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Great British Railways
Submitted via Online Portal

Office of the Chief Executive
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Dear Sir / Madam

We are very pleased to present to you this Expression of Interest, proposing that Carnforth provides the location for the headquarters of Great British Railways.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Caroline Jackson
Leader

Kieran Keane
Chief Executive

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1. Context | Carnforth: An Aspirational Place at a Time of Opportunity

Describe the geographical area covered by the application and why it should be considered for hosting the headquarters?

Carnforth, known locally as 'Steamtown', is a town that has shaped, and been shaped by, the railways of Great Britain since the advent of rail in the 19th century.

Located in the Lancaster district, close to the geographic centre of the United Kingdom, Carnforth provides a crossroads for rail links to the north, south, east and west, with the town centre just moments from junction 35 of the M6.

Carnforth's location in north Lancashire provides for outstanding quality of life. The diverse local area lies on the doorstep of both the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales, and contains the unique coastline of Morecambe Bay; two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the seaside towns of Morecambe and Heysham; and the historic city of Lancaster. Carnforth itself is situated on the idyllic Lancaster Canal, and provides the location for its canal turn.

The Lancaster district currently stands at a time of great opportunity, with the planned Eden Project North site in Morecambe, six miles of coastline to the south of Carnforth. Sustainable travel plans for the development include direct access from Carnforth.

High levels of regional connectivity also enable swift and straightforward access across north-west England and Greater Manchester, as well as the Isle of Man via nearby Heysham Port and freight connections through the Port of Lancaster at Glasson Dock.

The town itself has a population of 6,086, with a working population of 3,519 (57.8%). With Carnforth at the centre of the functional economic area of Morecambe Bay, there is high potential for a diverse and skilled workforce to be located nearby, as well as offering levelling up opportunities in terms of skills development and economic access for those in areas of the district currently experiencing deprivation.

Carnforth as a community has shown its level of ambition through its draft Neighbourhood Plan, currently at consultation stage. Carnforth Town Council has led the way in engaging local stakeholders across sectors to imagine and then deliver a '*vibrant and successful*' future in partnership. Alongside Lancaster City Council's ambitious environmental, economic and social priorities for 2030, and the emerging Greater Lancashire County Deal proposals, the stage is set for embracing opportunities of national significance in north Lancashire.

Who else is involved in developing and supporting your application?

Carnforth's proposal enjoys very strong public support at local and regional level. The Lancaster Civic Vision group has encapsulated the level of local support through a petition signed by hundreds of local residents and stakeholders.

Politically, the proposal also enjoys resounding cross-party support. The Lancaster district's two Members of Parliament, David Morris MP (Morecambe and Lunesdale) and Cat Smith MP (Lancaster and Fleetwood) both showed their support by attending [a debate on the topic on 8 March 2022](#).

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Both Lancaster City Council and Lancashire County Council have contributed to the development of the proposal, with both authorities' elected members across parties voicing their support, as well as allocating their respective organisations' resources.

Numerous local stakeholders have also expressed their support for the proposal:

- Carnforth Town Council
- Carnforth Chamber of Trade
- Lancaster and District Chamber of Commerce
- Lancaster University
- University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay Trust

Describe the proposed site(s) for the national headquarters. What benefits do you expect your town/city will gain from accommodating the headquarters?

A variety of specific sites and land types could be made available to host the headquarters of Great British Railways, subject to further clarification of the spatial and organisational requirements.

The town and wider district would benefit significantly from hosting Great British Railways. Carnforth's strong existing link to the railways via its heritage would be further enhanced by national recognition. Furthermore, it is proposed that some relatively minor and inexpensive improvements to Carnforth Station's connectivity would enable additional investment around rail infrastructure and skills, as well as wider industry opportunities.

For example, Lancaster City Council is currently working in partnership with a training provider to offer unemployed people the opportunity to develop railway maintenance skills. The Lancaster district could supply a substantial proportion of the skilled labour required for future rail projects whilst offering greater access to skilled employment.

The training provider is seeking to relocate to the Lancaster district, considering sites with room to place a siding. This demonstrates the scale of opportunity for Lancaster City Council to partner with stakeholders across sectors to quickly capitalise on its railway heritage and future opportunities through an initiative such as Great British Railways.

What do you think makes your town/city best suited as the location for Great British Railways' national headquarters?

Carnforth's 'crossroads' status - spanning the borders of Lancashire and Cumbria, with connectivity to the north, south, east and west as well as proximity to areas experiencing deprivation - provides the perfect opportunity for a levelling-up initiative that will directly and demonstrably benefit the communities of north Lancashire and south Cumbria.

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Figure 1: Carnforth Station, situated in the town centre

2. Levelling Up

What is your vision for levelling up your local area? What is currently underway to deliver this?

Carnforth's location and connectivity to a huge variety of different localities and communities provides an ideal site for levelling up opportunities. Developing north Lancashire's skills and employment provision around an industry that has traditionally been strongly associated with Carnforth would create significant opportunities for more deprived communities in the region.

The Morecambe Bay area (including the Lancaster district and the area currently covered by Barrow and South Lakeland districts) has been recognised over many years as a functional, integrated economic area, with strong historical, community and supply chain connections binding the three districts together. The Bay provides a base for world class sectors with exceptionally high levels of innovation.

Bringing such a nationally important headquarters to the town would inevitably increase economic prosperity and employment opportunity in the area as well as acting as facilitator for improving access to better primary and secondary education through new schools. This in turn will help bring average house prices - currently highly affordable at £174,500, substantially lower than averages for the Lancaster district (£219,900), north-west region (£228,928) and England (£350,964) - more in line with the wider region.

The Lancashire Enterprise Partnership has secured a £320 million Growth Deal, the largest secured outside the core city regions, which is on track to deliver up to 11,000 new jobs, 3,900 new homes, and leverage £1.2 billion in new private sector investment into the region. This is supported by other transformational regional initiatives including the development of the Eden Project North in Morecambe, the creation of a new National Cyber Force in nearby Samlesbury, and the launch of the Innovation in Manufacturing and Engineering (IME) programme launched by BAE Systems and Lancaster University to grow high-tech industry and skills capability in the north west. Locating Great British Railways' headquarters in Carnforth would complement these on-going initiatives and act as a catalyst for further growth and investment in the area.

A number of new and existing high-profile business are already relocating to Carnforth including Porsche South Lakes, Havwoods International, and Rickerby International. Several industrial parks in the town provide home to many small and medium businesses, many of which would benefit from the opportunity that bringing Great British Railways to Carnforth would provide.

The Carnforth Neighbourhood Plan states of Carnforth that it is *"a successful and growing market town that has further developed its transport links and promoted its significant transport heritage to achieve and enhance its role as a busy centre for the rural areas of north Lancashire and south Cumbria."* This includes 214 new homes currently in construction, with an additional 500 new homes in planning.

Bringing the headquarters to Carnforth aligns perfectly with many of the town's Neighbourhood Plan objectives, including its heritage assets, tourism, active transport, sustainable development, diversification of employment, and access to the town.

Carnforth also has ambitions to develop a new sports complex and to attract investment in the promotion and research around battery electric hybrid locomotives.

What levelling up opportunities do you believe could be created for your town/city that are linked to the headquarters?

The opportunity to bring Great British Railways to Carnforth would be a true example of levelling up in action, ensuring opportunities such as the headquarters competition are equally open to places of different sizes and geographies. To quote Cat Smith MP at a recent debate regarding the proposal: *"If levelling up is to mean anything, we cannot just see bids to Government coming from the big cities; we also need them to come from towns such as Carnforth"*.

Carnforth railway station and town centre acts as a hub for the area, with retail offerings, public space, and other amenities available within a five-minute walk from the station. Locating the headquarters at a site adjacent to the station would enhance this offering as it would increase trade for existing businesses and would act as an immediate catalyst for regeneration of the town and attract investment to the area.

The headquarters would reinvigorate the town's connections to the railways, building on the deep heritage connections and providing an opportunity for Carnforth to be central to the future of Britain's railways. It is an opportunity to enhance the town's reputation as a tourist destination, building on the previous popularity of the Steamtown Railway Museum and linking the rich railway history of the town with the future of the industry.

Locating Great British Railways in Carnforth offers the opportunity to provide a distinct national base for the organisation without detracting from any of its existing regional offices.



Figure 2: Historic railway infrastructure at Carnforth Station

3. Connected and Easy to Get To

How would employees and visitors be able to access the National Headquarters, via rail routes and other sustainable modes?

Employees and visitors would be able to access the Great British Railways headquarters by train via the existing well-used interchange station at Carnforth (used in 2019/20 by 189,000 passengers), which has direct train services from Manchester, Manchester Airport, Leeds, Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness.

Carnforth also has good access to the strategic road network via junction 35 of the M6 which is only just over a mile from the site.

The highly popular Lancaster Canal passes directly through the centre of Carnforth; as well as providing leisure access for narrowboat users, the well-maintained towpath acts as a flat and easily accessible thoroughfare for cyclists through the Lancaster district.

As part of the development of the site, electric car and bike charging hubs would be provided to facilitate travel to the site using more sustainable modes of transport. This would be complemented by a range of infrastructure upgrades to promote active and sustainable travel including footpath and cycleway improvements, bike lockers and storage racks, e-scooters etc.

How connected is your location to and from other nations and regions of Great Britain?

In 1965, Carnforth provided a connection for as many trains to London as Lancaster, and only three fewer trains each day than Preston. The town also enjoyed regular connections to Liverpool and Crewe, providing access to much of the United Kingdom.

Carnforth's rail connectivity could be significantly improved to connect it to many more of the UK's regions plus Scotland if the main line platform edges, which were fenced off in the 1970s, were restored and trains specified to call there. This would be a straightforward and inexpensive scheme.

Carnforth would then have direct trains to London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Carlisle, Glasgow and Edinburgh in addition to existing direct trains to Leeds, Manchester and Manchester Airport, with quick journey times, as shown in the table and on the map below:

From Carnforth to:	Potential, pre HS2
London	2h 35
Manchester	1h 20
Leeds	1h 41
Glasgow	2h 13
Edinburgh	2h 08
Birmingham	2h 02
Liverpool	1h 17
Carlisle	36 mins
Barrow	50 mins

Table 1: Carnforth's potential connections with reinstated main line platforms

Such improvements to Carnforth's rail connectivity would also create a huge economic stimulus to the area and wider Morecambe Bay region.

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Figure 3: Carnforth's rail connectivity with reinstated main line platforms

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How will your suggested sites be equally accessible to all members of society, in line with Public Sector Equality Duties?

The location and potential sites do not create any barriers to universal accessibility. Carnforth's location connects it to a multitude of diverse communities across north-west England. The immediate sites are also highly accessible, with access from the street to Carnforth station platforms by step free ramps; no steps are encountered between the station entrance and the potential sites adjacent to the station.

Demonstrate how your location has supported successful collaboration between local authorities, business and other organisations across the UK to further social, economic and transport objectives.

The wider area makes a major contribution to the national economy through its port at Heysham with connections to Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man, a nuclear power station, BAE Systems submarine plant at Barrow, and expertise in servicing offshore wind installations and the Irish Sea gasfield.

Numerous examples exist of successful collaborative projects between local stakeholders, including:

- Development and promotion of the planned Eden Project North, including community engagement activities and the emerging Morecambe Bay Curriculum in conjunction with local education providers
- Lancaster City Council's collaboration with Lancaster University's Data Science Institute, taking a data-driven approach to public realm operations and route optimisation, delivering a 10% saving on service costs and carbon emissions
- The Lancaster and Morecambe Cycling Towns project, enabling substantial investment in infrastructure as well as removing behavioural barriers to cycling and active transport.

Local and regional partners including local authorities, universities and other cross-sector stakeholders have established a culture of expertise in blending the skills and resources of the public and private sectors to further the UK's social cohesion and economic objectives. The Great British Railways headquarters will be welcomed and will enable the area to add transport to the list of its successful collaborations which deliver public benefit.

4. Opportunities for Great British Railways

How will your location enable Great British Railways to engage with customers, the private sector and wider transport industry?

Locating the headquarters at Carnforth would enable Great British Railways to maximise engagement with its customers, the wider rail and transport industry and private sector participants if the station's main line platforms are restored and services specified to call. This will significantly widen the number of places which have direct rail links to Carnforth enabling Great British Railways to engage easily with customers, private sector and rail industry counterparts. The headquarters would be able to maximise connectivity to national rail stakeholders via direct links to the following examples of rail industry agglomeration:

- Great British Railways' regional offices in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds
- Train Operating Company headquarters in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds
- Transport Scotland's offices in Glasgow and Edinburgh
- Transport for the North's head office in Manchester
- System Operator's base in Milton Keynes, where network timetables are co-ordinated
- HS2's head office in Birmingham
- Railway engineering, signalling, and design consultancies, such as Atkins based in Birmingham and Arup based in London
- Railway technology specialists such as Siemens with its head office in Manchester and Alstom with its sophisticated Transport Technology Centre near Liverpool (at Widnes)
- Access to international destinations via direct trains to Manchester Airport

What opportunities does your location offer for working with the rail supply chain, manufacturing hubs and institutes?

Great British Railways will be able to attract the staff it needs by offering relocation to an attractive area of the country, with affordable house prices, in close proximity to the outstanding natural amenities of Morecambe Bay, the Lake District, and the Yorkshire Dales. In the future there are plans for the Eden Project to establish a major new visitor attraction at Morecambe, adding to the attractiveness and vibrancy of the area.

Potential sites adjacent to the station are much larger than would be needed for an office building alone, meaning that there is sufficient land to also accommodate co-location alongside of other railway supply chain, industrial and manufacturing facilities. This offers the opportunity to create a specialist railway campus-style agglomeration, similar to that which has been successfully established at Pride Park, in Derby.

What opportunities exist for collaboration with the retail, economic and environmental sectors? How could Great British Railways benefit from these links?

Strong local and regional partnerships between public, private and education partners provide substantial opportunity for collaboration. Great British Railways would benefit particularly from existing deep relationships with nearby Lancaster University, University of Cumbria and Lancaster & Morecambe College which between them have over 15,000 students able to bring fresh thinking into the rail industry.

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Carnforth is part of a district with a GDP of £3.2bn per annum and a population of 143,500 people with skills and employment levels higher than the national average. Existing skillsets drawn from local technology, green energy, manufacturing, port and defence sectors could bring new ideas to the rail industry.

Local partners are committed to addressing the climate emergency through building the sustainable, prosperous economy of the future. A particular local emphasis is placed on 'green skills' development, within which public and electric transport will be key development areas. Carnforth and the local area would provide an ideal research environment for the future of rail travel as part of a sustainable district.

What opportunities does/do the site(s)/building(s) itself offer Great British Railways to develop as an organisation?

The potential sites, directly adjacent to Carnforth Station (see further information in section 6 below), provide far more space than would be needed for an initial office building, offering scope for future expansion. The opportunity exists to stimulate a railway-focused hub attracting other major players and suppliers within the industry to the area to magnify employment and agglomeration prospects.

Whilst currently in private ownership, the potential sites are primarily in light industrial or warehousing use, and as such could be flexible to the future needs of Great British Railways and its partners.

5. Railway Heritage and Links to the Network

Demonstrate your railway heritage and the benefits it offers to Great British Railways.

"It is a railway town" said the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner of Carnforth. The town's connections with the railway, in particular the Victorian steam revolution, are rich and deep with it still affectionately referred to as *'Steamtown'*.

Carnforth's importance came from its position at the crossroads of the North-South mainline and the East-West lines linking the Furness peninsula with West Yorkshire and beyond. It became not only a hub for the railways, but also for the Post Office and the site of an iron and steel works.

In the 50 years from 1850 Carnforth's population grew ten-fold from 300 to 3,000. The railways were a great benefit to the prosperity of the local community. They saved the lives of many people who would otherwise have risked the ancient, but perilous, crossing across the Morecambe Bay sands. They also opened up the Furness peninsula for the first time with Grange-over-Sands developing as a genteel resort.

Lancashire's Heysham – Morecambe – Lancaster railway was an early pioneer of electrification, when in 1908 an overhead electric line system was introduced, powered by a power station at Heysham. The system was upgraded and in 1953 a full electric service was provided between Heysham and Lancaster Green Eyre using a system similar to that used on Great Britain's railways today.

Following the First World War, by 1923 the Ironworks had completely closed and the railway system was being rationalised with a few larger companies being formed out of all the smaller ones. For Carnforth it became a major centre for the LMS – London, Midland and Scottish – although this took away the lively rivalry within the town that had existed between the workers of the three separate companies. That rivalry had meant that the whole town was immersed in the entrepreneurial spirit of the early railways.

The LMS continued to view Carnforth as a major railway hub and between 1938-44 developed the last of their Motive Power Depots (MPD) there. Developed in 1933 the MPD were cutting-edge in terms of ultra-efficient design. The MPD at Carnforth is a rare and remarkably complete survival of a steam-age MPD, including various unique elements such as the only working Coaling Plant to survive in this country.

It was during the Second World War that one of the most romantic and poignant love scenes ever filmed was shot at Carnforth. Released in late 1945, *Brief Encounter's* tale of forbidden love, duty, sacrifice and an unspoken parting tore at the heart of war-torn Britain and beyond. Since then Carnforth Station has become part of the national psyche and our national heritage.

Following WW2 the railways were nationalised and in 1948 British Rail made Carnforth a regional repair centre. Slowly over the next 20 years diesel started to replace steam. Last days of steam were concentrated in Lancashire at the sheds of Lostock Hall, Rose Grove and Carnforth. Carnforth was the home to the *'Oliver Cromwell'* which in August 1968 was the last scheduled British Rail steam-hauled passenger train. Carnforth was also the last operating MPD, closing in 1968-9.



Figure 4: Carnforth Station in the 1960s

This closure marked the next stage in Carnforth's railway life. It immediately became a base for Steamtown, which was a home for steam locomotive preservation and a working museum. Many of this country's most famous steam locomotives such as the Gresley-designed Pacifics, '*Flying Scotsman*', and the '*Sir Nigel Gresley*', found a safe home here. By 1977 it could claim to be the largest steam depot in the country and was commissioned to restore the famous Orient Express carriages. Steamtown still exists and West Coast Railways is one of the UK's largest rail heritage operators with steam engines still regularly running from Carnforth.



Figure 5: A steam engine passes Carnforth MPD

This amazing railway heritage can offer great benefits to Great British Railways. Carnforth is a town where the railways are built into its DNA, whether looking north, south, east or west. They are the reason for its existence and the rivalry between the three companies embedded this, with people feeling the sort of passion and loyalty for their particular railway that is only usually found in the supporters of football clubs.

It is this legacy that can bring great benefits to the Great British Railways, entrancing and inspiring people with the culture, romance and engineering prowess of the railways at the same time as we look to the future. Bringing Great British Railways to Carnforth would ensure this legacy is sustained and enhanced by future rail investment through the Integrated Rail Plan and the delivery of HS2.

What links are there with existing rail employment, innovation and sector bodies, such as regional or local offices?

As set out in section 4, Carnforth benefits from having direct rail links to Great British Railways' regional offices in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds and other key railway employers (suppliers, Train Operators, technology and innovation hubs etc.).

Carnforth also enjoys close proximity to key centres of higher education (Lancaster University and University of Cumbria), energy (EDF Energy in Heysham) defence (BAE Systems in Barrow) and the research and innovation opportunities offered by these prestigious local institutions.

How could you use the headquarters to preserve and enhance your railway heritage?

Locating Great British Railways' headquarters in Carnforth would significantly help to preserve and enhance the town's rich railway heritage.

Many of the LMS's Motive Power Depot buildings were recently on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. The Railway Conservation Area is also on the Heritage at Risk Register.

The siting of the headquarters at Carnforth would immediately raise the status of these heritage assets, and assist the fundraising efforts for restoration. The passion for retaining and enhancing this heritage is evident in the volunteers of the Carnforth Station and Railway Heritage Company Ltd. They have previously successfully campaigned and raised £1.5m of funding to undertake the loving restoration of the station after it lay derelict for many years. The heritage centre is now 'staffed' by volunteers who care passionately about the station and promoting it as a visitor attraction.

Carnforth hosts the last complete steam railway depot, with an outstanding opportunity for life to be injected to the many listed historic structures. The site is now occupied by West Coast Railways one of the UK's largest heritage rail operators. The love of rail is second to none in Carnforth.

Carnforth has six Grade 2 and three Grade 2* railway buildings and combined with the Steamtown museum and the station's Rail Heritage Centre this juxtaposition of the old and the new will inspire and enhance both, giving new meaning and relevance to the heritage in today's world. It will help to preserve the buildings and promote a sustainable future for the working heritage of Steamtown.

6. Value for Money

How will your location offer financial efficiency to Great British Railways?

A potential location, adjacent to Carnforth Station, is depicted below. It includes a former ironworks, surrounded by railways, today in private ownership with some light industrial and warehouse use. Sites such as this demonstrate a degree of flexibility for a variety of possible future uses. Industrial land values in this area are significantly cheaper than in the south-east, and are also cheaper than other established railway locations such as York, Swindon and Derby, according to [government guidance on land value appraisal](#).

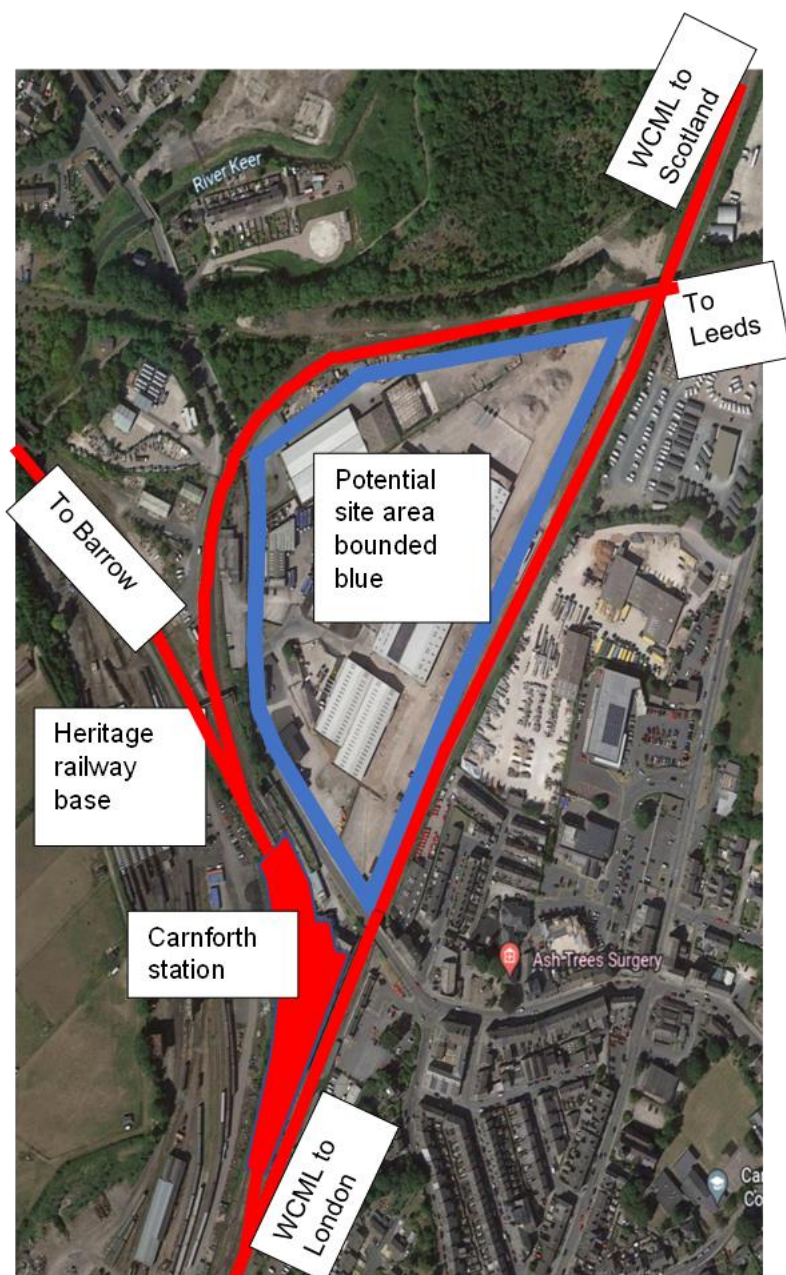


Figure 2: Land adjacent to Carnforth Station

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How does the proposed site allow Great British Railways to make good use of public money and keep costs down?

Existing infrastructure is more than adequate to accommodate Great British Railways adjacent to Carnforth Station. The location is readily accessible directly on foot from the station, and also via the road network by using existing rights of way and Warton Road. There would be no need to build new bridges over railways or roads, or other infrastructure, to enable the site to host the headquarters and any future rail-related uses.

How does your location generate public value including economic, social and environmental impacts?

As set out in earlier sections, Carnforth as a location provides connections between a wide variety of geographic locations in all directions. As such, Carnforth connects numerous economies, communities and environments, each of which would benefit from proximity to the headquarters of Great British Railways; and in turn, Great British Railways would benefit from access to a diversity of skills, communities and industries.

Economically, Carnforth has shown in recent years that it is able to attract significant businesses such as Porsche South Lakes, and the profile associated with Great British Railways would unlock a great deal of further investment around the transport industry, with the local area well able to accommodate further development sites.

Environmentally, the Lancaster district and wider Morecambe Bay area is deeply committed to transitioning to the sustainable transport infrastructure of the future. The location would provide an incubator and research environment for sustainable rail innovation via local energy and education stakeholders such as EDF Energy and Lancaster University.

Socially, Carnforth currently benefits from its status as a tourist destination steeped in railways heritage. Further enhancement of this status, combined with other local opportunities such as Eden Project North, would make north Lancashire an even more desirable location for visitors from the UK and worldwide, in a way that would remain deeply connected with the history of the town and its residents.

7. Public Support

Demonstrate the importance of the railways to the local community and your region.

As described in section 5, Carnforth as a town and thriving community owes its very existence to the emergence of the railways in the 19th century. Whilst the town has successfully diversified as part of the wider north Lancashire and Morecambe Bay economy, the depth of affinity for the railways has remained throughout, evidenced by the commitment and success of the volunteer-led Carnforth Station Heritage Centre.

The petitioning of Lancaster City Council by local stakeholders to express its interest in hosting Great British Railways demonstrates the strength of local feeling around the railways.

Carnforth is known widely as Steamtown; tourists flock to the town by train, coach, cycling and walking to experience its rail heritage. The enhanced facilities brought by Great British Railways would further develop its offer, whilst providing a highly desirable location for those associated with the headquarters.

How do your intentions for the national headquarters tie in with the needs of your local communities, your identity and values?

The Lancaster district includes a diversity of city, coast and countryside locations and communities. Carnforth's intense connection to the rail industry represents an obvious option within the district for welcoming the headquarters of Great British Railways.

[Lancaster City Council's four strategic priorities](#) reflect the values and vision of local partners and communities for 2030:

- A Sustainable District
- An Inclusive and Prosperous Local Economy
- Healthy and Happy Communities
- A Co-operative, Kind and Responsible Council

Bringing Great British Railways to Carnforth would identify very strongly with environmental, economic and community priorities. The opportunity for the district to lead the way nationally in sustainable transport would clearly resonate with local stakeholders; Great British Railways would swiftly find itself at the heart of a local and regional partnership committed to creating the sustainable communities of the future.