

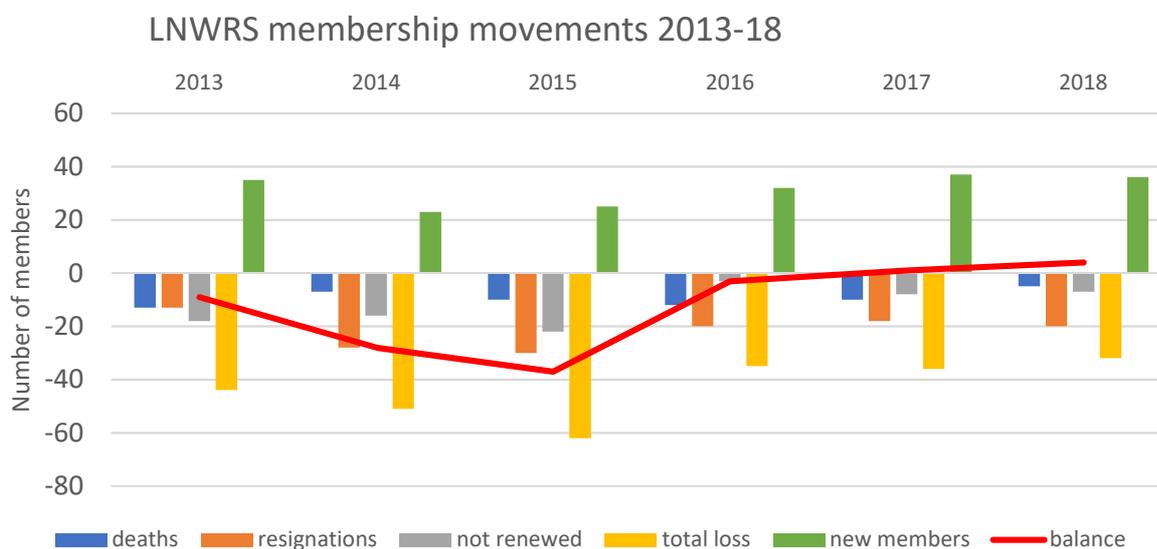
London & North Western Railway Society Strategy

In May 2018 the Executive Committee resolved that the strategic direction of the Society should be reviewed and confirmed, to provide greater clarity and to provide a Society which reflected members' wishes and the wider obligations of a charity. The principal sources of information used in the development of the strategy have been:

- the questionnaire sent to all members in September 2018. It has provided much useful information on what members value from the Society; many of the responses included letters which have provided valuable support in the preparation of this document.
- a review day held in August at which strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were examined and responses explored,
- a discussion paper prepared by R Foster and D Pennington on behalf of the research and archives sub-committee (January 2018) on developing the archives

The intention is that the strategy will be published for all the membership to see. The strategy will form a part of the agenda at all meetings of the Executive Committee and will be used to guide decisions. Progress will be reported at the annual general meeting.

Without a membership there is no Society, as the income from annual subscriptions forms the main part of the revenue. There has been concern expressed about a decline in the number of members. Analysis of the statistics shows that there is not a simple reduction in members. From the turn of the century there was a steady but slowing increase in net membership until a slight fall in 2013, with a significant decline from 2014 to 2016, when the membership declined by around 12%. A more detailed review of membership changes between 2013 and 2018 shows that between 2014 and 2018 resignations (i.e. deliberate ending of membership) was the largest single component of membership decline, while new member numbers showed an increase.



The purpose of the Society and its charitable obligations are set out in the Constitution. This is – *'to advance the education of the public in all aspects of the London and North Western Railway, including the study and preservation of information, drawings, photographs, models and other material pertaining to the railway company and related organisations and subjects.'*

As a registered Charity we need to be sure we are delivering the charitable objects that bring us charitable status and the benefits of gift aid. The Charity Commission (and legislation) have tightened the requirements, particularly over education, since the LNWR became a Charity. We must be clear that the services which the Society provide deliver what is currently required. If they do not, we must be clear about what needs to be done to comply, and how can provision be enhanced.

The Society should aim to be the first point of contact for information and advice on the LNWR and its predecessor organisations. It should also be strongly placed to provide information and advice on the LNWR infrastructure and equipment in the years since the Grouping. To support this, the strategy has been developed under six heads:

- Membership
- Archives and records
- Publications, promotion and publicity, and the wider charitable obligations
- Links and partnerships
- Finance
- Organisation

Membership

The active membership is a very small proportion of the total membership. This is always likely to be the case as many are satisfied by being passive members. However, we should aim to broaden the interest among members and create opportunities to become involved. The 2018 questionnaire has shown that there are members who are not currently involved but who would be interested in becoming so.

The strategic aims are:

- To increase the number of new members from within the hobby and through local history interests. The aim of recruiting at least 40 new members each year will both increase the total membership, and offset losses. In particular we will aim to attract new members by increasing the visibility of the LNWR through models and increase involvement with manufacturers by providing access to plans and drawings and advice.
- To support all existing interests in the LNWR including research, staff history and conservation/preservation.
- To develop an understanding among members of the Society's charitable obligations and what it has to do to deliver them To involve more members in more specific activities and find ways of using particular skills identified by members
- Broaden the eras covered in publications, particularly the newsletter while maintaining the LNWR focus.
- There is a growing interest in the digital hobby world in producing virtual models as an inexpensive way of reliving the past. The Society will support virtual modelling through access to plans and drawings to help produce the most accurate models.

Archives and records

A document prepared by the Records & Archives sub-committee in January 2018 forms the basis for this part of the strategy. The amount and range of archive material held by the Society in its own accommodation sets it apart from many line societies and is a significant factor in our relationship with external bodies, including the National Railway Museum and Cheshire County Archives. It is central to the development of the Society to generate

support for the Archives as an important aspect of the Society's work both as a principle and financially.

The Society has a lease on the present building until 2024, and the Signalling record Society has a sub-lease and shares some expenses. The accommodation is now almost completely full.

The strategic aims are:

- To develop a better understanding among members and the general public of the contents of the archive and its accessibility. To generate interest in the archive material and to increase the use of the archives by visitors to the Study Centre. This will include using material for 'non-railway' use, particularly family history research.
- To increase the understanding of the benefits of having an archive accessible as now for research, Journal article and other publication production and external public relations.
- To develop the suitability of the archive for a job placement for a student archivist due to its range and independence.
- To use our high specification plan and book scanners to copy and store much of the archive to an agreed timetable. This will protect vulnerable original material as it will not need to be available generally for use and inspection.
- A significant amount of the collection would benefit from more detailed cataloguing, which can be very time-consuming and is at present limited to the archive centre. Also, clear identification of duplicated material with a commercial value will provide the opportunity for income generation. Digitisation will also increase the availability of the archive material by enabling remote access.
- The scanners have a capacity beyond the needs of the LNWR and can be valuable to other organisations without such a capacity. Scanning should be to professionally recognised standards accepted by records offices and others. Conditions and rates for such access should be set out.
- To confirm and implement a clear policy for acquiring and disposal of items.
- To recruit more volunteers from among the membership to help achieve all these aims.
- To provide long-term accommodation for the archives and the study centre in facilities which minimise the cost to the Society, are more suitable for the storage of fragile material, and are as accessible as possible to the majority of the membership and the public.
- Evidence shows that LNWR material is held in many (non-LNWR) local archives, which are not necessarily, on the former network of the LNWR. A catalogue of these would create a virtual archive.

Publications, promotion, publicity, and the wider charitable obligations

The Society has not undertaken any review of its obligations and delivery in the years since it became a Charity in 2005. Since registration, there has been new legislation and the issue of new guidance, aspects of the law and guidance appear to be significantly more onerous than were applicable when the Charity was registered. There is a need to review the Society's charitable delivery.

The single most-valued benefit from membership is the Journal. For the majority of members, it is the only contact they have with the Society and there is a high level of satisfaction with it. The Society has a history of the successful publication of a number of books and monographs on a variety of subjects and intends to continue the support to authors and publishers.

The internet is increasingly used as a single point of contact by many people. In common with many line societies, the numbers visiting our website and forum are low and so the Society's online presence cannot be very effective at spreading the word. We should have a site which is easy to find and navigate, provides the enquirer with information, and gives them an opportunity to buy Society items and join the Society in one visit. The forum is an underused facility which contains much useful information and should be a valuable source for members and non-members. If the Society is to grow, or at the very least, maintain current membership levels, we need to attract people from an audience who will have little, if any, knowledge of the LNWR. A large proportion of the public uses social media and we should find a way of using it to enhance, not replace Society sites.

Model railway and engineering exhibitions can be a valuable venue for promoting the Society and sales. Given the geographical spread of the LNWR, an exhibition attendance programme should consider the resources needed to properly represent the Society in the most effective way. For example, the open day at Kidderminster is cited in the questionnaire responses as one of the most popular Society events. As well as members, the location on the SVR attracts the public and is an opportunity to expose them to the LNWR, recruit new members and create sales income. There is also scope to develop modellers' days at Kenilworth to link modellers to a major source of prototype information.

The strategic aims are:

- To ensure that the Society delivers its Charitable objects when viewed against guidance, good practice, and statements in original Charity application.
- To develop the web site as the single authoritative point of contact for LNWR information and sales. This includes making the forum work through promoting more and more frequent items. The mystery photograph section will be revived. The access and moderator arrangements will be reviewed.
- To manage the use of social media to enhance not replace Society presence on the web and act as signposts to our site. This will include control of the amount and type of Society material posted.
- To develop a scheme for a 'corporate image' Society presence at specific exhibitions. Consideration will be given to the production of area-specific information to increase the Society's profile.
- Develop the modellers' day at Kenilworth and consider invitations to modelling clubs to them. Maintain the open day at Kidderminster and consider developing further a symposium approach to the event.
- Have a plan for contact with magazines and web sites to include articles about the LNWR and modelling, and publicity for events.

Links and partnerships

The Society does not and should not work in isolation. Many members are also members of other line societies or historical associations. We should learn from each other and be prepared to share good practice.

The strategic aims are:

- Negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Railway Museum and develop 'partner of excellence' status.
- Develop an understanding with Cheshire archives on future working arrangements.
- Develop existing and establish new links with other research centres and heritage railways.

Finance

Good financial health is both a legal requirement and a survival necessity for the Society.

The strategic aims are:

- Establish strong financial protocols and Standing Financial Instructions
- To have in place arrangements to manage bequests and donations
- To have systems in place to maximise Society income from membership and other sources.

Organisation

The Society depends entirely on volunteers to meet its obligations and provide services. A significant amount of organisational knowledge and expertise lies in the hands of no more than 3% of the membership. This is potentially a very fragile arrangement and is a problem found in most similar organisations. To ensure that we are able to continue and remain in robust organisational health we need to encourage more and wider involvement by the membership in the running of their Society.

The strategic aims are:

- To develop succession planning for the officer roles, both trustee and others. The publication and maintaining of a manual of standard operating procedures will assist considerably in this.
- To share administrative responsibilities more widely, ideally through the use of small teams (or pairs) to undertake roles such as exhibition support, provision of area meetings, and archive cataloguing and repair.
- To have business continuity plans to maintain the Society's functions in the face of interruption of services such as loss of premises, loss of digital access or loss of staff.

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