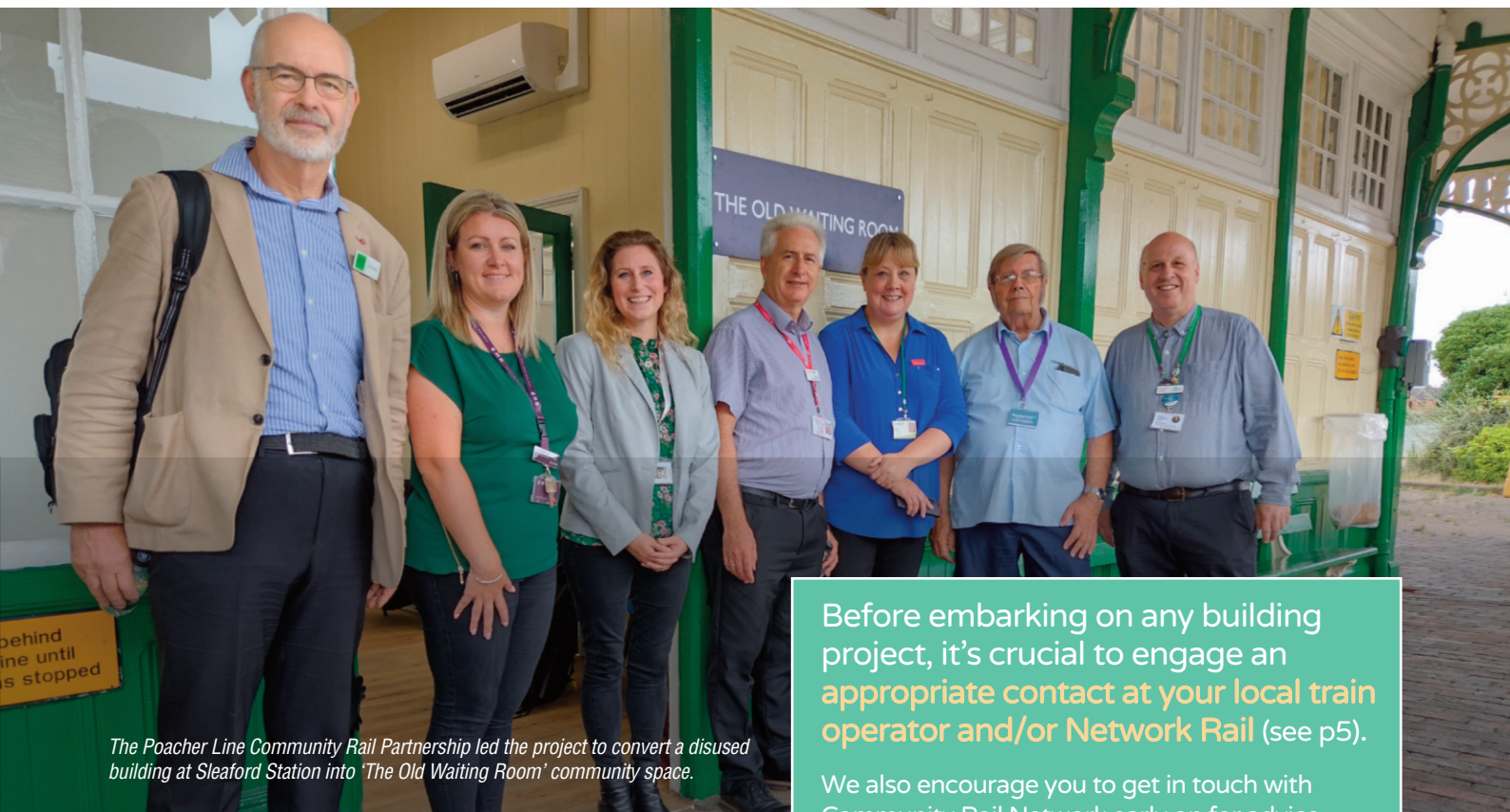


# Considerations for community re-use of redundant railway stations and buildings



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*The Poacher Line Community Rail Partnership led the project to convert a disused building at Sleaford Station into 'The Old Waiting Room' community space.*

**This checklist and other advice has been produced to help community groups who are considering potential re-use of redundant or currently out-of-use spaces and rooms at railway stations or other railway buildings.**

It is not an exhaustive list of things to consider, or a document intended to put off prospective re-use of rooms or station buildings, but should be regarded as prompts for further conversations and investigations before embarking on your scheme. **Please remember that Community Rail Network can offer support and advice at every stage of station building projects, and may also be able to assist with funding for such work.**

Before embarking on any building project, it's crucial to engage an **appropriate contact at your local train operator and/or Network Rail** (see p5).

We also encourage you to get in touch with Community Rail Network early on for advice and signposting (see p4), including on available funding sources.

It is essential to have the **appropriate rail industry permissions** to undertake even preliminary visits and inspections. Your rail industry contacts will also help you to ensure that **everyone is kept safe** from the outset. Disused buildings can pose a range of risks and hazards, so it's essential to have a competent person advising and supervising as appropriate, ensuring health and safety regulations are followed.

It is important to consider the reasons why station rooms or buildings are currently redundant or out of operational use. Some may just have become surplus to requirements, but others may be out-of-use due to their condition or have significant structural or age-related reasons for their non-use.

Still keen to progress? Have a read through our 'Ten Ws' of questions and thoughts before you start.

### 1. **Why** is your group considering this scheme?

- What is the reason for the scheme? 'Because it should be saved' is not always a good answer. Have you canvassed your local community to identify a real need?
- What is the community purpose for the building and the outcome your group would like to see? Bear in mind that station building renovations are significant projects that can typically cost anything from £50,000 to £1million or more.
- Will your group be using it, or is it being restored for use by others?
- Who is funding and paying for the surveys, renovation and fitting out of the building?
- Can a feasibility study be undertaken and business plan developed, drawing on local input?
- How does the scheme align to a local community identity and other community buildings in the area?

### 2. **Who** owns the building?

- It is essential to establish and involve the building landlord at an early stage, which could be Network Rail, a train operating company (if the station is leased to them), and/or the local authority or a private landlord. To confirm this, speak to your contact(s) within Network Rail or your train operator. If you cannot find a contact, ask Community Rail Network.
- Consider what type of leasing will be needed – two-party or tri-partite, and what are the fees? We advise community rail partnerships and groups to **always** steer away from taking on a Full Repairing Lease. Instead, look at securing an Internal Repairing Lease and ensure breakpoints are built into this (we can advise further on leasing arrangements).
- Has a full building condition survey been completed, and have you been able to review this?
- Are full architects' drawings needed if the project is complex or needs sympathetic restoration?

### 3. **Watertight** and structurally sound?

- From outside, check the roof, canopies, chimneys, guttering and downpipes for condition, moss growth, or sprouting trees and bushes. Walking around with a trusted builder may enable them to advise on structural integrity, but always check beforehand with your Network Rail and/or train operator contact(s), as work on stations may have to be undertaken by approved contractors.
- Are all rooftiles and flashings in place and secure? Gaps in the roof could be allowing water to get into the roof space which if left unchecked could mean damage and expensive roof repairs may be needed.
- If you aren't sure about the condition of any part of the structure, ask a surveyor to investigate.

### 4. **Walls** and ceilings

- From inside the building, are there signs of water ingress?
- Do walls feel damp or show any signs of condensation? Is there any smell of damp or mould?
- Are there significant cracks in the structure or mortar?
- Do you need the building to be heated? If so, is there a modern/efficient way of providing heating? If you are unsure, ask a heating engineer to advise.
- Infestations - are there signs of mice, rats, pigeons, bees, or woodworm? These can be tricky and expensive to remove and may need the involvement of specialists to do so. For example, protected species such as bats and newts need to be moved at the correct time of the year. Your train operator and/or Network Rail contact(s) may be able to assist with this.

## 5. Windows and doors

- Are there gaps around frames? Do the sashes, locks and fastenings operate satisfactorily to ensure they are secure, watertight and of a standard to offer appropriate insulation and conserve energy?
- Are there planning conditions specifying the materials that must be used for new doors and windows?

## 6. Wiring and electricity

- For safety reasons, it is important to have all electrical circuits and wiring fully tested by a qualified and competent electrician before commencing any work, and to find out if a full re-wire might be needed.
- Ensure the electrical supply matches the intended use of the building. The supply rating to service an older railway property may not be suitable for the range of electrical equipment installed to meet the requirements in a modernised building.
- Limit your own inspection simply to a basic functional check of undamaged switches, and only visually check the external condition and age of fittings and the main consumer panel.

## 7. Water

- Is the building connected to a fresh water supply that is operational?
- Does the water supply have sufficient pressure for your intended use and equipment?

## 8. Waste

- Where does the grey and 'brown' water go when it leaves the building? Are wastewater systems functional both on and beyond the premises?
- Consider charges that may be made for wastewater run-off.
- How will waste generated by use of the building be minimised, disposed of, and recycled or repurposed?

## 9. Work permissions

- Gain full written permissions from Network Rail and your train operator about all aspects of your plans for the room or building re-use and ensure asset protection and risk assessments are complete.
- Consider if listed building consent and landlords' consent are a requirement for your intended use - which is highly likely for a historic structure.
- Consider if a change of use permission will need to be applied for from the local planning authority.
- Obtain a fire certificate and all approvals for use of the space.
- Ensure the building can comply with relevant accessibility requirements.

## 10. Wear and ongoing usage costs

- How will you pay for the upkeep of this project and how are exterior maintenance faults raised?
- What sustainable income streams have you identified to keep the building operational?
- Who will look after day-to-day running of the space including taking bookings, opening, and closing it?
- Check insurance liability should there be any accidents involving a third-party around the building.
- How will the regular charges and monthly costs be covered? Consider heating, lighting, water, rent or lease, insurance, rates, security, keys, alarms, and upkeep / maintenance.

Don't be daunted by this list: station building projects can take several months or even years to complete, so breaking a scheme into manageable stages is a good way to get started. There are many stunning station building renovations across the UK railway network which will turn these **'Ten W's'** into a single **WOW!**

## Who can help?

### Community Rail Network

At Community Rail Network, we recognise that station building projects represent a significant undertaking for community groups and organisations. Giving unused railway buildings a new lease of life offers many advantages to communities, making stations more welcoming and hospitable, and delivering a wealth of economic, social, health and wellbeing benefits to local people.

As such, we are extremely keen to promote this area of development, and would encourage groups to consult us as early as possible as projects are being drawn up and developed. If you are a Community Rail Network member, you can get in touch with your **support and development team** lead for support and advice, or to enquire about **funding opportunities** related to station building projects.

If you are not a member, but would like to find out more about the support we can offer, visit the **join us** section of our **website**.

We may be able to accompany you on initial site visits, help to organise condition surveys, assist with the drawing up of architectural plans, offer ideas from other community rail partnerships and station groups, identify common problems/issues, and advise on fitting out for community use.

Station building projects can often be complex and time-consuming due to the processes involved, but our team are experienced in advising on potential issues, and committed to providing support and advice at every stage of the process.



*The Friends of Bishopstone Station have led on the renovation of the station's 1930s former parcels office, revamping the space as a community hub.*

### The Railway Heritage Trust

The **trust** assists operational railway companies in the preservation and upkeep of listed buildings and structures, and in the transfer of non-operational premises and structures to outside bodies willing to undertake their preservation.

It provides grants to projects which: support the restoration and/or reuse of listed buildings or structures; are in conservation areas; and which are owned by Network Rail. It can also support projects which are on parts of the National Highways Historical Rail Estate.

What grants can cover:

- contributions to project partnerships;
- enhancements to maintenance and restoration projects;
- the reinstatement of missing or demolished features of historic buildings and structures; and
- the repair of special fittings and equipment such as clocks, murals, memorials, and fixed furniture.

What grants can't cover:

- design fees;
- architects' fees;
- contingency;
- equipment/fittings.

Grants generally cover 40% of the heritage costs of a project. The trust can carry over liabilities for projects which are not completed in a designated financial year, as it recognises that projects can be subject to unforeseen delays. **Remember that Community Rail Network may be able to provide funding for costs not covered by the Railway Heritage Trust, for community rail partnerships and groups that meet our criteria.**

## Network Rail

Station building projects will involve working with rail industry partners, including Network Rail. You should initially get in touch with your usual Network Rail contact, which is likely to be a community rail representative such as a route communities lead. We can help identify suitable contacts if required. From there, your project may also involve departments including building assets, commercial property, asset protection, maintenance delivery, and station surveying.

To help in getting projects up and running, Network Rail advises it is useful to consider the following:

- Make sure you're talking to the right people;
- Have (and be able to present) a clear plan and/or business model for the proposed use of the building (something Community Rail Network can advise on);
- Be prepared to tackle structural and safety issues, and ready for any surveys/studies needed to inform costs and affect the ability to proceed with the project;
- Think about the practicalities of the building, and its ongoing maintenance/repair. Have a plan in place for who will be responsible for its upkeep;
- Ensure you have considered funding, both in the project planning phase, e.g. feasibility studies, and if/when the project progresses, e.g. leasing/maintenance fees;
- Be ready to discuss and take on legal responsibilities. Does your partnership/group have a clear, formalised structure suitable for a project of this kind? Can it ensure financial control and liability in relation to issues such as leasing, insurance, utilities etc.

## Train operator(s)

You will need to consult your train operator with regard to station building projects, and keep them informed of your plans/progress to ensure it complies with their own planned station improvement programmes and any relevant policies and procedures. To start this process, speak to the train operator's community rail representative or contact, which should be findable on their website (often their communities web page).

## Others

Depending on the proposed future use of the station building, we may be able to signpost you to other partner organisations for further specialist advice and support. For example, if you are intending to use the building as the base for a community business, an organisation such as the **Plunkett Foundation** may be able to assist, e.g. with business planning. Or if your plans involve links to sustainable or active travel, e.g. the creation of an active or 'multi-modal' travel hub, then we may be able to provide local contacts in organisations involved in our **Sustainable Transport Alliance**.



*Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership have transformed two redundant wooden platform buildings at Haltwhistle Station, converting them to flexible studio and office space to support local businesses.*

## Once you're up and running

Station building projects can take time to come to fruition, but can be hugely worthwhile for the communities involved. We have seen scores of projects where stations have been rejuvenated into community hubs through community-led projects supported by the railway and ourselves, with activities as varied as hospital radio stations, free food shops, community bike hires, community meeting and events spaces, art galleries, community cafes, museums and more. There are a range of examples outlined in our report on [Community Stations | innovative community uses for railway stations and land](#).

Each project is different and will have its own individual set of circumstances and challenges, but whether you are embarking on a station building project, or have started the process and come up against some barriers or challenges, we can offer support. We can also connect you to a community rail partnership or station group who may have been in a similar situation and found ways to overcome the issues they faced.

Using the experience of the projects they have led on, some 'top tips' from Community Rail Network members outlining key issues once projects have progressed to the delivery stage are summarised below.

### Top tips from Community Rail Network members:

- Remember the five Ps – passion, perseverance, patience, people, and public support;
- Keep a work diary outlining each stage of the project. This can provide vital evidence, particularly if supplemented by pictures of the ongoing work;
- Factor in sustainability. Is your building fit to accommodate efficient/modern energy systems? Are there listed building issues to consider?
- Engage your community at every stage. Listen, and be responsive and open to ideas;
- Use your local knowledge and expertise to retain some aspect of control over the project, even if others are doing the bulk of the work, e.g. external contractors;
- Use local companies/tradespeople if possible;
- Carefully consider and study lease or rental agreements. Can you agree a tripartite lease (e.g. with Network Rail, the train operator, and your group), and/or negotiate a peppercorn rent? Think about the length of term. Ensure your readiness to deal with legal matters and contact a local solicitor for legal advice;
- Use your networking and contacts. Talk to other groups who have completed similar projects. Engage your local MP and other dignitaries, and/or major local organisations relevant to the project.

For more information on all the support Community Rail Network can offer, visit [www.communityrail.org.uk](http://www.communityrail.org.uk)



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