ISLE OF WIGHT
COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP
ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026

Community Rail
Accredited Partnership
2026-27



Isle of Wight Community Rail Partnership

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the latest Annual Report of the Isle of Wight Community Rail Partnership CIC.

Last year marked an important milestone as we celebrated 20 years of Community Rail on the Isle of Wight. It gave us an opportunity to look back at how the Partnership has grown, the relationships that have been built and, most importantly, the difference that community rail has made to people and communities across the Island.

One year on, that work continues to evolve.

Over the past year, the Partnership has continued to demonstrate that community rail is about far more than the railway itself. It is about connecting people with opportunity, building confidence, supporting inclusion, encouraging sustainable travel and using our transport network to bring communities together.

The projects featured in this report reflect that breadth. We have continued to work with children and young people, schools, community organisations, volunteers and transport partners, creating opportunities for people to travel with greater confidence, engage with their local environment and discover more about the places connected by our railway.

Alongside our project delivery, we have also been working towards reaccreditation of the Partnership, reviewing our governance, priorities and future plans to ensure that we continue to meet the standards expected of an accredited Community Rail Partnership. This has also encouraged us to look carefully at the voices represented within the Partnership. As we move forward, we want to broaden our Steering Group so that it better reflects the diversity of the communities we serve, bringing different experiences, perspectives and ideas to the table and ensuring that inclusion remains at the heart of our work.

We have continued to develop new ideas and partnerships, building on projects that have already proved successful while finding new ways for Community Rail to respond to local needs.

None of this happens in isolation. The strength of the Isle of Wight Community Rail Partnership lies in the organisations and individuals who work alongside us. I would like to thank our rail, ferry and bus partners, local authorities, Community Rail Network, community organisations, schools, volunteers and supporters for the time, expertise and enthusiasm they continue to contribute.

As Chair, I remain enormously proud of what this Partnership achieves. Twenty-one years after our journey began, we are still developing, still innovating and still looking carefully at how we can do more. Our work towards reaccreditation, alongside the projects and partnerships featured in this report, gives us a clear direction for the year ahead.

Above all, we remain committed to putting our communities at the heart of what we do.

I hope you enjoy reading about another remarkable year of Community Rail on the Isle of Wight.

Richard Tyldsley Director
Isle of Wight Community Rail Partnership CIC

WHO WE ARE

The Isle of Wight Community Rail Partnership CIC works to connect the Island's railway with the communities it serves.

Centred around the Island Line from Ryde Pier Head to Shanklin, we bring together rail, bus and ferry operators, local authorities, community organisations, schools, businesses and volunteers to develop projects that make a positive difference to people and places across the Island.

Our work reaches well beyond the station platform. We help people gain the skills and confidence to travel independently, engage children and young people with safe and sustainable travel, support communities and local organisations, improve station environments and encourage visitors and residents to explore the Island using public transport.

The Island's unique transport network also gives us an important role in encouraging integrated travel. By working across rail, bus and ferry, we can help make public transport part of the whole journey — connecting communities on the Island as well as linking the Island with the mainland.

Our projects are developed through partnership and shaped by local need. By bringing together the knowledge, resources and experience of different organisations, we can often achieve far more collectively than any one organisation could achieve alone.

The Four Pillars of Community Rail

Our work is guided by the Four Pillars of Community Rail:

Providing a voice for the community — listening to local people and creating opportunities for communities to influence and participate in their railway.

Promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel — helping more people feel confident using public transport and encouraging rail, bus, ferry and active travel.

Bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion — creating opportunities, reducing barriers and using transport to connect people with experiences, education and one another.

Supporting social and economic development — working with local organisations, businesses and visitor destinations to strengthen communities and encourage sustainable exploration of the Island.

THROUGH THE WINDOW OF MY TRAIN

What began as a creative community project inspired by journeys on the Island Line grew into something much bigger — bringing together local history, railway heritage, art, photography and poetry, while creating new friendships and giving people the confidence to step outside their comfort zones and discover what they could achieve.

Funded by South Western Railway's Social Development Fund and the Community Rail Network's Community Rail Development Fund, *Through the Window of My Train* began in September 2025 by taking participants out of the workshop and onto the railway itself.

The first day was led by Jack Singleton – the WightWanderer, who accompanied groups on journeys along the Island Line with historic photographs showing familiar locations then and now. As the train travelled through the landscape, participants could compare the view outside their window with images of how those same places had looked in the past — discovering local history while seeing familiar surroundings from a completely different perspective.

The creative workshops took place at Brading Station, keeping the railway firmly at the heart of the project. Alongside trying their hand at art, photography and poetry, participants were able to visit the station's historic signal box, adding another dimension to their experience and providing further inspiration for their work.

There was no requirement to be an artist, photographer or poet. The project was about encouraging people to have a go. Participants were gently challenged to try something unfamiliar, explore their creativity and express their own memories, observations and connections with the Island and its railway.

From workshop to published book

The resulting work was brought together in a beautifully produced 68-page book, *Through the Window of My Train,* officially launched on 15 October 2025.

The launch brought the group together over lunch to celebrate what they had achieved. For those who had contributed poetry, however, there was one more challenge: they were invited to stand and read their work aloud.

For some, sharing something they had personally created in front of an audience represented a considerable step outside their comfort zone. It was also a wonderful demonstration of how far their confidence had developed during the project.

Seeing their artwork, photographs and words in print gave participants something permanent to be proud of, while the launch also gave something back to the place that had been at the heart of the project. All proceeds from book sales on the day went towards the upkeep of Brading Station.

But something else had happened along the way.

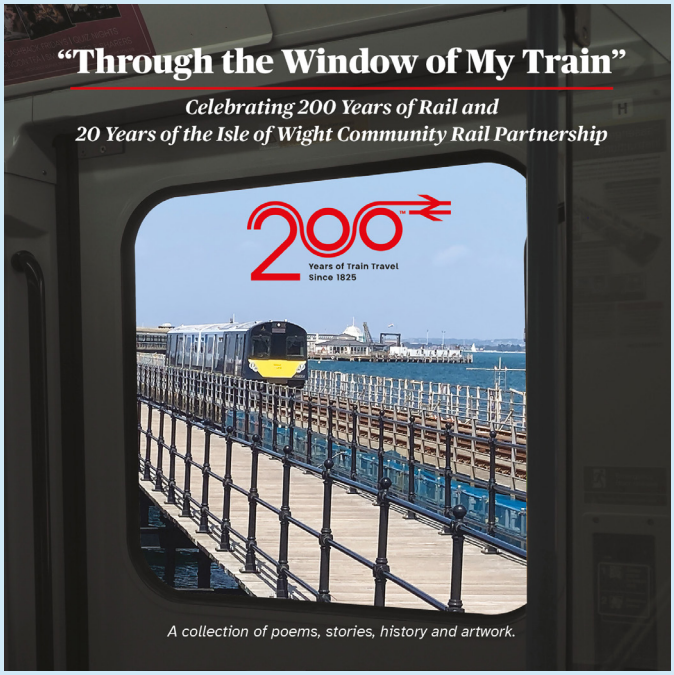
People who had arrived as individual participants had begun to form genuine friendships. Those relationships did not end when the workshops finished. Members of the group have continued to meet regularly for lunch — using the train to travel and meet one another.

What began as a creative Community Rail project had created its own lasting social network.

From book to exhibition

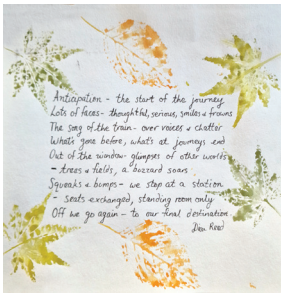
The story could easily have ended with the publication of the book, but careful management of the project budget resulted in an underspend, giving us an opportunity to extend the project and create even more community benefit from the funding available.

In April 2026, a further programme of community workshops gave more people the opportunity to try their hand at art, photography and poetry. Once again, the emphasis was not on previous experience or artistic ability, but on participation — creating a welcoming





Photos by Joanna Kori (Top Left), Sylvia Clare (Bottom Left), Alexander Blades (Top Right), Hollie Jackson (Bottom Right)



Artwork by Dian Reed



Artwork by Sharon Poole



Photos by Hollie Jackson (Top Left & Bottom Right), Alexander Blades (Bottom Left & Top Right)

environment in which people could experiment, learn from one another and discover what they were capable of.

The work created through the project was then brought together for a month-long public exhibition at Quay Arts in Newport, running from 2 May to 4 June 2026.

For participants, it was another significant moment. Work that had begun with a train journey, an idea, a photograph, a few words or a blank piece of paper was now being displayed in one of the Island's best-known arts venues. For visitors, the exhibition provided an opportunity to experience the railway and the Island through the eyes, memories and creativity of the people who had taken part.

Inspiring the next generation

Having the exhibition at Quay Arts created another opportunity to extend the project during Community Rail Week in May.

Young people from Dover Park Primary School were invited to visit Quay Arts, where they explored the exhibition and saw what members of their own community had created before taking part in a creative workshop of their own.

Inspired by what they had seen, the young people produced their own artwork — extending the project to another generation and encouraging them to look at their railway, journeys and Island through a different window.

A legacy beyond the project

From those first journeys along the Island Line with Jack Singleton and his then-and-now photographs, *Through the Window of My Train* travelled a remarkable distance itself — from train journeys and visits to Brading's historic signal box, to creative workshops, a published book, a public exhibition and another generation of young people creating work of their own.

But perhaps its most important legacy cannot be found in a book or hanging on an exhibition wall.

Participants grew in confidence, challenged themselves to try things they might previously have avoided and formed lasting friendships. Long after the original workshops finished, members of the group continue to meet socially and use the railway to bring them together.

Through the Window of My Train demonstrates the wider social value that Community Rail can create. By bringing people together around a shared experience of the railway, the project supported creativity, confidence, connection and friendship, while careful use of the funding enabled those benefits to reach even further into the community.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Sometimes a Community Rail project begins with an idea for an artwork. This one began by asking young people to look at something much bigger — how the railway itself can influence the landscape around it.

The project began in 2025, when young people visited the Isle of Wight Steam Railway to explore the movement of seeds and plants along the railway corridor. They looked at the effect created by passing trains and how seeds can travel along the line, resulting in plants appearing in places far from the areas where they would normally be expected to grow.

That idea — the railway acting as a corridor for nature — became the inspiration for a major piece of public art for the Los Altos subway adjacent to Sandown Station.

The project was originally planned to begin in October 2025, but the practicalities of working within a public subway meant that delivery had to fit around Island Roads' programme of works, pushing the main installation into March 2026.

That created a considerable challenge. The project was supported through South Western Railway's Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF) and, following the later-than-anticipated announcement of funding and an extension from the Department for Transport, the funding needed to be spent by the end of April.

It required flexibility, determination and close partnership working to bring everything together within the revised timeframe.

Young people shaping their own space

Young people supported by the Isle of Wight Youth Justice Service worked with Community Murals Isle of Wight, exploring different creative techniques and developing ideas that could ultimately be



transformed into a large-scale piece of public art.

Their exploration of the railway as a corridor for nature developed into an artwork filled with flowers and plants, reflecting the unusual movement of species along the railway line.

But the young people also wanted the artwork to respond to the subway itself.

What had previously been a rather dark and unwelcoming space was transformed through a design depicting sunrise and sunset, moonrise and moonset, with plants and flowers flowing through the artwork.

And it was the young people themselves who gave the finished piece its wonderfully appropriate name:

Light at the End of the Tunnel.

Partnership in action

Creating the artwork was only one part of transforming the subway.

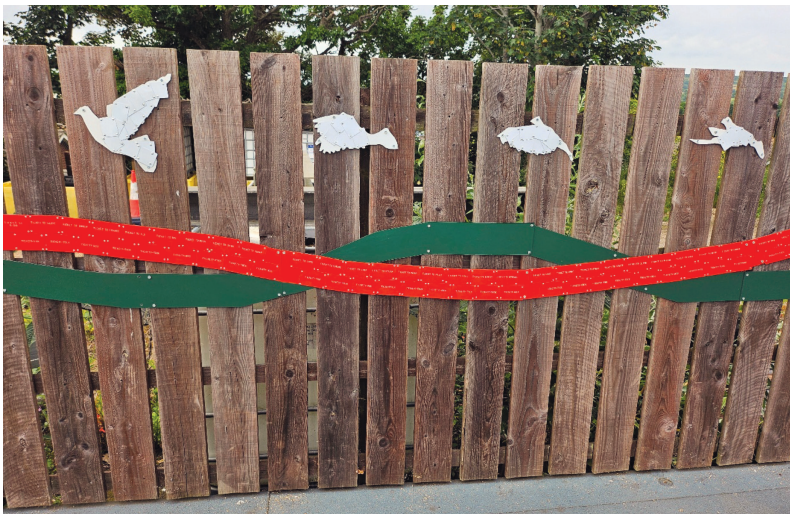
Island Roads prepared the area, including jet washing the walls ready

for the work to begin, while improvements to the lighting helped make the route itself brighter and more welcoming.

Then came an extraordinary contribution from Southern Vectis.

A request was shared through its staff intranet asking for volunteers to help prepare the subway. Those who came forward were, quite simply, worth their weight in gold.

Working alongside the artists from Community Murals Isle of Wight, the volunteers spent two days sanding and preparing the walls, undertaking the hard physical work needed before the young people's designs could begin to appear.



The finished project has transformed much more than the appearance of a subway. Los Altos provides an important accessible route between the community, Island Line and Los Altos Park, including for people using wheelchairs and pushchairs. The combination of new artwork, improved lighting and preparation of the space has created a much brighter and more welcoming environment for everyone using the route.

Back on Track

Light at the End of the Tunnel formed part of a wider partnership with Artswork through its Young Cultural Changemakers programme, supported by public funding from Arts Council England, together with match funding from South Western Railway's CCIF and Isle of Wight Community Rail Partnership CIC.

And it wasn't the only artwork to emerge.

Students from Lionheart School worked with Island artist Jo Kori to explore railway heritage and what the railway has meant to their community.

Their work developed into Back on Track, a striking three-dimensional platform installation created from riveted aluminium railway tickets, incorporating the young people's own words and rhymes and echoing the railway and its heritage.

Together, the two artworks gave young people very different opportunities to interpret the railway and leave something permanent behind within the station environment.

More than a mural

The social value of *Light at the End of the Tunnel* extends well beyond the physical transformation of the subway.

For the young people involved, the project provided an opportunity to develop new creative and practical skills, work alongside professional artists and see their own ideas become part of a permanent public space.

Rather than simply being asked what they would like to see, they were actively involved in shaping an environment used by their own community — creating a genuine sense of ownership, achievement and pride.

Working collaboratively encouraged confidence, communication and teamwork, while showing young people that their ideas and creativity were valued and that they could make a positive and highly visible contribution to their community.

The social value extends to the wider community. A previously dark, functional subway has become a brighter and more welcoming accessible route, improving the experience for local residents, rail passengers, families and those using wheelchairs or pushchairs.

It also brought together people and organisations that might not ordinarily work alongside one another. The contribution of the Southern Vectis volunteers, working with artists, young people, transport and community partners, demonstrates how Community Rail can use a single project to create a much wider sense of shared ownership and purpose.



Planting a different kind of seed

Together, these projects demonstrate what can happen when young people are trusted to help shape the places they use. Their ideas did not remain on paper or disappear at the end of a workshop. They became permanent pieces of public art, transforming the experience of people using Sandown Station and Los Altos every day.

Light at the End of the Tunnel is therefore an especially fitting name. A project that began by exploring how the railway carries seeds along the line ultimately allowed a different kind of seed to be planted — giving young people the opportunity to influence their environment, develop new skills and leave something positive behind for their community.

SUIT YOURSELF

Confidence, Opportunity and a Lasting Legacy

For some women, taking the next step towards employment, education or simply becoming more involved in their community can feel enormous.

A lack of confidence, poor mental wellbeing, time away from the workplace, caring responsibilities or difficult life experiences can all create barriers that are not easily overcome by simply offering someone a job vacancy or a training course.

Suit Yourself was created to help women take the steps that come before that.

Listening to the women who take part has always been central to the way *Suit Yourself* develops. Feedback from participants showed that they wanted more time to build confidence, develop relationships and put what they were learning into practice. In response, the programme has evolved and is now delivered over 12 weeks, giving women the time and space to progress at a pace that works for them.

During those 12 weeks, participants explore self-esteem, communication, assertiveness, wellbeing, presentation, employability, CV writing, interview skills and goal-setting, alongside opportunities to discover routes into education, training, volunteering and employment.

The programme has a long history on the Isle of Wight and became part of the Community Rail Partnership's work around seven years ago. Since then, more than 260 Island women have been supported through Suit Yourself, demonstrating both the continuing need for the programme and the difference that sustained community-based support can make.

More than a training course

The most recent phase of *Suit Yourself,* supported through South Western Railway's Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF), concluded in April 2026.

The programme is deliberately about much more than preparing someone for a job interview.

Women are encouraged to build confidence gradually, try new experiences and begin thinking differently about what might be possible for them. Visits to Isle of Wight College and Adult Community Learning introduce participants to opportunities for further education and training, while specialist wellbeing sessions with Isorropia Foundation help women explore their own wellbeing and resilience.

The railway also plays an important part.

Emma Brown, Island Line Operations Manager, brings more than 25 years of railway experience to the programme, providing mock interviews, careers guidance and mentoring. Women interested in railway careers can gain an insight into the industry and the different opportunities available to them.

Free travel on Island Line and Southern Vectis helps remove another practical barrier, enabling women to participate regardless of their own access to transport.

Just as importantly, time is built into the programme for women to talk, share lunch and get to know one another. For someone who may have become isolated or lost confidence in social situations, sitting around a table with other women can be every bit as important as the more formal elements of the course.

Those connections have lasted. Friendships formed through Suit Yourself continue long after the 12-week programme has finished, with women meeting up regularly and creating their own informal networks of friendship and support. They share experiences, encourage one another and maintain the confidence and connections they developed together.

From confidence to taking control

The outcomes demonstrate what that combination of practical and personal support can achieve.

Recent programmes supported 36 women, with 27 progressing into positive next steps.

But behind those numbers are individual women whose next steps can look very different.

For some it may be education, training or volunteering; for others it is having the confidence to return to employment.

And gaining a job can mean far more than receiving a wage.

For women who may have spent a long time feeling that circumstances were controlling their lives, employment can bring financial independence, renewed confidence, choices and a sense of purpose. Perhaps most importantly, it can give a woman the feeling that she is once again able to take control of her own life and make decisions about her future.

For others, the transformation may begin with something that appears much smaller: making a new friend, travelling independently, speaking confidently in a group or recognising for the first time in years that they have skills and something valuable to offer.

Those changes matter too.

And the impact can extend far beyond the women currently taking part.

Former Suit Yourself participants are now training to deliver wellbeing services through Isorropia, while one of the people supporting that progression completed one of the earliest Suit Yourself programmes herself more than 25 years ago.

It creates a remarkable circle: women who were once supported becoming the women who support somebody else.

That lasting impact has also received national recognition, with *Suit Yourself* achieving 3rd place at the National Community Rail

Awards — recognition of a programme that has continued to demonstrate the difference sustained, person-centred support can make to women's lives.

Building a sustainable future

One of the challenges facing successful community programmes is sustainability.

Funding opportunities understandably often seek new and innovative projects, but there are also times when the greatest social value comes from continuing something that has already demonstrated that it works.

Suit Yourself is one of those programmes.

Demand does not disappear when a funding cycle ends. Women continue to be referred to the programme and waiting lists demonstrate an ongoing need for the confidence, wellbeing and progression support it provides.

Indeed, when the next phase of *Suit Yourself* was being developed, there were already sufficient referrals to fill the first proposed programme and around half of a second before funding had even been secured.

Sustainability therefore matters not simply to the Partnership, but to the women who have already taken the difficult first step of asking for support and are waiting for the opportunity to take part.

Future delivery would also bring *Suit Yourself* even closer to the railway. Our intention is to deliver future programmes from Brading Railway Station, using the Heritage Centre and community space as the programme's base.

This creates benefits on several levels. It provides a welcoming community setting in which women can become familiar and confident with the railway as part of their everyday lives, while the room hire generated by the programme would provide much-needed income to support the Heritage Centre and community space at Brading Station.

It is another example of the wider value that can be created through Community Rail — investment in people also helping to sustain a community asset at the heart of the railway.

With funding in place through to the end of March 2027, we are actively seeking the additional investment needed to enable us to deliver at least two further 12-week Suit Yourself programmes within that period.

After more than 260 women supported, strong progression outcomes, lasting friendships, national recognition and a network of partners who understand the value of the programme, the challenge is no longer proving that *Suit Yourself* works.

It is creating a sustainable future that allows it to keep working for the women who need it — helping more women build the confidence, independence and opportunities to take control of their own lives, while ensuring that the investment made through Community Rail continues to benefit the wider community too.



Suit Yourself - Confidence, Opportunity and a Lasting Legacy

A WORD COMMUNITY RAIL MANAGER

It is always slightly strange reaching the end of an Annual Report and seeing a year's work neatly contained within a few pages.

Because, of course, community rail is never quite that neat.

Behind every project featured in this report there have been meetings, conversations, partnerships to build, funding applications to write, budgets to manage, projects to deliver and evaluate, problems to solve and, occasionally, plans that have had to change completely.

Alongside the visible project delivery, there has been a huge amount of work happening behind the scenes this year. We have continued developing our governance and working towards reaccreditation, strengthened relationships with existing and new partners, managed funding bids and project delivery, developed our website so that the work of the Partnership can be shared more widely, and spent two valuable days in Derby attending the National Community Rail Awards and associated Community Rail events — an important opportunity to celebrate achievement, share best practice and learn from colleagues across the national network.

But through all of that, community rail has continued to happen.

And for me, that is still the most important part.

It happens when a woman taking part in *Suit Yourself* begins to believe in herself again and takes a step towards employment, education or a different future. It happens when people who met through *Through the Window of My Train* form friendships that continue long after the funded project has finished. It happens when young people are trusted to transform a subway and can walk past it afterwards knowing, "I helped create that."

Those are the moments that remind me why we do this.

And we are certainly not standing still.

Two of our most ambitious projects are now beginning to take shape.

Living Shores will bring together young people, art, science and our unique UNESCO Biosphere environment to create something permanent at Ryde, connecting the railway with the extraordinary natural environment that surrounds it.

And Platform to Place will encourage people to do something beautifully simple: get off the train and explore. Beginning on the Island Line, it will help families and visitors discover the communities, stories, attractions and places beyond the station — using the railway as the starting point for an adventure.

Both projects represent something I think Community Rail does particularly well: taking the railway beyond the platform and connecting it with the people and places around it.

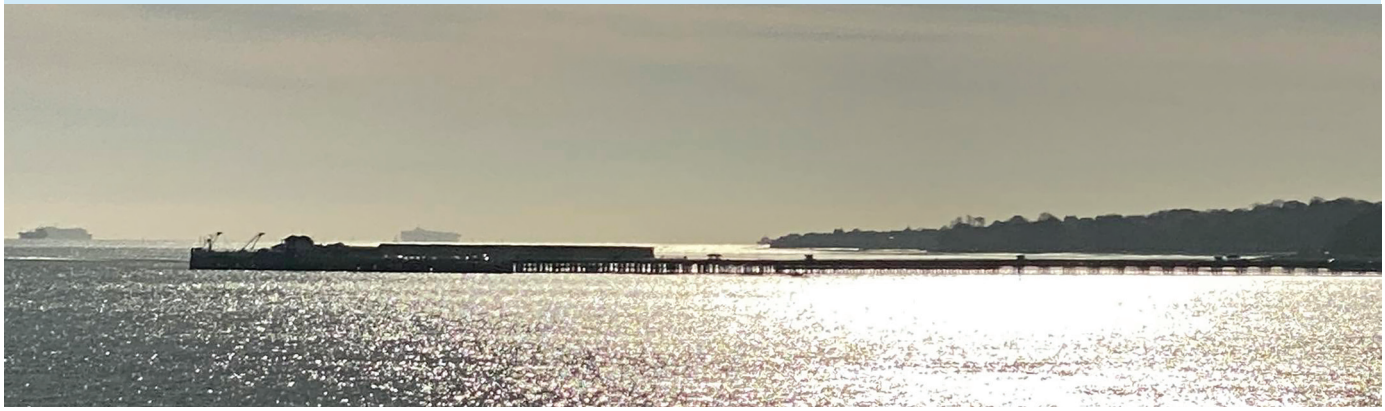
There is a great deal of work still to do, and funding will always be one of our biggest challenges. But looking at the partnerships, projects and people represented in this report, I am enormously excited about what comes next.

After more than two decades working in Community Rail, I still believe its greatest strength is its ability to bring people together and turn a conversation or an idea into something that makes a genuine difference.

That is the part of this job I love.

And with *Living Shores, Platform to Place* and plenty more already waiting in the wings, I have a feeling the next Annual Report might need a few more pages.

Bobby Lock Community Rail Manager
Isle of Wight Community Rail Partnership CIC



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