

Station Adoption

Frequently Asked Questions (last reviewed May 2025)

About Station Adoption

What is station adoption?

Station adoption is a community initiative where volunteer groups "adopt" a local station to enhance its environment, improve its appearance, and create a more welcoming space for customers. Activities may include gardening, planting, environmental improvements, and community engagement projects.

Why should I consider adopting a station?

Adopting a station allows you to make a positive difference in your local community, improve the traveling experience for rail users, and participate in environmental enhancement projects. It's an opportunity to work alongside like-minded volunteers while contributing to the improvement of public spaces.

Who can become a station adopter?

Station adoption is open to anyone over 18 years of age (with exceptions in some cases) who is interested in supporting the improvement of their local station and can commit a minimum amount of time each month to the group's activities.

How do I start a station adoption group?

To start a station adoption group, email your interest to community@chilternrailways.co.uk. You'll then have an initial call with the Stakeholder Executive and Area Manager, complete required paperwork, attend an in-person meeting, and await approval from Chiltern.

What paperwork is required to form a station adoption group?

Required paperwork includes forming a constituted entity (or using an existing one), signing the Community Rail Access Agreement, creating an Initial Outline Plan for the first 12 months, providing personal information for all volunteers, submitting bank details on headed paper, and ensuring all volunteers review safety briefings.

Are adopters responsible for day-to-day maintenance of the station?

No, station adopters are not responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the station. Regular maintenance tasks such as cleaning, repairs, safety checks, and operational functions remain the responsibility of Chiltern Railways staff. Adoption groups focus on enhancement projects like gardening, community engagement initiatives, and environmental improvements rather than essential maintenance.

How are successful station adoption projects recognised?

Successful station adoption projects are often featured in Chiltern Railways' quarterly newsletter, social media channels, and website. There are also industry awards such as the Community Rail Network Awards where outstanding station adoption work can be nominated. Chiltern Railways periodically holds events including our own awards at the Annual Community Conference to recognise and celebrate volunteer contributions across their network. We also provide annual complimentary travel passes to volunteers as a 'thank-you' for their hard work.

Safety and requirements

What safety measures must station adopters follow?

Station adopters must remain at least 1.25 meters (4 feet) from the platform edge, wear Chiltern-issued hi-vis vests and ID cards, use only handheld manual tools, avoid working at height, and never go on or near railway lines. All volunteers must review and follow the Safety Briefing Document.

Can station adopters access all areas of the station?

No, station adopters cannot access areas marked as "staff only" or "private" unless specifically agreed with the local station team. Volunteers must only work in public areas or locations they've been given explicit permission to access.

Do volunteers need to sign in when working at stations?

Yes, volunteers must sign in and out at staffed stations using forms available at the booking office. At unstaffed stations, groups should maintain their own log of visits and activities.

Are there restrictions on what we can plant?

Yes, certain plants are restricted including Sycamore, Horse Chestnut, Sweet Chestnut, Ash, Black Poplar, Lombardy Poplar, Small-leaved Lime, and Common Lime. Trees with significant growth potential should also be avoided.

Can we use chemicals for gardening or cleaning?

Use of weed killers and chemicals should be avoided unless there are no viable alternatives. Before using any chemicals, details must be sent to the Stakeholder Executive or Area Manager for a COSHH assessment by the Chiltern Railways HSSE team.

Can adopters ever access the track?

No, station adopters must never go on or anywhere near the railway line under any circumstances. This is one of the key safety rules emphasised in the Safety Briefing Document. The track area is strictly off-limits to all volunteers for their own safety. Any work that might require access to track areas must be carried out by qualified railway staff with appropriate training and authorisation.

Logistics and operations

How often should our group visit the station?

Your group should determine a regular schedule based on the maintenance needs of your projects and the availability of your volunteers. This should be outlined in your Initial Outline Plan.

How do we handle watering of plants?

When planning your planting, consider water access at the station. Hosepipes are discouraged as they create tripping hazards. Your Initial Outline Plan should detail how you will source water and maintain plants, especially during dry periods.

Can we work alone at the station?

Lone working is discouraged for safety reasons. It's recommended that volunteers always work in pairs or groups.

What should we do if we notice vandalism or suspicious behaviour?

Report any signs of trespass, vandalism, or concerning behaviour to station staff if available. If staff are not present, contact British Transport Police on 0800 40 50 40 or text them on 61016. In emergencies, always call 999.

What equipment will Chiltern Railways provide?

Chiltern Railways will provide hi-vis vests and identification cards for all registered volunteers. Other tools and equipment must be supplied by the adoption group, however, funded is provided by Chiltern on an annual basis – more on this in the ‘Funding and support’ section.

What happens if our group can no longer continue with station adoption?

If your group can no longer continue with station adoption, please notify the Stakeholder Executive as soon as possible. They will work with you to either find a transition solution or properly close out your adoption status. Any Chiltern-issued equipment (such as hi-vis vests and ID cards) should be returned.

Can we hold events at our adopted station?

Events may be possible with prior approval from Chiltern Railways. Submit your event proposal to the Stakeholder Executive and Area Manager with sufficient notice, detailing the nature of the event, expected attendance, space requirements, and any potential impact on station operations or passengers.

How do we manage seasonal changes in our adoption activities?

Your adoption plan should consider seasonal variations in maintenance needs and volunteer availability. Winter might focus on planning, indoor projects, and minimal maintenance, while spring and summer could emphasise planting and more intensive gardening activities. Discuss seasonal strategies with us to ensure year-round station care while respecting volunteer capacity.

Can we involve local schools or community organisations in our work?

Yes, involving local schools, community organisations, and businesses is encouraged as it strengthens community connections. However, any formal partnerships or regular involvement of external groups should be discussed with us first. All participants must follow safety guidelines, and special considerations apply when involving young people under 18 or individuals with special needs.

Funding and support

What funding is available for station adoption groups?

Chiltern Railways provides an annual grant of £250 to each approved station adoption group to cover basic costs. Additional funding may be available on a case-by-case basis for specific projects or expenses.

How do we receive funding from Chiltern Railways?

Funding is sent directly to your group's bank account. Personal accounts cannot be used; payments must go to a business or community bank account. Bank details must be provided on the organisation's headed paper when onboarding.

When is funding distributed?

The annual £250 grant is typically disbursed by May of each financial year. Additional approved funding will be distributed as required following case-by-case review.

Can we seek additional funding from other sources?

Yes, groups are encouraged to explore additional funding opportunities through awards, grants, and sponsorships to support their station adoption activities.

What ongoing support does Chiltern Railways provide?

Support includes quarterly check-ins, invitations to events, funding opportunities, and ongoing collaboration with the Chiltern team on station maintenance and improvements.

Can we sell items or fundraise at the station?

Fundraising activities at the station require prior approval from Chiltern Railways. Submit your fundraising proposal to the Stakeholder Executive, clearly outlining what you plan to sell, where you would like to position yourselves, and how the funds will be used to benefit the station adoption project.

Are there opportunities for collaborative projects with other adoption groups?

Yes, Chiltern Railways encourages collaboration between station adoption groups. The quarterly newsletter and periodic network events provide opportunities to connect with other groups. Collaborative projects may be eligible for additional support or resources, especially when they demonstrate broader community benefits or innovative approaches to station enhancement.

Insurance and liability

Are station adopters covered by insurance?

Provided you are working within the area to which the general public has access to, or to which you have been given permission to access by Chiltern Railways, and you are part of an approved station adoption scheme working in accordance with your agreement with us, you are covered by Chiltern's insurance arrangements.

Are volunteers insured against injury to themselves?

Chiltern arranges liability insurance to cover bodily injury caused by Chiltern's negligence.

Is volunteers' personal property insured?

Chiltern has property insurance for its own assets, this cover would extend to volunteers' personal effects if the damage was caused by Chiltern's negligence.

Are volunteers insured for damage or injury they may cause to third-party property or a passer-by?

Yes, if the volunteers were liable for any damage, the claim from the third party would be made against Chiltern, who would be vicariously liable for their employees/representatives' negligent acts or omissions – if negligence was established

Do we need our own insurance policy?

It is a good idea to have your own insurance policy (if your group is working outside of Chiltern's property, at other locations in your town for example). However, Chiltern employees are not able to provide advice in this regard.

Data protection and communications

Why does Chiltern Railways collect personal information from volunteers?

Personal information is collected primarily to ensure volunteers' safety while on station premises, maintain accurate records of participants, facilitate communication, and manage identification cards and equipment.

How is volunteers' personal data kept secure?

All information is stored securely in the Tractivity platform and only accessed by authorised personnel. and is only kept for the duration of a person's time as a station adopter.

Can volunteers opt out of communications?

Yes, volunteers can choose whether they wish to receive stakeholder communications via email or post by indicating their preferences on the Volunteer Data Collection Form.

How long is volunteer data retained?

Personal data is kept only for the duration of a person's time as a station adopter, unless they agree to receive stakeholder communications, in which case data will be retained for that purpose after they leave the program.

What can we expect in the quarterly newsletter?

The quarterly newsletter typically includes updates on Chiltern Railways initiatives, highlights of successful station adoption projects across the network, upcoming events and opportunities, seasonal gardening tips, recognition of volunteer achievements, and important safety reminders. It's a great way to stay connected with the wider station adoption community and get inspiration for your own projects.

Can we put up posters or notices at our adopted station?

Yes, you can put up posters or notices at your adopted station with prior approval from Chiltern Railways. All materials must be submitted to the Stakeholder Executive for review before display. Approved posters must be placed in designated areas only (typically notice boards), and not on historical features, safety equipment, or within 2.5 meters of the platform edge. Content should be community-focused and aligned with station adoption goals.