



Volunteering Strategy Plan

3rd July 2025 - Updated: 21 January 2026 - **Next review date:** By 31 January 2027

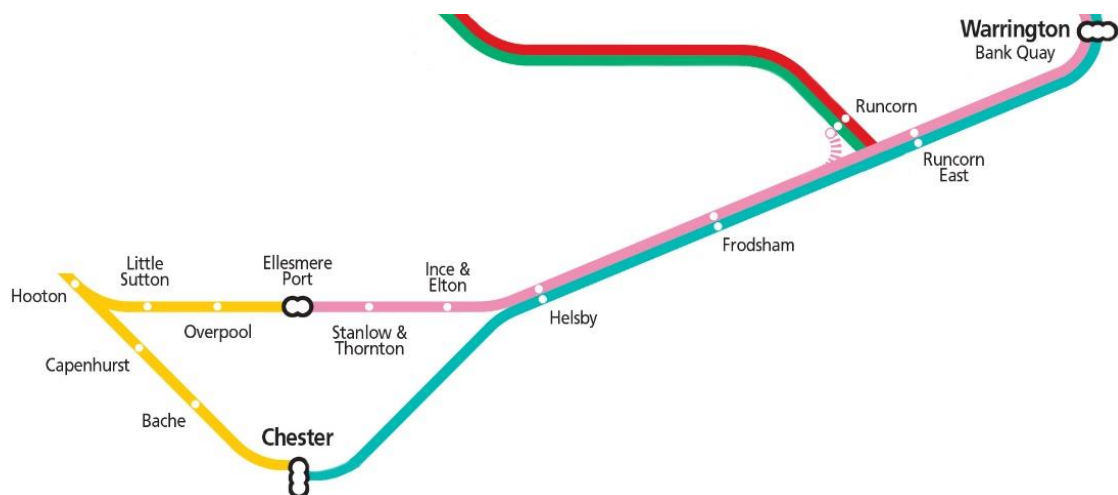
1. Introduction and Background

Community rail is engaging 125,000 people annually in a huge array of activities worth £129million in social value to communities across Britain.

The grassroots movement is playing a key role in putting local railways and stations at the heart of inclusive, empowered, sustainable and healthy communities, and from funding of just over £7.2million, is producing a social return on investment of £17.89 per £1 spent.

Community rail helps communities derive value from their local railways and stations. It delivers far-reaching and life-changing benefits around increasing access to opportunity, building social inclusion and connectedness, promoting sustainable travel and tourism, enhancing health and wellbeing, and stimulating local economic development.

North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership exists to develop and deliver community rail projects in the northern part of Cheshire West and Chester, together with the boroughs of Halton and Warrington.



We are a small, but growing volunteer-led organisation, formed as a not for profit Community Interest Company intent on ensuring that our diverse communities are proactively engaged with, and proud of, their railways because they recognise the contributions they make to:

- Place – a great place to live, study, or work in; and
- Sustainable economic and social development – enriching lives and allowing our part of Cheshire to thrive.



Volunteering Strategy Plan

In July 2025 we launched a new Volunteering Programme that aims to engage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to support our work – whether for a few hours or a few days a month.

This Volunteering Strategy Plan covers the volunteers who will be engaged directly by the Community Interest Company. Some volunteers may also be members of partner organisations and where that organisation has the lead responsibility for a project or programme of work its policies will apply, although we will work closely with partner organisations to ensure as much alignment as possible in the policies.

In addition to delivering practical projects, volunteering within North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership plays a critical role in building the long-term capacity, resilience and sustainability of the organisation. Volunteers contribute not only time and skills, but leadership, insight and advocacy that help the Partnership operate credibly, evidence its impact and maintain the confidence of funders, partners and communities. Leadership and coordination volunteer roles are therefore integral to how the Partnership plans, delivers and demonstrates its work.



Volunteering Strategy Plan

2. Vision/ Mission

Our vision is:

Everyone Proud of our Railways

Our volunteering approach plays a central role in achieving this vision. Volunteers help inspire pride in our railways, ignite new ideas and partnerships, enable projects to be delivered on the ground, and sustain momentum by capturing learning, evidence and impact over time. Progress against this vision will be reviewed over time through planned activity, learning from delivery, and visible outcomes shared with partners, volunteers and communities.

We plan to achieve this through Our Four Strategic Themes:

1. Stations in their Place

Connecting Stations to Community Identity

Outcomes:

- Stations that feel welcoming, safe and vibrant
- Clear Gateways between rail and the surrounding towns and villages
- Better integration with walking, cycling, buses and local networks

2. Affordable Access and Promotion

Enabling Sustainable Travel Choices

Outcomes:

- Wider awareness of value for money rail options
- Truly accessible travel for all ages and abilities
- Joint marketing with local attractions to increase visitor numbers

3. Health, Well-being and Inclusion

Supporting Community Wellbeing

Outcomes:

- Volunteer opportunities and support for local charitable aims
- Access to spaces and services promoting mental and physical health
- Inclusive outreach to under-represented or hard-to-reach communities

4. Research, Education and Heritage

Inspiring Learning and Preserving our Railway Stories

Outcomes:

- Enabling research through strong links with the University of Chester and beyond
- Engaging schools and colleges with inspiring education and careers programmes
- Recording and sharing the railway's social and economic impact

Each of these four themes will be achieved over time with projects that require volunteers to plan and successfully deliver them. Examples of the types of projects we envisage and where volunteers will be welcomed in order to ensure that they are successful, are shown in the table below:

Theme	Examples of Projects	Examples of Volunteer Activities
Stations in their Place	Helping to ensure that the railway environment is welcoming and environmentally sustainable, whether through the creation of safe, clean green spaces or in bringing art in all its forms into the railway environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gardening • Creation of bio-diverse spaces • Co-ordination of artwork origination and production • Station poets • Project managing new signage and interpretation boards
Affordable Access and Promotion	<p>Befriending those in our communities who currently find it difficult to contemplate travelling by public transport, including travelling with them to build self-confidence;</p> <p>Developing connections and advocating public transport with other community based groups where improvements can be made to ensuring that the railways are, and are seen to be, "for me" however I personally identify</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel companions • Rail travel advocates (identifying with diverse communities)
Health, Well-being and Inclusion	<p>Management of this Volunteering Strategy and its execution</p> <p>Representing NCCRP at Frodsham, Helsby and Elton Together (and similar Community Partnerships for other communities) to ensure collaborative project opportunities are identified and developed.</p> <p>Developing inspirational new ideas whether on the railway or in the towns and rural areas that our communities live in, in collaboration with our partners, especially where this will lead to improvements in physical or mental health and well-being</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer management • Health and well-being ambassador • Health and well-being projects co-ordinator



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Research, Education and Heritage	<p>Research and communication of the history of our railways and its impact on economic, social and cultural development;</p> <p>Working with schools and youth groups to help educate young people of the relevance of the railways to their future career choices, as well as in the need to treat the railways properly in relation to safety and social behaviours</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Railway/social history researcher • Youth ambassador
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These examples are not exhaustive and will evolve over time. Volunteer-led activity will be reviewed periodically to understand what is working well, where improvements can be made, and how outcomes can be demonstrated across the Partnership's four strategic themes.

In addition, the core tasks of the Partnership will be undertaken by volunteers:

Tasks	Example of Volunteer Activities
Marketing and promoting news – through both social media/digital means and also in creating physical/printed information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and communications co-ordinator • Social media content lead
Administrative tasks in support of the part-time Community Rail Development Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Virtual) office administrator
Helping with the community engagement to ensure that outcomes match each community's needs and we can show the positive impact that we have created	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Engagement supporter

Our Volunteers will be the lifeblood of the Partnership, inspiring, enthusing and committed to delivering the outcomes that will make all of our communities "Proud of our Railways"



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3. Strategy

The resourcing for the core activities of the Partnership is founded in it being a grassroots community based organisation, where volunteers consider their involvement as a key part in the development and sustainability of great places to live, study or work in.

We employ on a part time basis a Community Rail Officer who provides the “glue” which helps hold everything together in a robust, responsible way, but almost all project activities are volunteer delivered.

Projects will be planned, delivered and reviewed in line with the Partnership’s four strategic themes, with learning and outcomes used to inform future activity and continuous improvement.

There are a number of specific measurable outcomes that we believe are important for this Volunteering Strategy Plan, in particular:

For the volunteer:

- Improved mental and physical health and wellbeing through engaging in purposeful activities and in social activities
- Skills development and experience supporting current or future employment potential
- Contribution to other organisational community programmes – such as educational personal development, youth award schemes, corporate volunteering programmes
- Satisfaction from being a part of the wider “railway family”

For the community:

- Providing a mobility “voice” for all the diverse communities that make up our part of the world, which is respected and valued for its differing insights and perspectives;
- Personal positive social value impact contribution to health and wellbeing measures recognised by the various health and social care boards and community partnerships that cover our area through collaboration by our volunteers in their programmes and projects
- Personal positive environmental impact contribution to climate emergency and biodiversity programmes in our area through collaboration by our volunteers in their programmes and projects

Our measures of these outcomes are expected to align with:

- Local authority social value impact targets for relevant activities
- Railway Safety and Standards Board’s Social Value Impact Tool
- Externally recognised, relevant community centred awards and research publications



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We plan to develop our volunteering strategy outcome reporting during the Autumn of 2025 with an initial annual report prepared for the AGM in September 2026. Thereafter we anticipate quarterly reporting with results published on our website and that of relevant partners.

A Vision for Volunteering

We fully support Cheshire West Voluntary Action's Vision for Volunteering and in particular commit to the principles of:

- Volunteering is inclusive; resulting in volunteering being accessible for people of all ages and abilities, making sure that the benefits are felt by individuals and communities alike.
- Volunteering is empowering; resulting in Volunteers being recognised as changemakers in their communities. They are supported with stepping forward, and pursuing projects that align with their strengths and interests.
- Volunteering is collaborative; strong partnerships make it easy for volunteer involving organisations to work together in Cheshire West. Partnerships are encouraged across community, public and private sectors.
- Volunteering is experimental; meaning it is flexible, innovative, and dynamic. Volunteer involving organisations are adaptable to changing circumstances, with opportunities naturally evolving from people's skills and interests.
- Volunteering is appreciated; Volunteering becomes a part of everyday life, and Volunteers receive the recognition they deserve. All efforts are celebrated, and volunteers enjoy a positive experience that is underpinned by dignity and respect.

Recruitment

Our principles for volunteer recruitment are

- Transparent and open – we will seek to promote volunteering opportunities as widely as practicable, and explain clearly the process for selection and retention of volunteers;
- Diversity valued and inclusivity embraced as the norm”- we will proactively encourage all parts of our diverse communities to consider volunteering and value the different perspectives and insights that result

Induction and training

We will ensure that a simple, but standardised, induction programme is available for all volunteers. This will include

- The Vision and values of the Partnership
- How we work
- How to seek guidance or further support
- Personal safety and security
- Calling out concerns
- Celebrating successes



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Volunteer engagement and feedback will help shape how roles, support and training continue to develop over time.

We work with Cheshire West Voluntary Action to access relevant training opportunities, much of which is at zero cost to the Partnership or its volunteers. Further training will be provided for as required from the Partnership's core budget.

In addition for volunteers involved in specific projects we will either deliver ourselves, or arrange for our partner organisations to deliver, training to ensure that everyone is competent to safely deliver the relevant activities. Each project will have any volunteer training needs identified and resourced before it is approved.

Reward

Although many volunteers will often say that the only reward they want is to see benefits transferred to the community it is really important to us that we recognise commitment and celebrate success. Our volunteers will be invited to a suitable annual celebration event that builds on the theme of our vision of being proud of our railways, as well as nominating individuals for any relevant local, regional or national awards. We will also provide appropriate confidential references on request to confirm the voluntary work undertaken by any Volunteer and the skills evidenced.

We will ensure that Volunteers are reimbursed for any necessary out of pocket expenses.

Resourcing

Oversight of the recruitment and volunteer development process will be provided by the Volunteering Co-ordinator, itself a lead volunteer role

We will deploy a volunteer management system and CRM for creating rotas, sending emails to our pool of volunteers, and securely storing personal information such as emergency contact details, medical needs etc. Options for such a system, including the Cheshire West Volunteering Platform will be reviewed and recommendations made to the Partnership's Board within the first three months of its existence.

While the Community Rail Development Officer provides essential continuity and coordination, the Partnership is fundamentally volunteer-led. A number of defined leadership and management volunteer roles are critical to delivery, governance support and organisational development. These roles help ensure that projects are well planned, volunteers are supported, finances are managed responsibly, communications are effective, and outcomes are captured and reported.



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4. Policies and Procedures

Each volunteer will have access to the Volunteering Handbook (either in hard copy format or through a portal on the website). It will set out the basis of the commitment that the Partnership makes to the Volunteer and the Volunteer to the Partnership.

A summary of the policies and procedures that are included in the Handbook is shown below

- Data Protection Policy
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- Health and Safety
- Privacy
- Safeguarding

These will be kept up-to date in order to remain compliant with legal and regulatory requirements, and aligned with best practice.

Effective volunteering also underpins the Partnership's ability to evidence impact. Volunteer activity contributes directly to the delivery of outcomes across all four strategic themes and provides the insight, case studies and data needed for accreditation, reporting and continuous improvement. Ensuring that volunteering activity is visible, recorded and reflected upon is therefore a core part of how the Partnership demonstrates value and builds confidence with stakeholders.

5. Impact Measuring

We are committed to being able to demonstrate the impact of our Volunteering Strategy Plan and the wider work of the Partnership. Measuring impact helps us understand what difference our activities make for volunteers, communities and partners, and ensures that we continue to learn, improve and build confidence in what we deliver.

Impact measurement will be proportionate and practical, focusing on demonstrating outcomes, learning from experience, and evidencing progress over time rather than creating unnecessary administrative burden for volunteers.

Volunteer activity contributes directly to the delivery of outcomes across all four strategic themes and provides valuable insight, case studies and evidence of social value. This includes both quantitative information, where appropriate, and qualitative stories that reflect lived experience and community benefit.



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Our measures of impact are expected to align with:

- Local authority social value impact targets for relevant activities
- The Railway Safety and Standards Board's Social Value Impact Tool
- Externally recognised, relevant community-centred awards and research publications

We plan to develop our volunteering strategy outcome reporting during the Autumn of 2025, with an initial annual report prepared for the AGM in September 2026. Thereafter, we anticipate quarterly reporting, with results published on our website and, where appropriate, shared with relevant partners.

Findings and learning will be reviewed internally and shared where appropriate through reports, updates and case studies to support transparency, accreditation and funding confidence.