

LEIGHTON BUZZARD NARROW GAUGE RAILWAY



Our Strategic Plan for 2024 to 2029

Version 1 – March 2024

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Photo on page 13 by Neil Cairns

All Other Photos by Mark Lewis

Section 1 – Introduction and Background

The Executive Committee of the Leighton Buzzard Narrow Gauge Railway (LNBGR) decided in 2023 that it would be beneficial to develop a Strategic Plan for the next 5 years (2024 to 2029).

The purpose for doing this was:

- To build on our strong foundations to the benefit of all
- To clarify together what we want to achieve going forward
- To use this to guide and focus our actions
- To ensure we are using our resources to best effect
- To support museum accreditation

1.1 The Process

Working with experienced Facilitators, we have developed:

- **A Vision** – where do we want to be in 5 years' time?
- **A Mission** – what is our purpose / reason for being?
- An analysis of our **strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats** (SWOT) in order to understand where we are now
- A set of **Strategic Goals** to give us a clear focus on how we will achieve our Vision
- A **Stakeholder Map** to help us better understand who our stakeholders are, and how contact with them should be managed
- **Action Plans** that will deliver our Strategic Goals

We have over the last few months undertaken several workshops to create our Vision, Mission, SWOT and Strategic Goals. We also had a Stakeholder Mapping Session.

We have also undertaken a 'Planning for the Future' Session with the Heads of Department to identify the key actions they think we need to progress most urgently. As a result of this work, we have identified key Actions to progress, including the 'one key thing' we need to do in each area and where possible a 'quick win'. These Actions do not preclude others, but will help us to focus on the areas the railway has collectively identified as needing attention to help us move towards achieving our Goals. The Action areas are explained below, but the Action Plans themselves will be living documents so are not appended to this Strategy Document.

We are now in a position to publish our initial draft of our Strategy document. It is our intention to update this periodically over the next 5 years. We welcome your comments. Contact details are at the end of this document.

Section 2. Our Vision

Our Vision is:

- To deliver an educational, interactive, unique, historical operating railway museum
- To offer a friendly, caring and accessible welcome to all our passengers
- To support happy volunteers in fulfilling both their own and the railway's goals

This Vision describes where we want it to be in five years' time.

How do we want it to be for our volunteers and passengers and what will our Museum offering look like?

Section 3. Our Mission

Our Mission is:

- To preserve and operate the line of the former Leighton Buzzard Light Railway Company and to collect, preserve and display artefacts related to narrow gauge light railways and sand quarrying for the education, appreciation and enjoyment of the public.

Our Mission describes our reason for being: what is our purpose?

We have a unique railway on the former track bed of a 'sand railway' and we feel it is important to tell its story.

Section 4. Where we are now? – Strengths Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

This SWOT analysis summarises the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that we identified. We compiled a list of SWOTS and from that larger list the following were ranked as the most important.

The full analysis is available on request.

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
Dedicated and hard working volunteers	Lack of effective fund raising skills
Accredited Museum and Charitable status	Staffing of jobs when trains are in operation is challenging because of some shortages of volunteers in key operating roles
Established position in family, education and enthusiast sectors	Space to provide dedicated museum and workshop facilities is limited
Ability to recruit & retain volunteers	Lack of clear organisational structure and succession planning
Steam and Internal Combustion Locomotives	Poor working environment for volunteers
Effective use of technology – website, electronic point of sale & social media	Inability to train volunteers quickly enough
OPPORTUNITY	THREAT
Growing population throughout South Bedfordshire provides more potential customers and volunteers	Environmental legislation
Expanded events programme	Ageing volunteers in some areas risks loss of skills and knowledge
No comparable heritage attraction in local area	Ageing infrastructure
Develop programmes for younger volunteers	Coal – cost & availability
Strengthened approach to schools	Unexpected loss of asset
More 2-train days	Income is directly related to the ability to increase visitor numbers
	Inflation
	Other local attractions

Section 5. Our Strategic Goals –

How will we achieve our Vision?

5.1 Introduction

We (LBNGR) have developed 15 Strategic Goals to guide our actions going forward. They naturally fall into 7 key areas. We also agreed to have an Executive Committee Champion for each area to give a clear interface point with the Executive Committee.

Following the Planning for the Future Session with the Heads of Department, the Executive Committee has identified key actions and quick wins to progress.

These are outlined in the following Sections along with explanations on the thinking that led to each Goals that's been identified.



5.2 Health, Safety and Environment

- **We will operate a safe and reliable narrow-gauge railway.**
 - LBNGR will comply with all relevant health & safety legislation and aspire to our own standards of safety culture throughout the railway.
 - We will adequately resource safety through an EC Safety Director, a Health & Safety Officer, Operations Manager, Duty Operations Managers and all volunteers through training and competence tracking.
 - We will review and audit on a regular basis and commence in 2023 with an initial Safety Action Plan.
 - Information, Training & Supervision will be provided to all volunteers through Heads of Department and others as appropriate.
 - We will consult with all volunteers through representation by Heads of Department. Communication will be made through HOPS, newsletters, magazines, and noticeboards.
- **We will identify and reduce our adverse impact on the environment.**
 - LBNGR will always be conscious of the environment that the railway operates within.
 - We will minimise and recycle waste materials where practicable.
 - We will reuse railway materials and artefacts wherever possible.
 - Where locomotives or rolling stock cannot be reused or restored (by LBNGR or other parties) they will be dismantled, and components used for other projects in a manner consistent with the Collection and Disposal Policy
 - We will minimise smoke and spark emissions from steam locomotives through firing techniques and use of appropriate coal / man-made alternatives.





5.3 Funding

Funding covers all aspects of financial management for the railway. Therefore, the Goals identified fell into 3 different areas as follows:

- **We will continue to have sound financial management, verified by audit.**
 - Continue sound Financial Management
 - Develop better communications with the Heads of Department to encourage feedback so they can better manage their day-to-day spending against current budgets
 - Review Budget process with a view to helping HoDs think broadly about their expenditure to reduce the possibility of out-of-budget costs
- **We will endeavour to increase our income from grants, legacies, gift aid and donations.**
 - We will identify external consultants to assist in opening possible avenues for Grant funding for projects
 - We will develop easier ways for people to leave legacies, give donations and further identify opportunities available using Gift Aid
- **We will increase our passenger income by attracting more visitors and giving them more opportunities to spend when they are with us.**
 - This Goal links with those under Passenger Experience as the ability to increase income in this area is directly linked to our ongoing development of our Event Programme. See Section 5.5

5.4 Volunteers

We recognise that our volunteers are the backbone of our organisation. In light of the age profile of our team, it is very important for us to keep momentum up in attracting new members. This is a challenge for us like many other organisations, and hence we have dedicated a Strategic Goal to give it the necessary focus.

- **We will continue to foster a friendly volunteer environment, where members are valued, are appropriately trained and are part of a clear succession plan.**
 - Each department will be encouraged to appoint a mentor for new volunteers
 - A training / induction programme will be developed for each new volunteer
 - Succession plans will be developed for each key position
- **We will develop a programme to attract more volunteers, greater in both number and diversity.**
 - We will establish a dedicated Volunteer Co-ordinator role whose sole role will be to establish and manage recruitment and retention
 - We will seek to implement “best practice” from other heritage railways
 - We will develop relationships with local colleges and schools to attract young apprentices / volunteers





5.5 Passenger Experience

- **We will develop a marketing plan to increase our passenger numbers.**
 - We will develop a programme of events which adds value to our core service and meets the needs of all our passengers, from small children to the most dedicated railway fan. This will evolve each year to encourage people to return.
 - Passengers will feel welcome and safe with our smart, professional and friendly volunteers.
 - We will encourage passengers to share their experiences with us and with the wider public through media including our visitors book, online review websites and marketing surveys.
- **We will develop our range of events to attract a wider and more diverse audience to our friendly railway.**
 - We will work in partnership with local community groups and charities for mutual benefit.
 - We will ensure our core service of a heritage rail journey is delivered to a high standard with well-maintained facilities
 - We will ensure all passengers have the opportunity to view our museum exhibits and engine shed
 - We will offer an attractive shop and develop partnerships with others to offer refreshments and other retail opportunities that may be attractive to our passengers.

5.6 Preservation/Heritage

- **We will improve our operating railway museum offering to provide an interactive and educational experience for our passengers.**
 - We will improve the signage and descriptions of our museum items
 - We will introduce audio/interactive links
- **We will engage with local schools and organisations to tell our local story.**
 - We will develop a “presentation pack” that can be tailored to deliver talks to different audiences
 - We will encourage educational visits to the Railway
- **We will maintain and acquire locomotives and rolling stock consistent with our Museum Collection Policy.**
 - We will regularly review our collection to ensure we are able to display items appropriately
 - We will ensure working locomotives and rolling stock have a defined maintenance schedule



5.7 Organisation/Communication

- **We will improve our communications with all our stakeholder groups, using new / existing systems where appropriate.**
 - We have identified our Stakeholder Groups – see Section 6
 - We will formalise a Communication Group
 - We will develop a Communication Plan to help us;
 - ensure we are all on the same page in our Communications
 - collate our understanding of our current Communications
 - Identify what communications we need with which stakeholders and when
 - identify the best communication channels to deliver what we need to say
 - identify clear timescales and ownership in the Communication Plan
 - Produce regular newsletter to working volunteers on day-to-day issues (separate from members communications)
- **We will review and update our organisation structure and communicate it clearly to our stakeholders**
 - Develop a practical structure that is consistent with our strategy and operational requirements
 - Allow more operational decisions to be taken separately from the EC with a longer term goal of the EC becoming closer to a “trustee board”
 - Publish an Organisation Chart which allows all volunteers to have a clear reporting line for guidance/decisions and ‘know where they fit’



5.8 Land, Buildings and Permanent Way

- **We will develop a land and buildings strategy to meet the needs of the railway, including:**
 - We will work with our landlord(s) to find opportunities to expand our current facilities
 - We will improve the storage and maintenance space for assets owned by and on loan to the Society including
 - Page's Park rolling stock shed
 - Stonehenge covered facilities
 - We will maintain a programme of permanent way and Level Crossing maintenance
 - improve facilities for our passengers.
 - Improve access to view museum items
 - Look to improve “wet weather” facilities
 - We will develop an asset database and a rolling programme to maintain and renew the estate.



5.9 Executive Committee Champions

The following Executive Committee members (EC) will be the interface with the Action Plan owners.

Health, Safety and Environment – Mark Lewis

Funding – David Knapman and Nick Clayton

Volunteers – Rob Longman

Passenger Experience – Sharon Preston

Preservation / Heritage – Mark Clifford and Tony Tomkins

Organisation / Communication – David Wood (interim)

Land, Buildings and Permanent Way – Jamie Randall



Section 6 Stakeholder Analysis

In successful organisations, things don't happen in a vacuum. We need our Volunteers and Members to support and engage in the delivery of our Strategic Goals. They are integral to the success of our railway so understanding who they are and working together with them is key to our success in delivering our Vision for the future.

Stakeholder analysis and mapping helped us to identify how much 'power' and 'interest' our various Stakeholder Groups have in the delivery of our Vision. We identified the Communication Channels we currently use. It is important for us to include our stakeholders in the delivery of our Vision.

HIGH	KEEP SATISFIED		MANAGE CLOSELY	
	Planning Dept [CBC]	Local MPs	Private owners	Heads of Departments
POWER	Police	Central Bedfordshire Council	Office of Rail & Road, HMRI and HS&E	Volunteers
	Fire & Rescue	Leighton-Linslade Town Council	EPOS support company	E.C. member
	Health Dept.	Passengers		Management Structure
	Financial Conduct Authority	External Charter Market		
	Quarry owners (Redlands/Arnold White/George Garside)			
LOW	AWG (landlords)			
	Banks			
	Insurance companies			
	MONITOR		KEEP INFORMED	
	External Funding	NRM & MOD (RAF)	Preserved Railways	Society members
	Suppliers	Heritage Railway Association	Local Transport groups	Financial donors
	Internet Companies	Event organisers (Page’s Park)	Bedfordshire Museum Group	Café
	Local community	Other railways / Froissy	Press/Media	Craft shop
	Utility companies		HOPS Ltd	
	Local community groups (bands/choir/theatre)			
	Local competitors			
	LOW	INTEREST		HIGH

Section 7 Next Steps

We have initial Action Plans to underpin the delivery of our Strategic Goals. These will be managed internally and are not included in the strategic Plan as they will be living documents.

We recognise that we have limited resources and achieving our goals will necessitate recruiting new volunteers with relevant skills. If you, or anyone you know, might have an interest in helping the Railway in any capacity then please email [**volunteer@lbngers.org.uk**](mailto:volunteer@lbngers.org.uk)

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions about our Strategy then please feel free to email [**chairman@lbngers.org.uk**](mailto:chairman@lbngers.org.uk)

