

AGM meeting- Informal Briefing, Presentation and Questions and Answers

Following completion of the 2019 AGM, there followed an informal session with a brief update from the Chairman on events during the year. This was followed by a presentation on the Gauge Museum Project by Helen Anson and Steve Williams. There was then a question and answer session with Members.

Chairman's Informal Briefing

Chris Austin provided an informal briefing to Members which was essentially an update on his Chairman's Report to the AGM. Key points to note were that:

- 2018 had been a difficult year particularly in relation to the uncertainties posed by the problems at the PLC.
- Visitor numbers at the Gauge Museum had fallen. Chris Austin said he would enlarge on the reasons later.
- The Trust had had a major success with the approval of the Gauge Museum National Lottery Heritage Fund Grant of £40,000 supplemented by Trust resources of £20,000. This had led to establishment of a formal Project Group and there would be a presentation on the Project by Helen Anson and Steve Williams shortly.
- In addition, the Trust had improved its income levels and its finances were in a healthy state.
- Work on coach BC K 6705 had been completed with the exception of the corridor gangway connections and it was intended that the coach would be available for use on the WSR from June 2019 onwards.
- Jonathan Jones-Pratt had been appointed as the new PLC Chairman in September and had taken resolute and decisive action to address the short term financial problems facing the PLC. The Trust Board, recognising the fundamental challenge of ensuring that the railway was able to continue to operate, had committed funding towards the purchase of heritage bullhead rail for Blue Anchor and made a number of other offers to the PLC consistent with the Trusts charitable objects.
- It was inevitable that visitor numbers and income to the Trust would be affected by late opening of the railway. However, on a positive note, the Office of Rail and Road follow-up visit to the WSR on the previous day (22nd March) had been positive and that the railway would be reopening from Bishops Lydeard to Watchet from 30 March 2019 with the remainder of the line following in April.
- Discussions with the PLC about the possibility of Quantock Belle Sunday lunch train customers being able to visit the Gauge Museum first as part of their experience were at an advanced stage.
- The acquisition of Don Fraser as Treasurer in succession to Chris Bolt was an extremely welcome addition to the Board of Trustees and the Board was already benefiting from Don's wise guidance. The return of David Baker after a short break and a move to North Devon was also very much appreciated and David was taking particular responsibility for oversight of Blue Anchor Railway Museum.
- The Trust has been extremely fortunate in securing the services of Helen Anson as its Learning Officer. Helen started in December and has quickly proved herself to be an indispensable member of the team. Helen has forged many good local links already and is working in collaboration with Catherine Dance, the Association Community Engagement Officer. Smith and Jones have also been appointed as the design and interpretation consultants for the Gauge Museum Project.
- A programme of winter cleaning and refurbishment of the Gauge Museum was well underway as were improvements to the Gauge Junction model railway.

- As ever, the Trust was looking to acquire more Members and volunteers. Members were asked to “spread the word” both within the railway and outside.

Presentation on the Gauge Museum Project

Helen Anson and Steve Williams gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Project. A copy of the presentation is available on the Trust website. Members were also asked that if they were interested in the Learning Assistant role, then they should contact Helen Anson. Details on this were also being published on the website.

Questions and Answers

A question and answer session with Members then took place.

Question-Mary Randle

In relation to the Gauge Museum Project, will DRB checks be required in relation to child protection and, if so, who will pay for these?

Answer-Chris Austin and Helen Anson

Yes, DRB checks will be required and in order to be fully compliant, the Trust intends to ensure that all relevant volunteers are covered. Subject to confirmation of cost, the Trust was happy in principle to fund DRB checks for volunteers. Helen Anson was already investigating this and would confirm the position to interested Learning Assistant applicants. It was noted that work on safeguarding was being undertaken by a newly formed Learning and Education Group and that the question of DRB checks would be addressed for all volunteers.

Question-Peter Darke

Peter said that he fully supported the role of Learning Officer and asked of the objectives of the Project would include a better description of the artefacts on display within the Museum?

Answer-Helen Anson

Yes, this was one of the aims of the Project and Helen cited the example of the Gauge Measure as an object that could be better explained to visitors.

Question-Mary Randle

Does the Trust Board know why visitor numbers in the Gauge Museum were down in 2018?

Answer-Chris Austin

Although precise reasons for this were not clear, it was felt that shorter turnaround times for trains at Bishops Lydeard had a significant impact as did issues such as the Christmas marquee behind the signal box. Following representations to the PLC, for 2019, there would be longer turnaround times of between 45 and 50 minutes for trains. In addition, Ian Coleby has produced a new Museums Leaflet for distribution with tickets, PLC promotional material and available in the shops. Geoff Evens and Ian Coleby had also commissioned new poster boards at the entrance to the station.

Question-Tim Stanger

If the Trust is going to succeed and flourish, it needs many more members and supporters. What measures are in hand to achieve this?

Answer-Chris Austin, Geoff Evens and Steve Williams

The Trust would remain focused on its specific remit of learning coupled with the Museums and heritage carriage restoration. Additionally, as part of the Business Plan for 2019, there would be a specific push on membership. There was already an agreement with the PLC to add core narrative about the Trust to PLC marketing and promotional material and on social media. The Trust website was being enhanced to include the Learning Offer as part of the Museum Project and we were already being successful in recruiting to the new Learning Assistant role in support of Helen Anson.

There was a new Volunteer Committee for the whole railway being established and this was a major initiative around the recruitment and retention of volunteers. New role profiles for volunteer activities within the Trust were being created and would be advertised when signed off.

Question-Peter Darke

How will Ticket Clerks know about the Museums run by the Trust?

Answer-Chris Austin

The Ticket Clerks will have supplies of the new Museums Leaflet to handout with tickets along the line. The Museums are also being promoted as previously indicated through the PLC marketing and commercial functions.

Question-Tim Stanger

It seems hard to donate funds to the Trust especially on the Internet. What innovative plans are being considered to improve the fairly modest annual income?

Answer-Geoff Evens, Don Fraser and Steve Williams

The problems with the donation button on the website are being resolved and the new button will be operational early in the following week. The Trust Board has approved a new Fundraising Plan and a number of those ideas are already in development. Donation forms will be made available widely along the railway and publicised again on the website outlining ways to donate. An example of the new initiative will be in relation to the QB trains and, following agreement with the PLC the opportunity to hold charity fundraising days at both Bishop Lydeard and Blue Anchor stations during 2019. The Trust would also be exploring the use of card machines for donations and the possibility of mobile phone donations.

Question-Tim Stanger

Greg and the team have done a monumental job on coach 6705 and a considerable amount of money has been spent on its restoration. What provision is being made to keep under some sort of cover, temporary or otherwise when not in traffic? Left out in the open would see it deteriorate quickly I would suggest.

Answer-Chris Austin

Clearly, when the coach is in traffic it will be stored out in the open. Ideally, we are hoping that, over the winter, 6705 could be stable in the Museum Siding and covered with an interim

poly tunnel. In the longer term, the Trust will be looking to implement a covered accommodation solution as outlined in the Southern Gateway proposals.

SW/2019/AGM