

# The Lynton Line – Issue 4 July 2021

*An occasional newsletter intended to inform local residents about activity on the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway, including events, behind-the-scenes work and rebuilding.*

## The Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Trust

The L&BR Trust is a registered charity whose aim is to conserve and restore the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway along its original 19-mile route between Lynton & Barnstaple. It currently operates a 1-mile section of the line from the restored Woody Bay station south to Killington Lane halt.

## The Local Government Position

The restoration of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway is an integral element of the Local Plans of Exmoor National Park, North Devon & Torrington, and is also supported in the Lynton & Lynmouth Neighbourhood Plan. These authorities recognise the former railway as a valuable heritage asset that should be restored to further their community and sustainability objectives. So, the whole route of the former railway from Lynton into Barnstaple at Pilton Causeway is now protected from adverse development.

In 2016 the L&BR Trust was granted planning permission by North Devon Council to reinstate the railway line outside the National Park to Wistlandpound reservoir. This was followed in 2018 by permission granted by the Exmoor National Park for the section between the present terminus at Killington Lane and the National Park boundary.

## The Railway and the Environment

One reason that the route of the former railway is considered to be a heritage asset is that it is still largely intact and visible in the landscape, and the relative freedom from obstructions means the environmental impact of reinstating the line will be positive. Even areas where significant works are needed will see net environmental gains.

There will be a gain of biodiversity from the conversion of a narrow strip of land (much of it grazed at present) to form a continuous 5.5-mile habitat corridor. Careful management of embankments and cuttings along the line will help create a diverse environment that will be a haven for wildlife and native plants. Surplus land will allow new woodland to be created.



*This view of the original railway formation through Holwell Wood shows the small strip of land required by the railway, and the opportunities for wildlife and plants on the banks either side.*

The railway boundary in many areas consists of Devon hedgebanks, and sympathetic restoration of these is already enhancing their biodiversity and providing a secure stock-proof boundary.



*Elsewhere, as here at Wistlandpound, the original concrete post and wire boundary fence is being reinstated. The rebuilt line will run in the cutting beyond the new fence.*

Apart from the reconstruction of two bridges demolished when the railway was closed in 1935, the only significant engineering tasks is the construction of the embankment and culvert over the River Heddon at Parracombe Bank. This embankment was destroyed by flooding at the time of the 1952 Lynmouth disaster. Works here will be carefully controlled to minimise disruption of the river and the local environment, with the timing of work restricted under planning conditions imposed by the Environment Agency.

The restored railway does not physically affect any historic assets; indeed its reinstatement will be positive in areas such as Churchtown, Parracombe, where English Heritage have noted that the removal of a 1980s bungalow and excavation of the old railway cutting will greatly enhance the views of the Grade 1 listed St Petroc's Church.

Visitors will be able to savour the beauties of the National Park, leaving their cars at the new railway car park near the A39/A399 road junction, and travelling at 15 to 25mph through scenery revealing spectacular views not available to motorists. The proposed bus service will also help relieve congestion and parking in Lynton.

## The Economics of the Railway

The reinstated railway will provide much-needed inward investment and employment opportunities both to the immediate locality and also to Exmoor and North Devon at large.

To date the L&B has invested more than £5.5m in capital projects. Where possible, we give work to local companies and suppliers which, together with money spent locally by our 50,000 or so passengers, generates over £1.2m economic benefit to the area each year.

The investment proposed for the extension is £12.37m which will be one of the largest injections of funds into the Exmoor area. The number of passengers on the extended line is expected to rise significantly, greatly increasing the inward income and opportunities for the local economy. An appraisal by Economic Consultant Genecom, carried out for the Exmoor National Park as part of the 2018 planning permissions, confirmed our own analysis that the extended railway would generate some £13.7million GVA (Gross Value Added) in the Exmoor economy by 2031, and would create the equivalent of forty-one full-time jobs in the area.

## Latest Land Purchases



The L&BR Trust is now the owner of the bungalow known as 'The Halt' at Churchtown, Parracombe, built on the site of the former railway halt. We now own not only another former station but also all the trackbed between Woody Bay and Parracombe. The Halt is currently tenanted and will remain so for the immediate future.

The purchase of land near Rowley Cross has also extended our ownership of L&B trackbed onwards from Holwell Wood to Rowley Cross. This allows us to work with Devon Highways to alleviate the drainage issues that affect that part of the A39 and the neighbouring picnic site.

The Trust now owns some 67% of the land required for the extension from Killington Lane to Wistlandpound. With Exmoor Associates, whose role is to purchase and manage trackbed south from Wistlandpound to Barnstaple, around 6.5 miles or 33% of the entire 19-mile railway route is in railway ownership, along with five of the nine original stations and halts.

## Reopening 2021

The Railway reopened on the 13th April, initially at weekends only, increasing to every day except Mondays and Fridays once restrictions on holiday accommodation were eased in May. Visitor numbers have exceeded all expectations. As a rare Covid-secure attraction with no booking needed, we have had to run extra trains on some days to accommodate the visitor numbers arriving at Woody Bay whilst ensuring that all those that want to travel can do so in a Covid-safe way. Our opening days will increase during the school holidays, and our latest timetable can always be found on our website ([www.lynton-rail.co.uk](http://www.lynton-rail.co.uk)).

## Woody Bay Tearooms

The tea rooms at Woody Bay station have also been busy, with visitors and locals alike enjoying our hospitality. The tea rooms are open whenever trains are running and there is no obligation to travel on the train when using them. Plenty of free parking is available. Why not meet friends there, or drop in for a coffee or a cream tea?

## Culvert Clearance and Fencing at The Calvert Trust, Wistlandpound

Our team of locally-based volunteers recently carried out some fencing and clearance work to the boundary of the railway at Wistlandpound. Earlier work there had revealed that the inlet to a culvert under the railway embankment was blocked, and the boundary fence was in poor shape. The blocked culvert was causing a significant area of the field to be unsuitable for grazing by the Calvert Trust's horses. The gang took advantage of some good weather in June to excavate the culvert inlet, and to renew the fencing.

The culvert inlet (right) was found 1.5m below ground level and after a bit of clearing the inlet pipe was running freely. A ditch was dug to direct the water into the culvert which will now enable that part of the field to drain and be usable for the first time in many years.



Approximately 250m of fencing was replaced using the railway's original concrete fence posts to the boundary. Special pony netting was attached to the fence line at the request of the Calvert Trust to prevent their horses getting their feet caught. The Calvert Trust were delighted with the result with their field made stock-proof, safe and fully usable once more.

## Staff Changes

The time has come for Martyn Budd (right), our General Manager since 2007, to retire. He will be greatly missed, but we welcome Stuart Nelhams who has been appointed to replace him. Stuart comes to the L&BR from the nearby West Somerset Railway where he has been both a volunteer and a staff member for many years.

The railway has also taken on a local 18-year-old apprentice to be trained in conjunction with Bridgwater and Taunton College and to assist with the maintenance and operation of the railway.

As the line is extended to Wistlandpound we will need further staff and apprentices.



## Feedback

We hope that the news items reported above show how the aims and principles of the L&BR Trust are already being put into practice on the current railway, and on all the land we own.

We welcome your feedback on this newsletter, and will answer any additional questions you may have. Contact our Director Clive Robey ([clive.robey@lynton-rail.co.uk](mailto:clive.robey@lynton-rail.co.uk)).