



Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Strategic Plan: 2026 to 2031

'A world-class narrow-gauge railway for everyone'



Foreward

As the new Chair of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway (L&BR) Trust I'm in a very privileged position to help drive the development of our unique heritage railway. The physical and financial investment by those who have been a part of the story so far should not be underestimated: we genuinely appreciate the legacy of those before us.

After more than 35 years of continual development the L&BR is at a pivotal moment in our evolution with ongoing improvement activities at Woody Bay, Blackmoor (the Old Station Inn) and Chelfham, the growth of our rolling stock fleet, our formalised closer working with Barnstaple & Yeo Valley Railway Trust (B&YVRT) who are developing the southern end of the former line and, of course, our desire to increase the length of the operational railway.

The development of the L&BR has always been an ambitious undertaking and as such we want our members, volunteers, partners, supporters and donors to understand our intentions and direction of travel, with clarity.

This strategic plan provides the evidence and background to our operation and development as well as setting out our ambitions and aims for the next 5-years.

It has been developed and adopted by the Joint Board of the L&BR (Trust and Community Interest Company) and will inform our future decisions and activities. Progress will be reported via our Annual General Meeting process, and this document will be reviewed in Winter 2028 / 2029 (midway during the plan period).

We hope that you find this Strategic Plan: 2026 to 2031 useful and it inspires you to get involved with this amazing world-famous narrow-gauge railway.

Giles Perkins, FCILT
Chair of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Trust
July 2026



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1. About the L&BR

Since the formation of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Association back in 1979, we've seen considerable change. The Lynton & Barnstaple Light Railway Company Limited, incorporated in 1993, ran the LynBarn Railway at Clovelly, purchased land and property, including Woody Bay Station. With ownership commencing there in 1995, trains running to Bridge 67 in 2004, Killington Lane in 2006 and with the Trust's formation in 2007, the foundations of what we have today at Woody Bay, Blackmoor (the Old Station Inn) and Chelfham were established.

Whilst there have been set-backs and challenges on our journey it is widely recognised that our sites and operations are some of the best across narrow-gauge and standard-gauge heritage railways. This has been achieved through the dedication of members, volunteers, donors, staff and supporters past and present.

Importantly, we must recognise that where the L&BR resides is a very special part of the world and that the socio-economic realities of North Devon influence everything we do.

- *Total North Devon population: 101,222 (2024)*
- *Median age: 48 (2024)*
- *Population density: 93 people per square km (2024), lowest 10% of the UK*
- *Economic inactivity (16-64 years of age): 22% (2023)*
- *Total Economic Output (GVA) of North Devon: £2.16 billion (2025)*
- *Active businesses: 4,020 (2023)*
- *1.6 million tourism visits to Exmoor National Park, average stay length 4.3 nights, 99% visitor satisfaction (2024)*
- *Tourism Economic Impact for Exmoor: £242m (2024)*
- *2,377 Full-Time Equivalent jobs (FTEs) supported in tourism (2024)*
- *Exmoor visitors: 36% from SW England, 31% from rest of UK, 25% SE England, 8% Overseas (2024/25)*
- *77% of visitors use the internet for information prior to coming to Exmoor (2024/25)*
- *Scenery and landscape are the top tourist draw (2024/25)*

As a narrow-gauge railway on Exmoor, in the Southwest of England, we are very different from other UK heritage railways close to large population centres. With our legacy, geography and heritage in mind we have developed our vision for the L&BR.

Data sources: Office of National Statistics, North Devon & Torridge Council, Devon County Council, Visit Exmoor



Next: Our vision

2. Our vision

“Our vision is to provide access to a reinstated and authentic recreation of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway which is built and operated in line with modern practices.

We will do this by respecting its heritage and legacy, recognising the unique location on Exmoor National Park and in North Devon and being sustainable in our operations and developments.

We respect the environment and our neighbours, engage with and educate the public on the railway and its social history, and are inclusive for staff, visitors, volunteers, members and supporters.”

We recognise that to realise this vision takes resources, skills, dedication and funding all of which come from a broad church of individuals, groups and organisations.

We also recognise that we all continue to experience economic challenges and as a part of the heritage tourism sector we must continue to be creative so that we can thrive.

Our vision is grounded in the realities of today and hopes for the future and is informed by evidence overleaf.



3. Key facts

Key facts about the L&BR:

- 32,590 tickets sold & 38,065 return trips made, meaning that 16.8% of our visitors make more than one trip on the train (2025)
- 28% of our tickets are now bought online in advance (2025)
- On-site spend at Woody Bay: 49% fares, 31% tearoom, 14% shop, 6% other (2025)
- Around 3,500 visitors to Chelfham (2025 inc. the viaduct event)
- We have over £6.7m of assets (2025)
- £871,000 in restricted funds (for projects) (2025)
- 2,762 members, 34.8% life, 14.2% families, 23.5% couples, 27.3% individuals, 0.2% others (2026)
- 19% of our memberships are registered by women (2026)
- 5 FTE staff and 250 active volunteers (2026)
- 92% of volunteers are men, 8% women (2026)
- 4.6 / 5 on Google rating from 1,572 reviews and 4.4 / 5 on TripAdvisor from 621 reviews (2026)
- 21% of our visitors are local to Exmoor or North Devon (2026)
- 71% of those who are not local stay in the area overnight (2026)
- Over 79% of our visitors think the ride is too short (2026)

This is our starting point for growth, but let's remember what we have achieved over the last 5-years.

Data sources: L&BR visitor survey 2026 / L&BR data 2025 / Google Reviews & Trip Advisor 2026



Next: Our achievements

4. Our achievements

Society has shifted radically since the pandemic but despite what seems to be constant change we have achieved a lot, including.

- *New tearoom, courtyard and enhanced food and drink offer.*
- *Improvements to visitors' facilities including public toilets, car park and shop*
- *Diversified shop offer and introduction of online digital ticketing and, electronic tills.*
- *New events such as the dinosaur weekend and mixed traction.*
- *Planning for and completion of the carriage shelter.*
- *Permanent planning permission for and investing in the engine shed, paint shop and engineering facilities.*
- *Completion of the new garden railway and investment in the miniature railway.*
- *Development of the Safety Management System and associated documentation.*
- *5 completed heritage carriages and Van 23 in progress.*
- *Completion of the overhaul of locomotive Sir George Newnes*
- *Continued enhancement of Chelfham station and its environs.*
- *Purchase of the Old Station Inn at Blackmoor.*
- *Establishment and growth of our YouTube channel.*
- *Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Award 2024*
- *Grade II listing of Woody Bay station buildings.*
- *Fencing of the alignment completed from Blackmoor towards Wistlandpound.*
- *A Heritage Railway Association Awards commendation.*
- *Launch of our 'TrackForce', our youth volunteer group.*
- *Provision of permanent volunteer accommodation.*
- *A Memorandum of Understanding signed with B&YVRT.*

So how do we build momentum, confidence and trust so that we can build and do more?
As always there are challenges for us but there are also opportunities.



5. Challenges and opportunities

It continues to be an uncertain time for the heritage tourism sector but there is also significant potential.

Challenges

- *UK visitor economy and variable seasonal weather.*
- *The cost of everything, for everyone.*
- *Continued carbon management responsibilities.*
- *Preserving and enhancing the landscape and environment within our boundaries.*
- *Attracting and retaining volunteers in North Devon particularly younger people.*
- *Growing and diversifying our membership against strong competition.*

Opportunities

- *The unique railway and social history of the L&BR.*
- *Our achievements, legacy to date and respected position in Heritage Rail sector.*
- *Stunning Exmoor landscape and our position within it.*
- *Dedication of our staff, volunteers, members, donors and supporters.*
- *Heritage railways are fun and fashionable and we can capitalise upon this, the 'Francis Bourgeois' effect.*

So, within this fast-moving landscape, how should the L&BR be acting as an organisation?

We have defined our values which guide our behaviours, actions and activities.



6. Our values

To instil confidence with all our members, partners and stakeholders, we will be:

1. ***Evidence-based in our decision-making and activities.***
2. ***Financially diligent, robust and sustainable in our business planning.***
3. ***Environmentally sustainable in our operations and developments.***
4. ***Trustworthy, so that we are valued by our members, visitors, investors, donors, stakeholders and neighbours.***
5. ***Active in strengthening our reputation so that we are recognised for our efforts at local, regional, national and international levels.***
6. ***Open, innovative, informed and agile in our approach.***
7. ***Realistic with our ambitions and plans.***

Our values guide everything we do and inform our ambitions for the next 5-years; they also help define who we are and our culture, essential in satisfying the needs and expectations of everyone who is part of our success.



7. Our partners and stakeholders

We do not operate in isolation. We have deep working relationships with many people and organisations which govern, guide, contribute and help us in our activities. These include.

- *Our staff, members, volunteers, donors, area groups and working groups.*
- *Office of Rail and Road (ORR).*
- *Health and Safety Executive (HSE).*
- *Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB).*
- *Charity Commission for England and Wales.*
- *Fundraising Regulator.*
- *His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).*
- *Companies House.*
- *Heritage Railway Association (HRA).*
- *Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA)**
- *North Devon Council**
- *Devon County Council**
- *Local Parish Councils.*
- *Visit Exmoor.*
- *National Highways.*
- *The 762 Club.*
- *2819 Bagnall Ltd.*
- *Barnstaple & Yeo Valley Railway Trust (B&YVRT).*

Linking our values to the needs and expectations of our partners and stakeholders helps frame our ambitions and aims which, in turn, shapes the directional part of this plan.

**North Devon Council, Devon County Council and ENPA responsibilities may evolve as part of the 2026 Local Government Reorganisation.*



Next: Strategic ambitions and aims, 2026 to 2031

8. Strategic ambitions and aims, 2026 to 2031

Below we set out our strategic ambitions and aims for the next 5-years, which go beyond our core activities of operating our railway and sites effectively, efficiently, diligently and safely.

Strategic ambitions. To...	Our aims. We will...
1. Grow and diversify our membership offer to attract more members and volunteers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop our membership offer to provide more people with more reasons and options to easily join us.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow our membership through traditional (press) and non-traditional (social media) channels.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversify our membership to include more younger people (via our TrackForce youth volunteer programme) and women.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow our volunteer base (regular and occasional) through active recruitment and volunteer care.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw upon more of our members' professional skills to help realise our vision.
2. Diversify our visitor offer for the general public and rail enthusiast markets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversify special events to provide appeal to a broad set of potential customers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop specific events and activities to appeal to a wide range of railway enthusiasts.
3. Raise our profile within and beyond the heritage rail sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform specialist rail and heritage press and websites on our ongoing developments and activities.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with and support local publications across Exmoor, North Devon and the Southwest to provide information, news and historical stories.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively take part in local business forums to increase the reach of the L&BR and the joint opportunities that may emerge.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an active member of the Heritage Railway Association (HRA) taking part in events and conferences as well as offering our facilities to the HRA.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively use social media and digital channels to raise our profile, inform our members and supporters, and attract new visitors.
4. Strengthen our community links and local contribution across Exmoor and North Devon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop our strategic partnerships across Exmoor and North Devon with organisations, charities, and individuals so that we are an active part of the community.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take part in heritage, community and other events across the Southwest (and via our Area Groups, further afield) to increase the visibility of the L&BR to new audiences.

Strategic ambitions. To...	Our aims. We will...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly provide talks, presentations and workshops for local community groups.
5. Protect and enhance our assets and make them understandable and accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in and develop our heritage and other rolling stock to meet the needs of the railway as it develops and ensure that they are protected for the enjoyment of all who visit the L&BR. • Actively care for our heritage and other buildings across our sites so that they provide a best-in-class depiction of the L&BR to our visitors. • Actively manage our non-operational sections of track-bed, fencing them where required to provide occasional access for our members so that they can understand the railway prior to being brought into operational use. • Actively manage other land we own to maximise its contribution to local areas as amenity, woodland, pastures or other functions. • Specifically continue to improve and develop our site at Chelfham to complement our operational locations and local activities by B&YVRT. • Update our integrated plan for the Old Station Inn site at Blackmoor to make the most of its potential. • Invest in our engineering, workshops and storage facilities to enable as much work as possible to be undertaken by our staff and volunteers.
6. Increase the length of the operational railway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit a planning application for the extension of the railway from Killington Lane to Parracombe Halt, to extend the railway once permission is secured. • Continue to invest in and develop the alignment between the Old Station Inn (Blackmoor) and Wistlandpound (reservoir) so that in time it can be provide a complementary, but not competing, attraction to our operations centred at Woody Bay. • Actively monitor opportunities to close gaps in our track-bed ownership between Lynton and Wistlandpound, acting when opportunities arise with a view to these being a part of future extensions.
7. Continue to decarbonise our energy usage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to assess the performance of manufactured smokeless fuels to reduce the impacts of our steam locomotive operations further. • Investigate the conversion of our diesel locomotives to hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO) to reduce our reliance on diesel fuels. • Invest in electric hand tools and plant as and when suitable versions are available and applicable to our needs.

Strategic ambitions. To...	Our aims. We will...
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor our energy use across our sites to help optimise use and inform future decisions to sustainable alternatives. • Be carbon neutral by 2038 (in line with the Exmoor National Park targets) through the activities listed above and by further offsetting by tree planting on land we own and other offsetting initiatives.
8. Expand our museum functions and achieve museum accreditation status.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the formal and informal display of L&BR historical assets at Woody Bay, the Old Station Inn and Chelfham. • Plan for a more permanent and substantive museum facility to be part of the Old Station Inn complex. • Make more information of our historical artefacts and the social history of the railway available via our website. • Work to achieve museum accreditation status and to unlock the associated benefits.
9. Develop our relationship with B&YVRT.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build upon the Memorandum of Understanding between L&BRT and B&YVRT through the sharing of information, skills and resources for the betterment of the overall 'Lynton and Barnstaple project'.
10. Review our governance model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a review of our governance model to provide the best mechanisms to help achieve strategic ambitions 1 to 9 above and take a recommendation to our membership.

For each of our ambitions and aims we will develop performance metrics and present our progress to members via our Annual General Meeting process. It is important to note that we cannot achieve these alone: we need help and resources.



9. Get involved

We need help from the whole of our community to realise our vision and deliver on our aims and ambitions.

Whether you're an individual, group or organisation your help would really benefit the L&BR

- Join us as a member, support us and tell others about our heritage and progress.
- Become a volunteers, adult or youth, near or far, UK or abroad, and help us with your skills and experience.
- Consider donating, small or large, regular or one-off; it all helps us do things better and quicker.
- Think about leaving us something in your will: legacies help us make huge leaps forward.
- Community groups or corporate organisations, we'd love to talk about how we can work together.

As members, volunteers, supporters or donors we all have a role to play in helping develop and expand the L&BR.



10. Are you with us?

The ultimate reopening of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway from end to end by the L&BRT and the B&YRT, working together, is *'the last great narrow-gauge adventure'*.

It requires commitment, dedication, support and focus. Are you with us? How will you help us? Who will you tell about us?

We're stronger together and we'll achieve *'a world-class narrow-gauge railway for everyone'*.



If you need a copy of this document in large print, please get in touch.

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