

Bala & Ffestiniog Railway Heritage Trust

State of the Railway 2021



Artist image of the potential future Llan Ffestiniog Station



CONTENTS



PAGE 2
Chairman's Thoughts

PAGE 3
The Railway Today
Future of the Railway

PAGE 4
Trust Developments

PAGE 5
Timber for a Tenner
Become a member



Welcome to this State of the Railway special to help update members

and non members about the current status of the project leading into 2021.

2020 has thrown up significant challenges to the Trust mainly in terms of the spread of coronavirus which had a significant effect on

the development plans of the Trust seeing 2 of the working party weekends cancelled which has set back plans for the development of Llan Ffestiniog station grounds. Due to current reports that lockdowns are likely to extend into January the decision has been made to cancel the working party weekend in January as well.

This has led to a complete recasting of the plan for the working party weekends at Llan Ffestiniog to cover 2021 and 2022. Some of this change was necessary due to restrictions (tree felling season and need to acquire a licence to remove trees) but also due to the expanded scope of work necessary on the site following development of a plan for the old station building stones that remain on site.

I look forward to this time next year and reporting a very very different site that is almost prepared for a new station building to rise on the old.

I look forward to bringing you along with me on this wonderful journey over the next few weeks, months, years and decades with the common goal of seeing Heritage Steam running between Blaenau Ffestiniog and Trawsfynydd Lake Halt one day.

Happy reading.

Shane Barry
Chairman (2020 - 2023)



The Railway Today

The 6.5 mile line currently remains mothballed and has been mothballed since a week after the last charter train ran in October 1998. Since then minimal maintenance has been carried out by Network Rail with a view to keeping the formation protected for future needs.

The line has a 1 foot section cut out just past the end of the headshunt at Blaenau Ffestiniog preventing any movement on the line. Movement on the line is further prevented by the presence of significant vegetation and tree growth within the formation across the entire 6.5 mile section.

Some sections of the track are suffering from washouts and strategic removal of ballast by Network Rail contractors to enable drainage as some sections of the line are heavily waterlogged.

The structures that could be viewed from public land in the main appear to be in good condition with two due to be replaced soon by Network Rail as they no longer meet the plated weight for the bridges involved.

The Future of the Railway

Network Rail kept the line in a mothballed status in anticipation of potential future use within the network. Over the last few years there has been various discussions and proposals of which this Trust is one of many to have seen the light of day.

The NDA have been exploring the possibility of using the line between Blaenau Ffestiniog and Trawsfynydd Lake Halt for the removal of waste materials from the Trawsfynydd Power Station decommissioning project due to the volumes that need moving. It would also be a suitable option for bringing in materials for the development and operation of the SMR on this site.

Network Rail has assigned funding in the next 12 months for the replacement of two bridges on the line as they no longer meet the plated weight for the bridges for access to land across the railway. This funding was assigned before the most recent announcement of cuts to maintenance within Network Rail to free up funds for the central government to pay for the pandemic borrowing. It is unknown if these bridges will still be replaced as a result.

Network Rail is currently working on the potential for the line to be restored to working order in the next 6 or 7 years to facilitate works at Trawsfynydd Power Station.

This changes the dynamic of the operation of the Trust for the future, however it does mean that the long term future of the line is assured as well as the possibility that costs in the short term may be significantly reduced for the Trust. This has the potential to mean that the Trust may end up in a position where it is able to acquire a fully laid out and maintained line to run services or become a Train Operating Company or other legal entity or agreements to entitle it to run heritage services over the line. The downside of this is that there is likely to be a significant cost in this as Network Rail is obliged to seek a return on its investment as much as possible.

Trust Developments



As a result of the potential restoration of the line for commercial use within the next few years the Trust has taken the decision to concentrate on non track related aspects of their work. To this end the Trust work for the next 12 to 24 months will concentrate on Llan Ffestiniog Station (COVID-19 restrictions dependent).



The current owners of the Llan Ffestiniog Site are very supportive of the project and have agreed to work with the Trust to release the area highlighted in yellow above for the project.

As a result of this and the aforementioned plans for the line by the NDA and NR, the Trust will be for the next 12 to 24 months concentrating its efforts on the Llan Ffestiniog Site.

This will see the site cleared and prepared for future rebuilding of the station as and when finances become available to do so.

In the meantime it is the Trust's position and plan to maintain the site in good condition and where practical put it to the good use of the Trust.

All of this work is in preparation for plans in 2022 to be able to lay track panels at Llan Ffestiniog out of the cattle dock with a view to creating a van storage facility and camping coach facility at Llan Ffestiniog.

In the medium to long term the hope is that the site will provide a small income to the Trust to help with its ongoing development.



Supporting the Trust Timber for a Tenner Appeal

The diagram to the right is the infographic that we will be using to illustrate the progress of our timber for a tenner appeal. We are very close to shading in the first sleeper (£2,000 raised) and look forward to the day that we will be able to shade in all the sleepers.

This appeal is quite important to the trust as it gives the trust sufficient general funds to meet its needs over the next 12 months as well as providing a surplus to meet any unexpected demands or indeed to be saved for. It also enables the Trust to purchase the land at Llan Ffestiniog and add it to the assets of the Trust.

These funds will enable us to complete all the enabling works at Llan Ffestiniog including installing all necessary services for the site (power, water and sewage) ready for building work to start on the station itself in the future.

Help us to show that the Trust can be of benefit to the local area and enhance the local environment as well as provide additional tourism opportunities in the future.

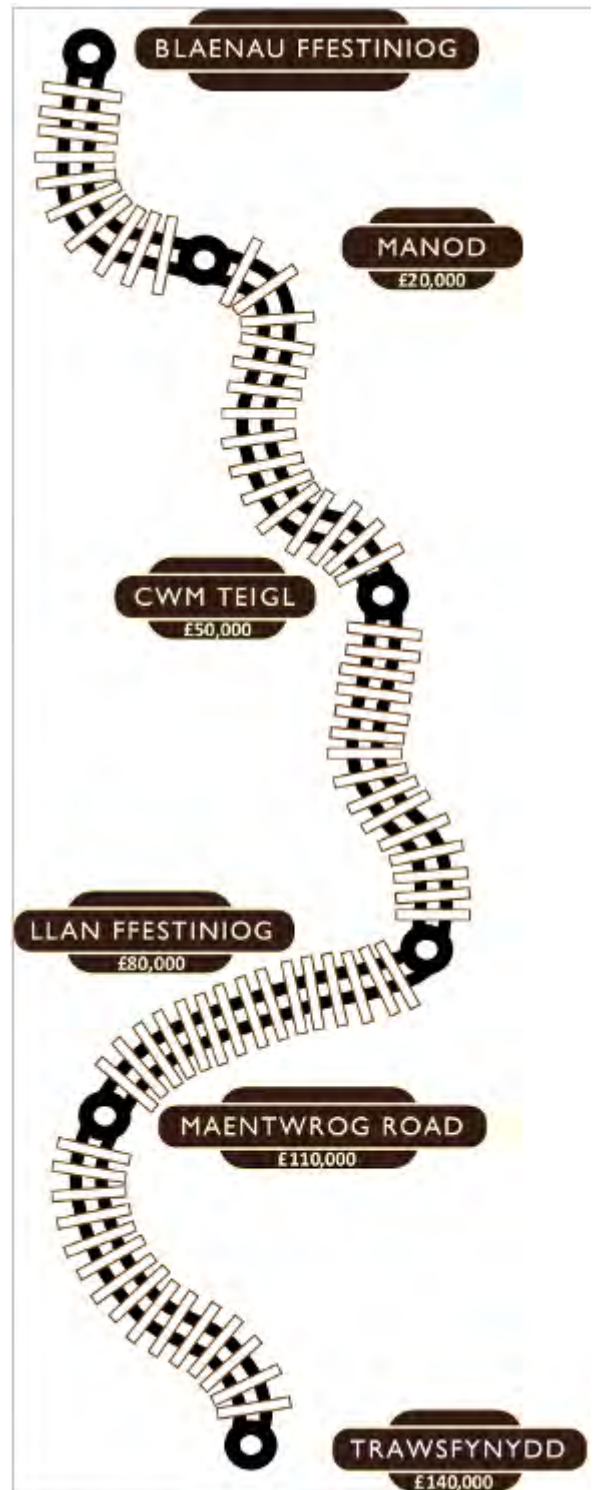
Become a member

The lifeblood of any heritage operation is its members, as such the trust is always recruiting new members to help it achieve its aims of preserving the history of the line as well as the long term aim of running heritage services.

Becoming a member will also enable you to take an active part of the Trusts working party weekends or becoming a committee member to help enable the work to be achieved.

Members will have a vote at the AGM to help shape the future directions of the Trust and guide the committee for the future.

Membership costs £20 a year and in return you receive (currently) 4 newsletters a year, an AGM special notice and the satisfaction of making a small but appreciated difference to a heritage rail operation.



Outline plan for works at Llan Ffestiniog – subject to change due to COVID restrictions.

February 13th & 14th Vegetation Clearance

As many petrol powered trimmers as possible for this weekend (minimum of 4 preferably more). Vegetation to be cleared from under and around all trees and the cattle docks to improve access around the site. Light branch clearance can be carried out at the same time. It is hoped that we will be able to start the repair works to the platform faces at the same time to improve safety on site.

March 6th & 7th Station Building Stone Clearance

There is a considerable quantity of facing stones from the station building and other buildings on site. This stone is blocking the areas where the rail track will go extending from the cattle dock. This work is to enable future work on laying track extending out from the cattle dock. Some of this stone is likely to be suitable for creation of a new wall to separate the driveway from the proposed trust land.

April 10th & 11th AGM weekend - Station Building Stone Clearance

There is a considerable quantity of facing stones from the station building and other buildings on site. This stone is blocking the areas where the rail track will go extending from the cattle dock. This work is to enable future work on laying track extending out from the cattle dock.

May 22nd & 23rd Track laying cattle dock

Preparatory work will be undertaken with a view to laying track on the ground beside the cattle dock to allow storage of a van and a camping coach. Only some of the track will be able to be laid until the trees along the path are removed.

June 19th & 20th Track laying cattle dock

Preparatory work will be undertaken with a view to laying track on the ground beside the cattle dock to allow storage of a van and a camping coach. Only some of the track will be able to be laid until the trees along the path are removed.

July 31st & 1st August TBC

September 25th & 26th Chainsaw work

This weekend will see (subject to permission from SNPA) the cutting down of trees on the site to enable the remaining works on the site.

October 23rd & 24th Digger to remove trunks

An agreement to be reached with a hire company to have a digger available to dig out the tree trunks and roots from the site with a view to preparing the site for being rotavated on the next working party weekend.

November TBC Digger to remove trunks

An agreement to be reached with a hire company to have a digger available to dig out the tree

trunks and roots from the site with a view to preparing the site for being rotavated on the next working party weekend.

December 4th & 5th Rotavate Soil

This weekend will be dedicated to rotating the soil and removing any remaining stones and debris from the soil with the view of planting grass.

Other works to be scheduled in:

Once grass has been planted to arrange with local horticulturalist and local children to encourage them to build and maintain flowerbeds (raised and edged with sleepers perhaps?). These would be built and maintained in areas that would not be likely to be damaged during ongoing works for station building and any other potential works on the site.

Post clearance works.

Surveyors – survey site to ascertain full amount of space available and any known / obvious issues encountered.

Architectural – produce draft plans for the new station building – suggestion below.

Builders – to help ascertain the practicality of the draft building plans for the site.

Planning advisers – To advise on draft plans that are likely to be accepted by local planning authority.

Grounds maintenance – regular work keeping grass cut and flowerbeds maintained – these to be done in conjunction with local groups where possible.

Building suggestion

- Same area as demolished station but with a larger footprint for modern needs.
- Design to be fully covid compliant
- Ground floor museum,
- booking office beside museum
- Office space behind booking office.
- 1st Floor cafe (potential, if not will be ground floor based)
- Lift (if 1st floor installed)

Ultimately the building is more likely to appear similar to the old structure, indeed the Snowdonia National Parks may insist on the old design being followed, but it will need to be an entirely new building as all the existing foundations will need to be dug up and relayed due to damage from roots of trees over the years.

Camping Coach area

The current landowner has given permission to install track panels beside the cattle docks to enable the siting of a camping coach and catering coach for use of the trust as required. In order to do this the Trust will need to recover a considerable quantity of blocks and stones that exist in this area which may be the remains of the goods shed or station building. The plan for these blocks / stones

is to recover them and create a materials management area on the site to ascertain the quality of the materials and whether it can be reused in any future building works on site. It is also intended that this stone can be used to create a new wall to separate the access road from the proposed Trust land for the station area.

With regards the track panel, it is envisaged that this will be laid in the same format as a main track panel requiring the removal of subsoil, creation of a stable base, laying of a membrane to go under the ballast, laying the ballast before positioning the track so that a coach can safely be stood on the track.

This project will also ultimately require the installation of an electrical supply to the site and careful consideration will need to be undertaken as to how this would be carried out and managed for the safety of all. Before the waste facilities can be used it will be necessary to work with Welsh Water in order to arrange the installation and connection with the mains network a sewage system which takes into account the necessity to reuse surface water as much as possible for maximum green site potential.

In the meantime a suggestion has been made to put a suitable wagon at this location to store tools securely on site instead of using a container. Utilising a wagon would be more in keeping with the train station theme and likely to be easier to store on site.

Platform Faces

Some of the slabs along the platform faces are missing but are believed to be elsewhere on site, over the course of the clearance work it is planned to hunt for these missing slabs and then arrange to get them all in the one place for restoration to the platform edge. The ramps on and off the village platform side are damaged and will require rebuilding in due course. This will be carried out as and when possible during the working party weekends.

Connections:

Electricity connections

A new electrical connection can cost £10,000 plus vat for connection to a new site.

Water connection -

Welsh Water website states £2,000 plus vat for Application (will be deducted from final fees for connection)

Standard connection costs £1639.00

It is believed there are more costs attached, the documents supplied on the website make reference to other potential charges with no figures, it is suggested that £10,000 be budgeted for the work owing to necessity to cross a street to access the mains.

Waste Connection

Consent cost £587.00

Adoption Agreement £591.00

It is believed there are more costs attached, the documents supplied on the website make reference to other potential charges with no figures, it is suggested that £10,000 be budgeted for the work owing to necessity to cross a street to access the mains.