

2024

# Annual Community Rail Report



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# Foreword

I am delighted to introduce the Chiltern Railways Annual Community Rail Report for 2024. This year has been another exciting year for the Chiltern Railways Stakeholder Team as we continue to build upon our commitment to community development across our network. Overall Chiltern Railways has created £1.3bn of social value to deliver our vision of Easier, Greener and Better journeys for local people.

Our 2024 Community Investment Fund has enabled us to support 11 excellent projects with £125,000 of funding this year. From creating and launching vibrant pieces of public artwork to delivering educational initiatives for local schoolchildren, we have created social value and lasting positive change for local communities.

The success of our Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) has been crucial. The Oxfordshire CRP and Heart of England CRP have implemented creative projects that meet local needs, such as the Rail for Refugees initiative, which helps refugee families with transport, and the rail trails project promoting leisure and tourism near our stations.

Our 11 station adoption groups, and 125 volunteers, deserve a special mention for their passionate work in enhancing and maintaining our stations, making them more attractive and welcoming places for passengers. Their dedication has been truly inspiring, and we are committed to expanding this programme to involve even more communities, especially on the southern part of our route, in the future.

Another key highlight this year was the 125th anniversary of London Marylebone station in March. We worked closely with residents' associations and community partners to mark the occasion in a variety of ways, from the creation of an exhibition explaining the station's history, to a celebration event with performances from local schools and musicians.

I also had the pleasure of speaking at the Community Stakeholder Conference this year, bringing together over 65 delegates, sharing examples and ideas of how we can collaborate with local communities and celebrate our achievements. The insight gained from the event will undoubtedly shape our future initiatives, ensuring that we continue to meet the needs of our communities.

As we look forward to 2025, the 200th year of the railways, our focus remains on strengthening our community ties, supporting local projects through our next Community Investment Fund and ensuring that our operations contribute positively to the areas we serve. We are really excited about the future of the railway and are committed to working collaboratively with our partners across the route to make Chiltern an Easier, Greener and Better railway for all.

**Vanessa Russell**

Human Resources Director



# Meet the Team



## **David Heathfield** **Head of Corporate Affairs**

David has been at Chiltern Railways for 10 years since joining from his previous career as a journalist. As Head of Corporate Affairs, David is responsible for our internal and external communications functions, including our stakeholder engagement and media relations teams.



## **Zach Bailey** **Regional Growth Manager**

Zach started at Chiltern as Stakeholder Manager in early-2022, following previous roles managing station operations at MTR Elizabeth Line and Transport for London. Zach became Chiltern's Regional Growth Manager in early 2024, now responsible for stakeholder engagement for major projects across our route such as Chiltern's delivery of the new rail route between Oxford and Milton Keynes.



## **Joshua van Haaren** **Stakeholder Manager**

Josh joined Chiltern in late-2024 following a varied career in stakeholder management and communications in the local authority, housing and energy industries. Josh is now responsible for Chiltern's engagement with MPs, Local Authorities and Destination Management Organisations.



## **Harry Burr** **Stakeholder Executive**

Harry joined the team alongside Josh in late-2024, and manages day-to-day relationships with our Community Rail Partnerships and station adoption groups. Harry has held previous roles in transport planning at engineering consultant Mott MacDonald and is a keen advocate for rail.



# Community Investment Fund

Investing in communities across the Chiltern Railways route is essential to furthering social, economic and environmental development. Applications for our 2024/25 CIF opened in early-2024 and we were pleased to announce the organisations we are funding in October 2024. Application criteria focused on groups operating within 5 miles of a Chiltern Railways station, with all projects required to justify how they would deliver social, economic or environmental benefits to local communities.

Our 2023/24 beneficiaries continued to go from strength to strength in 2024, as they completed their projects. These included:

## **Friends of Leamington Spa (Coronation Garden)**

expanding the beautiful station gardens by adding a Coronation Garden including two replica GWR heritage benches, and new planters, to create an inviting area for passengers to wait for trains.

## **Heart of England CRP (Rail Familiarity Sessions)**

partnerships with Syrian and Ukrainian refugee families to provide rail confidence building sessions and days out by planning 10 rail confidence sessions across Chiltern's network.

## **Baker Street Quarter Partnership (Marylebone Harewood Exit Refurbishment)**

transforming the secondary entrance to Marylebone with local interior architecture students, delivering a new historical exhibition and cartographic installation to celebrate the stations 125th anniversary.



# Community Investment Fund

(continued)

In October 2024, we announced funding for 11 projects as part of our 2024/25 Community Investment Fund. Projects included new artwork to celebrate community figures at Banbury Station, tree planting events and workshops at Gerrards Cross and the transformation of vacant space at London Marylebone into an artwork exhibition. We also installed murals celebrating heritage and diversity at Oxford Parkway and Bicester North, all contributing to our Easier, Greener and Better vision for travel.

Our first Community Investment Fund project of 2024 was delivered in October, The Feathers Association designed and installed a mural celebrating their 90th anniversary on the Rossmore Road bridge near Marylebone. Chiltern Railways unveiled this alongside Network Rail, Westminster City Council and the Lord Mayor of Westminster.

*“Bunny Bread’s artwork will serve as a powerful tribute to the impact we’ve had on generations of local youth, and we hope it inspires pride and connection within the community. We are incredibly grateful to Chiltern Railways for their generous support in making this vision a reality”*

**David Jones, CEO, The Feathers Association**



In addition, in November, the Marylebone on Display project, in partnership with the Baker Street Quarter and the Marylebone Project, launched its first artwork exhibition between 21st November and 15th January, created from a 12-week long art therapy programme with homeless women in the Marylebone area. We look forward to seeing the next few exhibitions promoting other local businesses and charities take place in 2025.



# Community Rail Partnerships

We value the work of our Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) who do a fantastic job engaging our communities. Our two Community Rail Partnerships are Oxfordshire CRP covering 6 stations in Oxfordshire and Heart of England CRP covering 7 stations in Warwickshire and the West Midlands.

We reached out and asked our CRPs what their highlights were of working with us in 2024. Here's what they had to say.



## Oxfordshire CRP

### **Banbury, Kings Sutton, Bicester North, Bicester Village, Islip, Oxford Parkway**

Reflecting on a full and exciting first full year of grassroots project delivery, we have thrived with support from Chiltern Railways and community partners. In 2023/24, two new community projects were launched.

The Getaway programme engaged 115 young people from four community groups across Oxfordshire in confidence-building rail trips, while the Taste for Travel project promoted two new leisure trails for Bicester North and Banbury stations. These trails encouraged sustainable exploration of the county and promoted leisure and tourist attractions supporting local businesses.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the Moving Murals project, where youth groups in Banbury and Oxford will create community art celebrating local voice and sustainability. Chiltern Railways will join OxCRP in early 2025 to unveil these exhibitions at Oxford Parkway with a launch event for stakeholders, press, and community members. Additionally, OxCRP Community Rail Development Officer, Alayne McDonald, was recognised at the Community Stakeholder Conference, receiving the Outstanding Individual Contribution award. Since launching in September 2023, OxCRP has built a strong partnership with Chiltern Railways, looking forward to further collaboration to deliver for social, environmental, and economic benefits in the county.

Learn more at [www.oxfordshirecommunityrail.org](http://www.oxfordshirecommunityrail.org)

# Community Rail Partnerships

(continued)



## Heart of England CRP

**Leamington Spa, Warwick, Warwick Parkway, Hatton, Lapworth, Dorridge, Solihull**

2024 has seen the Heart of England CRP lead projects aimed at harder-to-reach communities in a way that develops a meaningful long-term connection between them and the railways. The core funding that Chiltern Railways has provided us with has been invaluable in helping us develop and deliver activities that support the 4 pillars of Community Rail. In the past year we've been able to provide funding for every station adoption group through our Small Grants Fund, deliver careers days and rail safety workshops to schools, partner with Stratford Literary Festival to launch a nationwide story-writing competition for young people and continue our ongoing activities such as promoting our Rail Trails.

One of our key projects that started at the end of 2023 and continued through 2024 was our Railway Explorations Commonwealth project. Funded through the Chiltern Railways Community Investment Fund this was a project designed to help refugees and asylum seeker in Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire to build their confidence and familiarity with the railways.

Working with Positive Youth Foundation and Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre in Coventry, and in partnership with the Refugee and Resettlement Officers at Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) and Warwickshire County Council (WCC) we planned rail confidence workshops and day trips out on the railways. As language can be a huge barrier to using the railways, we have produced resources in 9 different languages that cover everything from the details of the participants trips to the different types of tickets and other useful railway information.

Thanks to the funding provided by Chiltern Railways we have provided 17 trips to over 270 people and Solihull MBC are now looking for ways to do more events which encourage communities to mix as a direct result of the project. Future trips are being planned, including a Christmas ice-skating trip for families in Solihull. None of this would have been possible with the vital funding and support that the CRP receive from Chiltern.

**Learn more at [www.heartcommunityrail.org.uk](http://www.heartcommunityrail.org.uk)**



# Station Adopters

We have 11 active Station Adoption groups across our route in the West Midlands, Warwickshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, bringing local ownership to their stations.



There is the opportunity to expand our station adoption network in 2025, especially on the southern parts of our route in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Greater London. We are inspired by the creativity and dedication of our adopters in making our stations welcoming places to be for our passengers. Our current station adoption network includes:

**Friends of Moor Street Station**

**Friends of Solihull Station**

**Friends of Dorridge Station**

**Friends of Lapworth Station**

**Friends of Hatton Station**

**Friends of Warwick Station**

**Friends of Leamington Spa Station**

**Friends of Bicester North Station**

**Friends of High Wycombe Station**

**Friends of Stoke Mandeville Station**

**Friends of Aylesbury Station**

# Station Adopters

## (continued)

Key highlights for our station adoption groups include:

### At Dorridge

Our station adoption group at Dorridge won the Chiltern Community Project of the Year award for their fantastic work in restoring Dorridge station booking office and waiting room, part-funded by Chiltern and the Heart of England CRP, and Dorridge subsequently reached the final of the World Cup of Stations, beaten only by Maghull in Merseyside – we're so proud of Dorridge for this achievement.



### At Aylesbury

Dave Furze, a key individual in our Aylesbury station adoption group, won Chiltern's Community Recognition Award at our Community Rail Conference in October. Dave has led the adoption group over the last 5 years, working with the Town Council to install themed planters and artwork at the station



### At Solihull

Our station adoption group at Solihull won Station Adoption Group of the Year at our Community Rail Conference. The team have gone from strength to strength in 2024, including tending the beautiful station planters, installing historic displays in the waiting room and teaming up with local businesses to promote attractions in the town centre





# Station Adopters

(continued)

## At Bicester North

During the summer, the station adoption group continued to maintain the 90m long by 5m wide flower bed. The colourful planting received compliments from Chiltern customers throughout the year. The adopters have also installed a decorated Christmas tree in the booking office.



## At High Wycombe

Chiltern Rangers and Buckinghamshire New University have been busy revitalising the whole station, including improving the station gardens, adding new local area artwork, and planting a new wildflower meadow.





# Station Adopters

(continued)

## At Lapworth

A new tap has been installed, to help more effectively deliver watering, organised by Network Rail. In addition, the former phone box at the station has been converted into a book exchange by the local Guides group, and posters have been commissioned from the Canal and River Trust and National Trust to highlight walks from the station to local sights, to be installed shortly.



## At Leamington Spa

The adoption group at Leamington Spa unveiled its new Coronation Garden, funded by our Community Investment Fund. The project includes two replica GWR heritage benches, and new planters, to create an inviting area for passengers to wait for trains



Interested in station adoption and want to find out more? Visit our website on [www.chilternrailways.co.uk/sustainability/community](http://www.chilternrailways.co.uk/sustainability/community), or email us on [adoptastation@chilternrailways.co.uk](mailto:adoptastation@chilternrailways.co.uk).



# Community Rail Network

The Community Rail Network (CRN) serves as a catalyst for the community rail movement, collaborating with train operating companies across Great Britain alongside corporate partners to actively engage communities.



This year, we have taken part in several activities in partnership with the Community Rail Network, such as:

### Attendance at Community Rail Network events, webinars and awards

including the Community Rail Conference in Nottingham in October.

### Providing input to CRP accreditation

specifically Oxfordshire CRP and the renewal for Heart of England CRP.

### Participation in CRN's Community Rail Week

including a promotional stand for community rail at Birmingham Moor Street.

### Inviting CRN to attend our 125th anniversary celebrations

at London Marylebone.

*"The positive commitment towards community rail activities by Chiltern Railways staff at all levels of the business is particularly pleasing to note as is the provision of a community project fund. Community Rail Network have an excellent relationship with the Chiltern Railways community rail team, collaborating on events and activities and presenting at the annual Community Rail & Stakeholder Conference"*



**Paul Webster, Regions Support Manager, Community Rail Network**

## New evidence on impact



# Business Engagement

We have been proactively developing relationships with local businesses and Business Improvement Districts, who support in enhancing our stations and providing a vital link to the local communities we serve.

## Baker Street Quarter Partnership

Our relationship with the Baker Street Quarter Partnership, who cover the area around Marylebone and Baker Street stations has been really rewarding this year. In both 2023/24 and 2024/25, they were beneficiaries of our Community Investment Fund, delivering key projects at our main London terminus station such as Marylebone on Display and rejuvenating the Harewood Road entrance to the station, to celebrate Marylebone's 125th anniversary.

This project involved working with a local artist Clare Hamman, and students at the University of Westminster to tell the story of the history of London Marylebone, including when residents fought for the station to be saved during closure plans in the 1980s. The team also delivered a cartographic representation of Chiltern's railway network and relationship with the Marylebone community which is on show at the station.

Baker Street Quarter Partnership also ran the Make It Marylebone campaign, promoting tourism to key hotels and attractions to the area through a joint Marketing campaign at Marylebone station. Other collaborations have included the installation of a new pop-up food truck, to deliver additional hot food options for Chiltern's customers and local office workers outside the station. A key aim of this activity was also growing rail patronage across our route.





# Business Engagement

(continued)

## Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) and Chiltern Rangers

We have partnered with BNU in Buckinghamshire to provide funding through our Community Investment Fund to support them in rejuvenating parts of High Wycombe station, becoming the de-facto station adopters alongside local group Chiltern Rangers. They've been busy watering plants, weeding planters, making hanging baskets, and planting flowers in partnership with the local community, creating a more pleasant environment for customers.



## Yarnton Home and Garden

We have been really grateful to Yarnton Home and Garden, a garden centre based near our station at Oxford Parkway in Kidlington, for their support this year. During the World Cup of Stations they erected several planters at Oxford Parkway and promoted the competition on social media. The team have also added new planters to Bicester Village station, improving the look and feel for both regular commuters and one-off visitors.



## Banbury Business Improvement District (BID)

We have collaborated closely with the team at Banbury BID this year, including delivering a local area photo gallery on the staircases and promoting local businesses and events on their new noticeboard located in the waiting area at the station. Looking ahead we are delivering another artwork exhibition at the station focusing on promoting the different communities who live and work in the town.

# Charity Partnerships

We pride ourselves in working closely with charities to get the best social value for communities not just on our route but across the country. This year, charity funding went to two charities, focusing on supporting young people in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) across the Chiltern route.

## National Literacy Trust

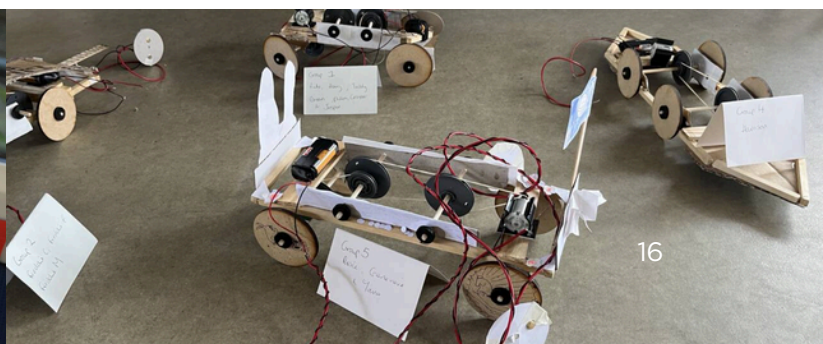
The National Literacy Trust (NLT) were Chiltern's primary charity partner for 2024 and focus on helping people change their life chances through the power of words – reading, writing, speaking and listening. We were pleased to support NLT with not just charity funding this year but also funding from our Community Investment Fund.

Our funding to NLT, including delay repay compensation customers donated, and lost property (around £12k in the last 12 months), helped deliver their 'Dream Big for STEM' programme, a career-focussed literacy programme. This year, the programme reached an amazing 90 primary school children across 2 schools in the Birmingham area with high levels of deprivation, proudly supported by 12 Chiltern volunteers. As part of our funding, 442 books were donated to school libraries and 97 donated to children.

## Primary Engineer

In our third year working with Primary Engineer, we continued to inspire the next generation of engineers, this time in Banbury. The partnership provided the opportunity for 5 schools to benefit from training and resources to build 30 rail related projects in each school, including a celebration event to bring the schools together and celebrate the power of engineering.

In February and June 2024, Primary Engineer delivered virtual training, joined by 5 teachers who were excited to build their confidence in delivering STEM projects to pupils. According to their impact report, they reached 300 pupils, with 100% of teachers agreeing that their pupils now have a greater understanding of what engineering is and its importance, agreeing that their pupils enjoyed learning about engineering.

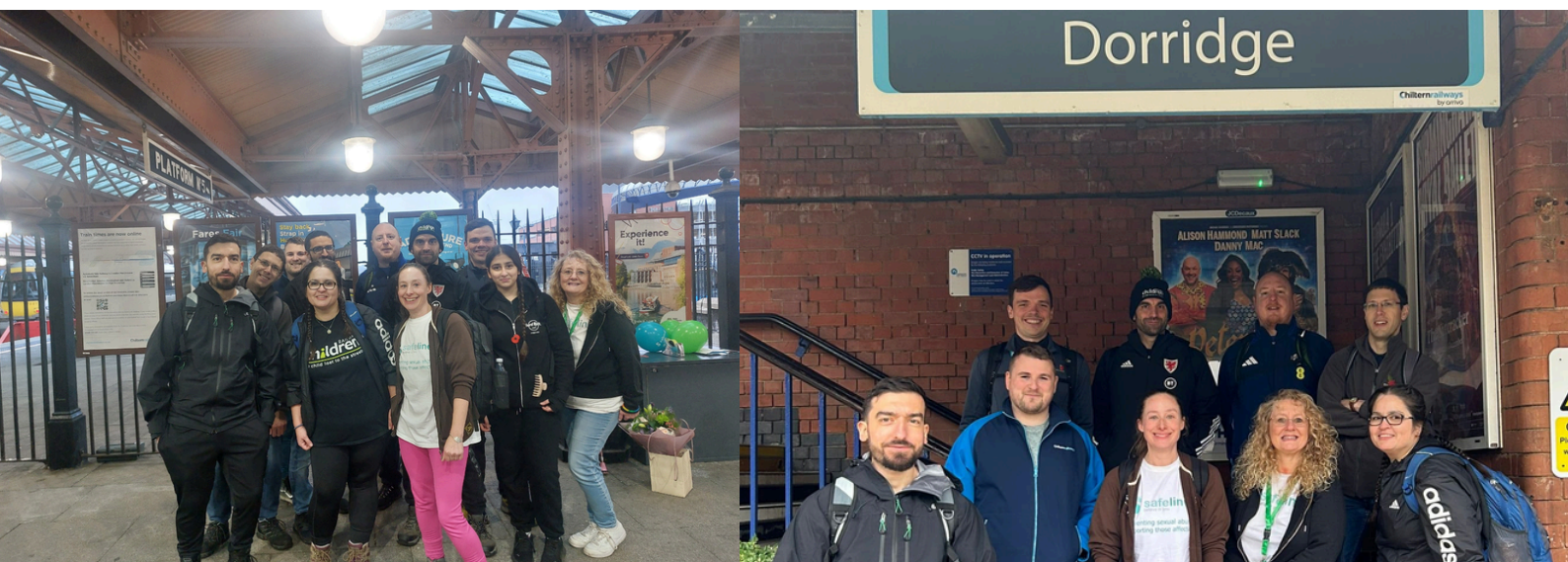




# Colleague Engagement

At Chiltern, our core values define how we engage internally and externally, and our colleagues live and breathe these values every day. Our values are Caring Passionately, Doing the Right Thing and Making a Difference. As part of these values, and in addition to our strong community partnerships, we ensure that our staff have opportunity to make positive social change in their communities.

At Chiltern we have volunteer days available to all staff every year – a key example of the usage of these days was by two of our colleagues, Laura and Rehana, who walked between Birmingham Moor Street and London Marylebone, around 159km, over 13 weeks, to raise money for the Railway Children. They raised an amazing £2,000. Well done to Laura and Rehana!



We committed £3,000 to our colleague community fund this year, providing the ability for Chiltern colleagues to apply for funding to be used in their local community. This year, this has been used to fund organisations including the Birmingham Children's Hospital, the Motor Neurone Disease Association, and local groups such as Aylesbury Town Corinthians and Bearbrook Combined School with grants provided of between £250 and £500 per organisation.

# Community Stakeholder Conference

In mid-October 2024, Chiltern Railways held its annual Community Stakeholder Conference at the Royal Pump Rooms in Leamington Spa, a five-minute walk from our beautiful Grade 2 listed station. From station adopters and CRPs to local authorities and neighbouring train operating companies, we had a wide variety of passionate delegates in attendance which enabled engaging and diverse discussion.

The day started with a tour of Foundry Wood, a managed access woodland near to Leamington Spa station, the recent expansion of which was funded by the 2023/24 Community Investment Fund. The 2-acre wood is between the Chiltern Main Line and the line to Coventry and is spearheaded by the Achieving Results in Communities charity.

We began the day with a Chiltern Railways update from Vanessa Russell, HR Director and community projects update from Zach Bailey, Regional Growth Manager, and an introduction to our two new starters, Harry Burr and Joshua van Haaren. Our first guest speaker, Jools Townsend, Chief Executive of the Community Rail Network, then spoke about engaging and empowering communities to unlock social value, and after lunch, Penny Alexander, Chief Executive of the Baker Street Quarter Partnership, discussed collaborating with the business community at London Marylebone.





# Community Stakeholder Conference

(continued)

Harry Burr introduced our group discussion around how communities can join in the celebration of Railway 200 across the Chiltern network, which will be outlined when we conclude. Some great ideas were generated and we will feed into our wider business planning around Railway 200.

Finally, we closed the day with our Community Rail Awards, recognising those key to our community rail schemes, including station adopters and CRPs. This year, the winners were:



# Finance and Project Funding

At Chiltern Railways, we have continued to support the development of the communities across our route, to better the lives of our rail users, partners and residents. In line with our obligations to the Department for Transport, we are transparent about our spending on community rail projects. We have outlined below our historic and anticipated future spending on community rail activities in the table below.

## Community Rail Partnerships

This table outlines the funds distributed and projected for our CRPs for 2024 and the next three years. The amount was increased in 2024 to account for inflationary pressures and enabling our CRPs to deliver more community projects. It also supported the expansion of the newly formed Oxfordshire CRP and appointment of an additional CRP Officer for the Heart of England CRP.

Both CRPs have agreed that they have been engaged with us to provide appropriate funding to support the aims and objectives of the CRP, including acknowledgement of recent funding increases.

Community Rail Partnership Core Funding					
	2023 (historic)	2024 (current)	2025 (forecast)	2026 (forecast)	2027 (forecast)
<b>Oxfordshire CRP</b>	£7,500	£15,000	£15,000	£15,000 + inflation	£15,000 + inflation
<b>Heart of England CRP</b>	£7,500	£15,000	£15,000	£15,000 + inflation	£15,000 + inflation

*“Community Rail Network are once again happy to support the proposed allocations of core funding as listed in the table to the CRPs in the Chiltern Railways network. We recognise the increases Chiltern has made to core funding in 2024/5, but note the need for funding to continue to increase by inflation in the coming years. The goal to see these amounts index linked for future settlements was discussed, and sufficient account has been taken of our views. Station adoption groups are also very well supported through grant funding and encouragement to register with Community Rail Network.”*



**Paul Webster, Regions Support Manager, Community Rail Network**



# Finance and Project Funding

(continued)

## Project Funding

We received a higher value Community Investment Fund from the Department for Transport in 2024, with 12 community partners receiving funding. Once the 2025 budget is confirmed we will open the application process for a new round of funding.

Community Investment Fund	
2023/24 (historic)	£126,000
2024/25 (current)	£145,000

## Charity Partners

This table outlines the grant funding allocated to our two charity partners who work on STEM projects closely with schools across our network.

Charity Partner Grant Funding		
	2023 (historic)	2024 (current)
Primary Engineer	£4,445	£5,250
National Literacy Trust	£5,635	£10,000
		£12,522 (delay repay/lost property)
<b>Total</b>	<b>£10,080</b>	<b>£27,772</b>

## Colleague Community Fund

We intend to retain this at the same amount in 2025.

Colleague Community Fund	
2024 (current)	£3,000
2025 (proposal)	£3,000

## Station Adoption Groups

We took on two new station adoption groups this year, providing them each with a £250 grant. We intend to raise this for all groups next year as the figure has not changed since before the pandemic and the cost of materials has increased significantly.

Station adoption group grants			
Station adoption group	2023 (historic)	2024 (current)	2025 (proposal)
Friends of Moor Street	£250	£250	£300
Friends of Solihull	£250	£250	£300
Friends of Dorridge	£250	£250	£300
Friends of Lapworth	£250	£250	£300
Friends of Hatton	£250	£250	£300
Friends of Warwick	£250	£250	£300
Friends of Leamington Spa	£250	£250	£300
Friends of Bicester North	£250	£250	£300
Friends of High Wycombe	£250	£250	£300
Friends of Stoke Mandeville	£0	£250	£300
Friends of Aylesbury	£0	£250	£300
<b>Total</b>	<b>£2,250</b>	<b>£2,750</b>	<b>£3,300</b>

# Our Plans for 2025

2024 has been a busy year for Chiltern and the Stakeholder team, and we are excited to keep delivering our community programme in 2025. Here is a quick preview of our plans.

2025 is an important year for the railway and we will have a whole year of celebrations throughout 2025, celebrating 200 years since the first operational railway opened in Great Britain. We are excited to be participating in the programme, with schemes that will be announced shortly and across the year. In the meantime, don't hesitate to drop us a line if you have ideas or would like to support.

We are also aiming to expand our station adoption programme, especially on the southern parts of our route in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Greater London, contributing to several key social benefits on our route including reduction of loneliness and creating more lively stations.

Throughout the first half of 2025, our 2024/25 Community Investment Fund partners will launch their new projects and continue to deliver where already started:

## **Banbury BID**

new artwork along Banbury's station overbridge and leading to the gateline

## **Roald Dahl Museum**

collaboration with a local school to create a Roald Dahl mural at Great Missenden

## **The Tree Council**

series of pop-up events and workshops covering tree planting at Gerrards Cross

## **The Feathers Association**

design and erection of a mural celebrating their 90th anniversary on the Rossmore Road bridge near Marylebone

## **National Literacy Trust**

working with a school in the Marylebone area on rail-themed literacy education

## **Baker Street Quarter**

transformation of vacant wall spaces through art at Marylebone station



# Our Plans for 2025

(continued)

## **Buckinghamshire New University / Chiltern Rangers**

artwork for High Wycombe station overbridge and planting around the station

## **Jericho**

organising rail trips for individuals such as survivors of modern slavery

## **Oxfordshire CRP**

heritage and diversity murals at Oxford Parkway and Bicester North

## **Cressex School**

integrated rail trips to fit the school curriculum

## **Catch 22**

music performances at Marylebone and High Wycombe

Subject to funding approval we will launch our 2025/26 Community Investment Fund in late Spring 2025, with projects being announced in the Summer.

Overall, next year is looking to be another busy one for Chiltern Railways, and we look forward to working with all our partners and creating an easier, greener and better railway for our communities. As always, we'll continue to share updates of our exciting progress through 2025.



# Chilternrailways

