 and demystifying corporate fundraising.



Days out with a difference

Reports and consultations

CRN's new '[value of community rail](#)' report features ten case studies from Northern CRPs and station groups, highlighting how community rail delivers social, environmental and economic value for and with communities. It creates a major social return on investment – £17.89 for every £1 spent. Best practice examples include **Leeds-Morecambe CRP's** work creating Britain's first dementia-friendly railway line, **Community Rail Lancashire's** programme of tailored support combining confidence-building workshops and train trips and **Bishop Line CRP's** work to improve access and connectivity at Bishop Auckland station.

CRN also published Northern-sponsored guidance for [tackling anti-social behaviour](#) and [engaging in local planning and development](#). It highlighted successful projects, including **Community Rail Cumbria's** work at Maryport and Northern's station adoption activities at **Darnall**.

CRN continued to advocate for community rail with rail and government partners. It kept members informed on relevant strategic and policy areas, providing updates on the Draft Rail Reform Bill, Labour's Plan for Rail, and Transport for the North's Strategic Transport Plan. CRN also continued to link up with the Department for Transport and the Great British Railways Transition Team on rail reform, championing the role of CRPs and station groups in the North and across Britain.

Support and development

CRN's support and development team assisted Northern CRPs and station groups more than 350 times in 2024-25. It helped them access funding, draw up development plans, seek accreditation, progress youth engagement activities and promote sustainable and integrated travel. The team also offered specialist assistance on station building projects, community engagement, marketing and PR, governance and insurance.

Funding support

Up To January 2025, CRN supported 24 Northern projects through its Community Rail Development Fund. These include **South East Lancashire CRP's** mural at Wigan station, the 'Haltwhistle is Something Special' project led by **Tyne Valley CRP** and a youth art project celebrating active travel at **Church & Oswaldtwistle station**.

Twenty-three Northern projects also received support from the Small Grants Fund, including the **Friends of Blaydon Station's** train-themed bench, storage for the **Friends of Glazebrook Station's** community garden and a reprint of the **Friends of New Mills Station's** booklet of circular walks.



Northern Education Network

2024 saw the launch of the Northern Education Network to support our CRPs. It aims to inspire them, help them develop fresh initiatives and learn from successful ones.

The Network was put into practice by Community Rail Lancashire's Northern-funded education team, TrainEd. They travelled from Mid Cheshire to the Tyne Valley to give CRPs the confidence and expertise to implement their ideas.

The team focused on rail safety and boosting young people's travel confidence. CRPs got to shadow TrainEd's officers, developing skills to lead future rail safety workshops and train trips as part of Northern's 'Try The Train' initiative. As TrainEd's officers are former teachers, the CRPs were in qualified hands!

TrainEd also developed the Northern Education Network's rail safety resource pack, which CRPs can send to schools to support them in teaching rail safety.

As well as the one-on-one CRP meets, the Northern Education Network hosted meetings in Carnforth, Leeds and Manchester, bringing together CRPs, train operators and station and Friends groups to explain the remit of the Network, discuss ideas for future meetings and share ideas.

These get-togethers have also proved an opportunity for local groups to understand what resources are available through Northern to strengthen their initiatives. This included demonstrating a virtual reality simulation, which allows nervous travellers to gain more confidence by exploring their journey in advance from their phones, tablets, or even VR headsets.



Can we get this photo at a higher res?

Catherine Kingdom and Karen Bennett, Community Rail Education Development Officers

Our community commitments

Working together for BIG impact

Northern can confirm that the distribution of funds to the Community Rail Partnerships takes account of the Secretary of State's Community Rail Development Strategy. In developing funding proposals for CRPs, Northern has consulted with and taken into account the views of Community Rail Network and Community Rail Partnerships across the network through the Community Rail Executive Group.

At the time of writing, Northern has awarded nearly £70,000 in community project funding to a wide range of projects that deliver against the four pillars of the Community Rail Development Strategy:

- Providing a voice for the community
- Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel
- Bringing communities together
- Supporting diversity and inclusion
- Supporting social and economic development.

We've also awarded over £100,000 to support network-wide station adoption activity.

This report showcases many beneficiaries of our community project funding and awards for station adoption projects.



Buxton station



CRP	24/25	25/26*	26/27*
Settle Carlisle Developoment Company	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Esk Valley	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Penistone Line Partnership	£32,522	3£3,692	£33,692
Yorkshire Coast	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
High Peak and Hope Valley	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Mid Cheshire	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
North Cheshire	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Tyne Valley	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Community Rail Cumbria Cumbrian Coast line	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Community Rail Cumbria Furness line	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Community Rail Cumbria Lakes line	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
South Fylde	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
East Lancashire Line	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Clitheroe Line	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
West Lancashire Line	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Leeds - Morecambe (Bentham line)	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
South East Manchester	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Crewe - Manchester	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Bishop Line	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
South East Lancashire	£32,522	£33,692	£33,692
Calder Valley	£32,522	£33,693	£33,693
North Notts and Lincs	£9,656	10,004	£10,004
SUBTOTAL	£692,611	£717,545	£717,545
Community Rail Lancashire Education Programme (TrainEd)	£126,740	£131,303	£131,303
Community Rail Network	£212,874	£220,537	£220,537
TOTAL	£ 1,032,225	£1,069,385	£1,069,385

*subject to DfT approval

CRPs must achieve and maintain DfT accreditation to be eligible for Northern funding



Northern Community Project Fund		
Applicant	Project	Value
Tyne ValleyVCRP	Creating a CRP for the Northumberland Line	£3,000.00
Bentham Line CRP	Outside It Is Beautiful - Community Audio Stories	£5,610.00
Bishopline CRP	Last Train Home Festival	£2,000.00
	Secondary Schools Rail Safety and Careers Event	£1,300.00
	Storylines Sharing	£600.00
Bishop Line CRP and Tracks Darlington CIC	Big Little Gigs	£4,600.00
Clitheroe Line CRP	The Clitheroe Line - A Picturesque Railway Journey	£3,252.00
South East Lancashire CRP	Beacons of Bolton	£1,500.00
Young Commissioners	Young People Art Project at Barnsley Station	£3,000.00
Bradford City FC Community Foundation	Capturing Bradford's Rich History	£7,500.00
Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway	Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Signs	£10,000.00
South Yorkshire MCA and Barnsley MBC	Community Local Heritage Totem Sculpture Project	£2,500.00
Maverick Lab	Mindfulness by Train	£5,000.00
Community Rail Lancashire	Girguiding NE England Railway Challenge Badge Launch Event	£4,767.98
Community Rail Lancashire	TrainEd Careers Programme	£5,000.00
Dales and Bowland CIC	Malham Dales Bus (link from Settle station)	£4,500.00
Esk Valley RDC	Forget Me Not Train	£2,130.00
TOTAL		£66,259.98

Projects collectively delivering over 1000 hours of volunteering and attracting over £100,000 in third party funding

