



**Community  
Rail Awards  
2024**

*It's Your Station*

**Entry Toolkit**





# Community Rail Awards 2024

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## 1. 'It's Your Station' in context

**Station adoption groups make a valuable contribution to the community rail movement, helping communities get the most from their stations, and turning stations and their surroundings into welcoming, thriving, and celebratory gateways and hubs. At a time when we want to encourage people to use public transport, and empower people to improve their local areas, station adoption is more important than ever.**

We want to thank you for all the amazing work you do with your station. This is your chance to let others know about the station you love and the work you do. The 'It's Your Station' category recognises and rewards the hard-working people who maintain station gardens, displays, and the station environment, on a voluntary basis across the network.

There will be recognition of your tireless efforts, some awards, and, for a lucky few, a cash prize. Please do enter this year's 'It's Your Station' category – we'd love to hear from you and help celebrate with you and the hundreds of other station adoption groups across the country.

This guidance aims to support you in showcasing your station in the best possible way. It is hoped that this guidance will ensure station adoption groups across the network are able to engage with the 'It's Your Station' category year on year.

If you're not sure whether you qualify to enter – we can assure you, you absolutely do! And, as always, the team at Community Rail Network are here to help. Please take ten minutes to read through our helpful guidelines below. If you need any extra help, **just get in touch.**



## 2. How it works

**Continuing with guidelines introduced in 2020, there is no single 'It's Your Station' category winner. Instead, entries are placed into one of four bands: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. Every accepted entry is guaranteed at least a Bronze certificate. Judges will assess every entry, awarding points in four sections: Community, Gardening, Art & Heritage, and Sustainability. A brief description of what we are looking for in each section appears in Section 3.**

The total points achieved will place your entry into one of the four bands referred to above. The highest scoring entries in each band will be shortlisted, and the groups concerned will be notified in advance of the band in which they have been placed. The top scoring entry in each band is recognised as outstanding at that level and will be presented with a trophy and cash prize on stage at the 2023/24 Community Rail Awards. All entries can collect their certificates at the Awards evening.

**Entries are invited from** station groups or community groups directly involved with looking after the nominated station.

**Essential requirements:** Entries must describe the work you have done or are doing to improve your station garden and environment. You must include before and after images (relevant to when the work started) with your entry, and other suitable evidence, clearly showing the station environment and how it has been improved.

**Note:** Our judges are no longer able to make personal visits to stations, so you must make sure that your entry is well supported by photographs and video footage, as this will be the only opportunity to showcase your station and the work you've been doing. The purpose of this toolkit is to support you in making the most of your entry to the 'It's Your Station' category. In order to help you prepare and focus appropriately in advance of the entry date, we also have some drop-in sessions with this category's judges, on Zoom, during June. This is where you can ask questions or seek advice directly from them in advance of submitting your entry in September. Visit the Events Diary on the Community Rail Network website ([www.communityrail.org.uk](http://www.communityrail.org.uk)) to view the drop-in schedule.



### 3. Judging Assessment Criteria

To support you with your submission, below you will find further details on the different areas of achievement our judges will be looking for.

The judges will award points for all four sections of the criteria, and each entry will receive a grant total of points assessed out of 100. The number of points correlates to the below banding:

#### Points Band

90 - 100	Platinum
70 - 89	Gold
40 - 69	Silver
Up to 39	Bronze

Each entry will also receive feedback on areas of achievement as well as areas for development.



### The Criteria

#### Community (30% or 30 points)

Stations serve as a base for events to bring people together, to increase involvement in and support for station adopters' work and spread community rail messages further. Community events at stations can attract people to the area, boost the local economy, and encourage green travel.

From a small group who meet at the station each week and advertise in the local paper, to a joint effort including local groups, local sponsorship, and funding – it all counts, and we'd like to hear about it.

Perhaps your group is working towards things such as:

- Being inclusive of and representing local people and the community.
- Engaging with the local community to collaborate and participate in the planning and delivery of projects and in publicising its activities.
- Getting support to further activities by sponsorship, council grants, in-kind aid, etc.
- Working in partnership with the rail industry (e.g., Community Rail Partnerships, train operators, Network Rail, British Transport Police)
- Providing local information at the station (e.g., bus timetables, taxi information, directions to particular destinations, information about the station group)
- Making a positive difference at the station.

## Gardening (30% or 30 points)

Gardening activities at stations are about people coming together, learning new skills, and creating an environment that people can enjoy.

This helps to create feelings of pride, belonging, and a sense of place, and benefits health, wellbeing, and community cohesion. Often, areas that have become neglected or disused can be brought back to life, creating real impact and a sense of achievement.

Whatever the size of your gardening projects – whether they be small planters, hanging baskets and window boxes, or larger floral displays, food growing initiatives and biodiversity projects – we'd love to see the progress you've made.

Use your entry to show us how your group is employing good gardening practices, such as:

- High quality, colour, and variety of planting.
- Changing, maintaining, and caring for displays throughout the year.
- Making best use of available sites (e.g., using planters and hanging baskets when garden area is limited, maximising use of garden area, etc.)
- Creativity in planting.
- Growing vegetables, fruit, and herbs as well as flowering plants.
- Utilising gardening to enhance the overall station environment.

## Art & Heritage (20% or 20 points)

Stations provide a fantastic focal point for community art. They provide public and affordable space at the centre of communities, opening up art to a wider audience. Community rail groups involve local people in creating murals, sculptures, posters, and exhibitions to adorn stations. The presence of such artwork helps to create a feeling of ownership in station environments, with bold and colourful pieces making stations brighter and more attractive spaces for passengers.

If you have worked with a local school or artist and displayed their work on your station, take a snap of the work and the display board. We'd love to see the results.

To be awarded points in this section, show us how you are embracing creativity and artistic practices such as:

- Displaying artwork that impacts the station by showing skill and imagination.
- Engaging local artists, schools, or other community groups to be involved in the design and delivery of artwork at the station.
- Displaying heritage installations that have a railway or local historical theme (e.g., signage or other artefacts)
- Creating artistic displays that celebrate and connect the railway with the community.



## Environment & Sustainability (20% or 20 points)

Community rail is playing an increasing role in enhancing environmental sustainability via biodiversity, gardening, and wildlife projects, developing stations as green spaces offering multiple benefits to communities and ecosystems.

If your station group is passionate about addressing environmental issues, we'd like to hear about it. Perhaps you have been working towards:

- Improving the station environment by litter-picking, leaf-clearing, weeding platforms, etc.
- Creating or maintaining green space.
- Addressing sustainability by rainwater harvesting, composting, recycling, etc.
- Supporting wildlife with bug hotels, bird/bat boxes, pollinator friendly planting, etc.
- Planning for the future and sharing knowledge and skills.



## 4. Key tips and rules for taking better photographs and videos. *By Paul Bigland, railway photographer and writer.*

Here you will find some simple tips and tricks (starting with the most important one first) to help you take better photographs and videos to showcase your work on stations and improve your submission to the 'It's Your Station' category of the Community Rail Awards.

### Photographs

**Read the manual:** You'd be amazed at the number of people who never read up on what their increasingly clever little gizmos are capable of. Taking time to read up on how to use your phone's camera settings can save a lot of frustration later. Phones like the Samsung Galaxy have an extensive range of shooting options. Learning what they do and when to use them really will help you get better pictures.

**Low resolution pictures/videos:** A very common problem is people taking pictures when the actual file size is far too small. This causes the picture to pixelate when it's enlarged. What might look good on your phone screen will look very different in print or on a computer monitor. Small files will save you filling up your phone's memory or SIM card, but there's no point in taking pictures you can't use. Go into the camera setting menu on your phone and set it to the maximum resolution and the image quality to its finest (you can always change them back later). This will give you the best chance of getting good quality pictures. It's also worth adjusting your ISO setting to its lowest on a sunny or bright day (say 100 or 200) to lessen the chance of them appearing grainy.



**Flare, glare, and reflections:** A difficulty with camera phones is that there's no lens hood to shield the camera from sunlight shining directly into the lens, which causes flare and those annoying white diamonds that spoil a picture. If possible, try not to take pictures 'into the sun'. Not only will it prevent the problem, but your subject will be better illuminated by natural light.

**When to use the flash:** There are times when you'll need to use the flash on your phone, but I'd recommend using it sparingly. Flash bounces back from people wearing high-vis clothing, creating pictures that are often underexposed and unnatural looking as it highlights the reflective strips on clothing and not a lot else. Also, remember that the range of flash on phones is very limited. If you're taking pictures of subjects more than 20 feet away, you're probably doing little more than wasting your battery. Of course, if you are in a situation where you're photographing people with the strong light behind them, flash is very good for filling in the shadows to highlight important details such as people's faces.





**Metering Modes:** If your phone camera is equipped with different metering modes (matrix, centre weighted and spot) you will find spot metering very useful for correctly exposing someone (or something) that's brightly lit against a dark background. As its name suggests, spot metering judges the amount of light on a specific spot in a picture, rather than trying to average it out and risk overexposure. If you need to take close-up pictures, check to see if your camera has different focus modes and select macro mode. Oh, and don't forget that helmet torches can be very useful for providing that extra bit of light you might need to get a decent picture.

**Moving objects:** Many camera phones don't like fast moving objects! They can struggle to focus and take a picture, so you miss the train, or the picture is blurred. Some phones have a 'sports' mode. If yours does – use it. With video – slow down! People panning too quickly often causes the camera to lose focus for a while.

**Composition:** Railways are incredibly photogenic so consider being creative as well as simply recording what you see. Don't always take photographs from eye level and think about what other angles and heights you could possibly use. Photography is as much about telling a story as simply recording things so it's worth putting some thought into what it is you want your pictures to say to the awards judges. To help with composition, photographers use what's known as 'the rule of thirds'. Imagine dividing your screen into thirds, with two vertical and two horizontal lines, then placing your main subject off centre at a point where two of the lines cross.

## Videos

Videoining is where you will be really able to 'show and tell' to the judges and showcase your station in the best way. Most modern phones are a good tool for making videos as well as taking still pictures. Many of the same rules regarding quality and checking your settings apply to both, but there are a few specialised tips – the main one being, video needs more thought than still pictures, as they last a lot longer. If you make a boo-boo, you'll need editing skills!

**Switch your phone to airplane mode:** You don't want to be interrupted by calls, messages, or alerts.

**Settings:** Check your phone's video settings to use high-definition filming. This may mean your phone's memory is filled quicker, but you can easily transfer your video to a computer. Making sure your battery is fully charged or carrying a battery pack also helps.

**Stabilising during filming:** Use both hands, a selfie stick, or a portable tripod. Many phones have a video stabilisation setting that you can turn on to avoid camera-shake as you film. You'll find this in your camera settings.

**Focus:** Tap 'lock focus', holding the part of the screen where you want it to be.

We're not expecting you to turn into Steven Spielberg, but putting a bit of thought into filming before you start pays dividends.

With video, it's also helpful to have a **storyboard** written in advance so you know what it is you want to capture. Be concise, but not too brief. Think through what it is you want to film before you do it. Making notes about what you may want to say on the commentary is also a good idea to stop yourself getting tongue-tied, using too many 'erms' or forgetting what it was you wanted to say. This way, you'll also know how long you may be filming for. Short, disjointed videos don't tell the same story as longer, well thought through films.



## Finally, here's some simple tips to remember:

- **Always hold your phone with two hands:** This minimises the chance of shaking causing blurred pictures – especially in low light.
- **Check your phone's camera lens is clean:** They spend a lot of time in your pocket and easily collect dust and dirt.
- **Keep your flash turned off until you think you need it:** This will save your battery.
- **Remember the different modes:** Portrait (upright) and landscape (lengthways). Use what works best, which is often landscape, unless you're interviewing someone.
- **Ask for help:** We really recommend that if you're feeling a little unsure or don't think you have the necessary skills, to please engage with someone that does! Don't be afraid to seek support from volunteers, family, friends, young people, etc, to help you with the photos and videos for your submission.

I hope these few tips and techniques will improve your photography and video and allow you to get the best from your camera or camera phone. But if not, don't forget - you can always use your phone to call up the experts!



## 5. Friends of Buxton Station – case study

**Friends of Buxton Station (FoBS) achieved platinum level in the 'It's Your Station' category at the Community Rail Awards in 2020.**

Below you will find FoBS's winning entry, which will hopefully give you a good idea of how to go about putting together your own written submission.

The 2020 criteria required entrants to describe in 600 words the work being done at their station to improve community participation / engagement; gardening achievement; and biodiversity / environmental responsibility, with accompanying photos.

### Concept

Throughout 2021, Friends of Buxton Station (FoBS) examined the way their work had adapted to account for changes introduced by the pandemic. They considered the group at the very heart of their community, having sought ways to support the work of other partner collectives, engaging with other, mostly volunteer groups, towards a common purpose.

Into 2022 and social distancing became less of a factor, allowing greater physical as well as supportive cohesion.



### What happened

The group became a core part of something else much larger.

Firstly, we worked with voluntary community group Buxton Sparkles to provide festive entertainment for the town's largest ever Christmas lights switch-on event.

FoBS revere Samuel Turner, due to his pivotal role in bringing railways to Victorian Buxton, launching the thermal spa resort. His Memorial structure stands in the heart of the town, something that the group "dress" with flower garlands throughout summer, clean frequently, and "festoon" with Christmas decorations.

Near to Turner's Memorial, members of FoBS noticed that the town centre map had been destroyed by vandalism. They petitioned the local Council to replace it but took it upon themselves to complete the task when action hadn't been taken several weeks later.

Each year, FoBS have committed to join in local commemorative events: Buxton Art Trail, Buxton Garden Trail, Buxton Flowerpot Trail, Carnival & Wells Dressing, Armistice Day, and Christmas festivities.

Along with their targeted bumblebee conservation programme, FoBS worked with Buxton Town Team members (a local Community Interest Company) to scatter wildflower seeds along the edge of Ashwood Park and two areas of town centre parkland.



## 5. Friends of Buxton Station – case study (continued)

When researching a reprint of their much-lauded Rail Ale Trail leaflet, FoBS worked with Transition Buxton (environmental group) to promote “The Buxton Cup,” a multi-use pint pot designed to replace single use disposables at outdoor Licensed premises.

The group were instrumental in stimulating a major landowner to consider gifting just under three Acres of land near the station to “the town of Buxton.” Negotiations are at an early stage and commercial sensitivities prevent more detail, but this land could become a Local Nature Reserve.

### Results

FoBS organised a carol concert as part of the Buxton Sparkles’ Christmas switch-on event, which was attended by an estimated 5,000-6,000 folk. Producing online publicity and printing 500 enlarged-print song-sheets, the group commissioned and donated a small fee to Fairfield Brass Band, a community ensemble.

The carol concert was held at Turner’s Memorial, where the group also garlanded Christmas lights. During the run-up to the Platinum Jubilee, the memorial was also decorated with 400 brightly coloured knitted flowers, created in partnership by the U3A’s “knit & natter” group. The flowers were kept in place until the end of Carnival season.

Turner’s Memorial has four waterspouts draining into troughs. The vegetative growth occasionally blocks drainage outlets, so FoBS clean and maintain them monthly.

When the damaged tourist map next to Turner’s Memorial wasn’t replaced, FoBS sourced one and fitted it after negotiating with the local Council.

The “Trail season” runs in parallel to Carnival. FoBS have supported the volunteer-run Art (Jubilee post-box), Flowerpot (Queen) and Garden (Japanese) Trails.



Three kilograms of wildflower seed were scattered along the verge of Ashwood Park, an area enhanced by Buxton Town Team in partnership with the Council.

Twenty pubs were visited during research for the revised Rail Ale Trail leaflet. FoBS introduced “The Buxton Cup” to publicans as an environmentally friendly approach to outdoor drinking, detailing availability and cost-benefits.

A most exciting prospect can’t receive too much coverage here, suffice to mention that FoBS got a team together to encourage donation of unused and overgrown land, which can provide a wildlife haven near the town centre.

