



Chair's Report 2023-2025

[Note: We came into being as a purely informal small group in autumn 2023 and adopted a preliminary constitution a few months later, before transitioning in April 2025 to become a registered charity. For clarity, in this first full report we are covering the full period from our inception to September 2025.]

On behalf of the Trustees, I am delighted to present the first overview report of *For the Love of a Railway*.

It is no exaggeration to say that, two years ago, none of us expected to find ourselves so deeply committed to a project built around a railway that closed in 1965. The scope of our activities has grown considerably, yet our central mission remains: to celebrate the legend of the Axminster-Lyme Regis Railway and to use it to bring enjoyment and interest to people of all ages and potentially to other local lines. We also believe our initiative has the potential to deliver a much-needed boost to Axminster town centre.

Governance

From the outset, we recognised the importance of achieving charitable status - both to protect ourselves from individual liability and to enhance our credibility with funders. We therefore applied for and, in April 2025, became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

Our officers are:

- Geoff Hicks, Chairman
- Barrie Hedges, Secretary
- Kate Ridout, Joint Treasurer
- Stephen Thomas, Joint Treasurer

Other Trustees serving on our Board are or have been:

- The late Terry Guppy
- Bryan Henstock
- Phil Hutt
- Phil Weller

Other volunteers have regularly attended our meetings, making valuable contributions to discussions.

Premises

Our first project - the temporary model of the line displayed in the windows of the former River Cottage premises in Axminster at Christmas 2023 - demonstrated the level of public enthusiasm. It quickly became clear we needed a more secure base.

We identified the premises now known as The Depot in Chard Street, Axminster. We have been fortunate to operate there rent-free to date. Considerable effort has gone into decorating, repairing and fitting the space for our needs.

In July 2024 we moved our original layout into The Depot, and began a long-term plan to rebuild the scenery, add new track and develop intermediate locations. Trains were running from the official opening in October 2024, and we introduced twice-weekly public openings. Since then, many hundreds of visitors - aged from three to their mid-80s - have enjoyed what we offer.

We also overcame a major challenge when errors by our former electricity supplier led to excessive bills. Thankfully, this has been resolved and we received compensation.

Our current priority is to secure a one-year renewable licence for continued use of the premises.

Public benefit

The main activities carried out by the charity during the year are shown below. In carrying them out, the Trustees have acted in pursuance of the charity's charitable purposes, as set out in its constitution. In making decisions relating to these activities, the Trustees have had due regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit guidance when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant.

Fundraising

Without funds, our initiative could not exist. We are fortunate that many people have embraced our cause. Having first secured £1,000 for Lyme Billy 1, we have since raised a total of over £9,200 through crowdfunding, grants, collection boxes, events, donations and sales. This level of funding must continue if we are to sustain and grow our work while transitioning to a full commercial arrangement for our premises.

Grants received to date include:

- South Western Railway - £500 for the build of Lyme Billy
- Devon and Cornwall Community Rail Partnership - £500 for the build of Lyme Billy
- Creative East Devon Fund (EDDC) - £2,784 for our flexible lounge and the start of our Memories project
- Axe Vale Show - £250 for our portable model
- East Devon National Landscape - £1,242 for the design of our Tracks Through Time schools pack

We are grateful to Axminster Town Council for allowing us to use the Old Courthouse for the initial build of Lyme Billy 1, and to local businesses who have supported us in kind.

The greatest 'in kind' donation is undoubtedly the one made by our volunteers in freely contributing their skills and time. Without that time, we would not be able to match fund some of our grants.

Models

Our main focus has been on the evolution of our original Lyme Billy 1 layout into the Depot centrepiece Lyme Billy 2. Work on this more complex build is progressing well: it will feature authentic local buildings, advanced controls and finely detailed scenery, reviving the true magic of the line.

Other models include:

- Two layouts of Axminster Station and the town centre (one at the Community Waffle House, one for events)
- A small N-gauge Christmas display
- Stenson - an N-gauge layout kindly loaned long-term by PECO

We are also planning a child-friendly pop-up layout at The Depot, and are considering another major long-term project based on a different local line.

Events and initiatives

Outreach is a key part of our work. Highlights so far:

- **Displays** - our portable model has twice featured at the Axminster Model Railway Exhibition (which we co-manage), as well as at VE Day celebrations on Minster Green.
- **Speaker events** - two sold-out talks revived memories of the line and raised valuable funds.
- **Memories** - we are capturing first-hand recollections of the line while we can, and exploring how this work might help those living with dementia.
- **Tracks Through Time** - a schools pack integrating the story of the line into the local curriculum is in development.
- **Santa at the Station** - a Christmas grotto at Axminster Station in December 2024, raising funds and providing a much-needed festive attraction.
- **Fundraising bingo** - hosted by the late Trustee, Terry Guppy, at Axminster Tigers FC.

Risk

The Trustees have been constantly mindful of the risks of all types that may be created in pursuing our activities and believe we have taken the necessary steps to mitigate them.

Safeguarding

We take seriously our responsibility to safeguard children and vulnerable adults. We have adopted a safeguarding policy and appointed Stephen Thomas as Safeguarding Lead. All volunteers working with the public are asked to obtain DBS checks.

Communication

We recognised early on that strong communication was essential. We now have:

- More than 860 Facebook followers
- Over 3,000 users of our website: fortheLoveofarailway.co.uk
- More than 260 subscribers to our regular e-newsletter

We featured on BBC Spotlight TV for the opening of The Depot, and have enjoyed substantial print coverage. Our 25-minute video Sentimental Journey - featuring the late Terry Guppy - has been viewed more than 3,700 times.

Our Team

We suffered a great loss in August 2025 with the passing of our Trustee, and former fireman on the Axminster-Lyme Regis line, Terry Guppy. Terry was both our living link to the line and a warm, generous character loved by all who knew him. He will be greatly missed, and we are considering ways to commemorate his huge contribution.

Our team of Trustees and volunteers together form a strong, skilled and enthusiastic group. I thank every one of them for their dedication and commitment.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to the community and businesses of Axminster and beyond. Without your support, this quirky idea could never have taken root.

Geoff Hicks

Chair

September 2025