

WEST SOMERSET STEAM RAILWAY TRUST LTD

Minutes of the meeting of Board of Trustees held on Thursday 20th May 2020 at 10 am by videoconference

Present: Chris Austin (CA) Chairman Geoff Evens (GE) Steve Williams (SW)
Ian Coleby (IC) Don Fraser (DF) Matt Jackson (MJ)
David Baker (DB)

420. Welcome

CA welcomed Matt Jackson to the Board as the interim lead for the Model Railway Group and explained the background following the decision of Alan Meade to retire from the WSR. Trustees recorded their thanks and appreciation to Alan for all his years of service to the railway in the various roles he had undertaken. It was agreed that notice of Alan's retirement be posted on the website and on Facebook.

421. Apologies

These were received from Alan Smithers (ASM) who unfortunately was unable to connect to the meeting.

Action

422. Conflicts of Interest

No new conflicts of interest were reported.

423. Minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2020

These were approved as a correct record.

424. Action Log-19th March 2020 (items not on the agenda)

Covid 19 Pandemic

The Board noted all the current arrangements for shutdown that were in place together with the updates received either directly from the PLC or through HOPS. Trustees confirmed that all physical Steam Trust activities on the railway had been suspended.

Blue Anchor Museum Infrastructure Work

It was noted that completion of the external Museum repairs was still outstanding due to the impact of Coronavirus. A lot of the equipment was still stored in the Museum itself which meant that the building could not be accessed by visitors until this was resolved. It was agreed that ASM be asked to contact RAMS to agree a date and timescale for completion once the programme and timetable for phased reopening had been approved by the PLC.

ASM

Future Role of Blue Anchor Museum

SW said that not all volunteers at Blue Anchor had responded to the consultation document. It was agreed that, in light of the current situation, the deadline be extended by a further four weeks.

SW

425. Interim Arrangements for the Model Railway Group

CA had asked MJ to take the interim lead role acknowledging that it will be some time before the MRG will be fully functioning again. MJ said that he had worked with Alan Meade on relaunch plans which will be integrated into the reopening plans for the Gauge Museum. Given current guidance on groups and social distancing it was likely that there could be no more than 3 or 4 operators at any one time. MJ/CA

CA said that the intention was to review arrangements for how the MRG operated and to bring these to the Trust Board for approval. SW set out a proposed process and this was agreed. He would circulate this to CA and MJ and then to Trustees with a timetable. SW

426. Update on the Prospects for Reopening and Next Steps

CA summarised the current position as it was understood. Prospects for running trains during the remainder of 2020 looked pretty slim largely on both public protection and economic grounds. Easter 2021 was increasingly likely to be the first occasion on which trains will run in public service. The WSR process and timetable needed to be aligned to the wider tourist sector reopening across Taunton and West Somerset.

The railway continued to be managed on a care and maintenance basis. The PLC particularly through Martin Brown was working on a series of protocols designed to enable activities to be reintroduced on a phased basis in line with government guidance. CA was taking the lead on this for the Trust and was looking at what the Trust needs to put in place to be able to restart its activities (sanitisers, disinfectants et cetera). Quite a lot of progress has been made on buildings as well as arrangements for the Williton site. CA would be liaising with Ryan Pope as to the practicalities there are given the limited facilities available. No specific timetable was yet available however.

427. Treasurers Report

The papers from DF were received. He reported that the draft annual accounts were still with Monahans but that he expected a first completed draft next week. The Board was reminded that the Trust has until end of December 2020 to submit approved accounts in line with the Covid 19 arrangements. In terms of current accounts DF reminded the Board of the commitments already made and additional sums received from the Art Exhibition and from sale of 40th anniversary books. DB asked if we could promote the sale of the books in the Minehead shop and also online. DF to investigate. The current position with regard to the HLF was also noted. DF

428. Prospective Activities for the rest of 2020

At the time the item was proposed, it was thought that there would be more information about what could be scheduled up to December this year. In the absence of further information at this stage the item was deferred.

429. WSR Update

The paper from the West Somerset Railway Association regarding future support organisation configuration was noted and the response prepared and sent by the Chairman was ratified.

The Chairman asked Trustees for feedback on the briefing notes from the videoconference sessions with the PLC and Association and these were felt to be helpful and informative. The latest developments with regard to the S and D Trust and the Washford site were reported including the involvement of the HRA in seeking a mediated settlement.

430. Review of Trust Business Plan

SW reminded the Board that, before the current lockdown restrictions, Trustees had agreed to a formal review of the Business Plan for 2021/22. Following discussion, SW proposed that he prepare a summary schedule of proposed retentions and changes for consideration by Trustees and ratification at the July Board meeting. This was agreed.

SW

431. National Lottery Fund Project

SW updated the Board on the current position with regard to the Project. He said that he was trying to organise a videoconference meeting of the Project Team for the following week to progress those items of the Project Plan which could be undertaken via “desktop” activities.

SW

432. Charitable Objects and Powers

SW briefed the Board on the current position with regard to Objects and Powers.

433. AGM Preparations

Noting the update from DF on the annual accounts earlier, Trustees considered options for holding the AGM. SW said that there were one or two small adjustments and gaps in the Draft Annual Report to be finalised and he would finish these. In terms of timing and subject to Government guidance on the nature and size of social gatherings, the intention would be to aim for the AGM in September if possible. The potential use of Bishops Lydeard Village Hall would be investigated as the Station Committee Room would be too small. The position would be reviewed at the July Board meeting.

SW

434. Trustee Vacancies

With Alan Meade’s retirement and with future succession planning in mind, there was a need to look at advertising for new Trustees again. Clearly, a representative from MRG was required. A number of potential candidates were suggested. CA and SW would take this forward.

CA/SW

435. Future Board Meetings

Trustees present felt that the videoconference had gone well and were happy to continue with that medium. It was therefore agreed that the Board would stick to the previously circulated schedule of meetings for 2020 which meant that the next meeting will be Thursday 16th July 2020 at 10 AM by videoconference. SW was thanked for setting up and funding the subscription.

SW