



PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE
Planning ahead beyond 2033.

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Front cover: Light pacific 'Manston' nears Norden with a westbound SR passenger train.

Photo credit; all photos are copyright Andrew P M Wright.

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Approved by the Trustees of the Swanage Railway Trust.

I. EXECUTIVE FORWARD.

The Swanage Railway is at significant point in its development.

The physical work of re-building and re-connecting to the national rail network is complete. Our heritage business is well established running between Swanage and Norden, and looking forward the Railway is well placed to be part of a environmentally friendly transport solution for SE Dorset that supports residents both at work and leisure, and visitors who want to enjoy the area and wish to manage their impact on the environment while doing so.

Growth in facilities and services cannot be achieved on poor foundations. It is a priority to move to a sustainable commercially based business model that produces re-investable profits. With that model in place growth can be better managed, on sound footings, in incremental affordable steps.

Demand to access the area, particularly without cars, will continue to increase and at a pace that will challenge. The Railway has the opportunity to respond to that challenge and evolve, retaining in the process all the good qualities that have supported the railway's re-birth over the past 50 years. This Strategic Plan is a further step along that journey.

The Trustees,
Swanage Railway Trust,
October 2023

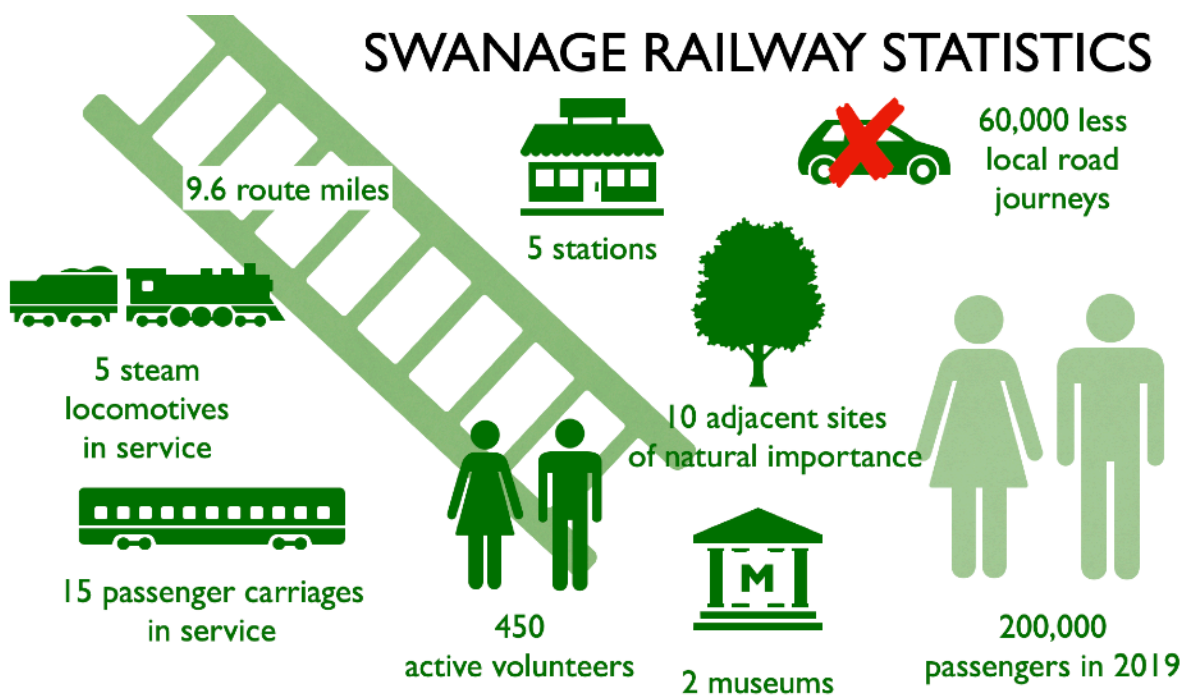
2. THE RAILWAY.

The Swanage Railway (SR) is a 9.6 mile long private heritage railway connecting Swanage with Wareham in Purbeck, South East Dorset carrying as many as 200,000 passengers in a pre pandemic year.

The Swanage Railway Trust (SRT), a registered charity, exists to promote and educate the public about the railways of Dorset.

The charity is managed by voluntary Trustees elected by its Members. The Trust's charitable objectives are met through a subsidiary company, the Swanage Railway Company (SRC) that is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the SR. The Trust controls the SRC through its voting rights.

The Company is managed by a Board of appointed Directors. The SRC has a number of salaried staff and active volunteers - drawn mainly from our Members - to provide predominantly steam hauled train services in a style comparable to British Railway's Southern Region in the late 1950s/early 1960s.



Fundraising, volunteer recruitment and museum development are activities managed by the SRT.

This plan is prepared by the Trustees, who have consulted at stages in its preparation.

Our Vision is

"To be a vibrant, volunteer led heritage railway attraction supporting the local economy"

and our Mission to achieve that is

"To ensure the preservation and safe operation of a heritage railway attraction that appeals to local residents, visitors to Purbeck, rail enthusiasts and volunteers, in order to be able to continually develop and bring economic benefit to the area"

3. A CHALLENGING TRADING ENVIRONMENT.

Evaluation of the risks and opportunities facing the SR has identified the following significant factors that the plan will need to address.

External factors.

- **Economic environment:** uncertainty caused by post covid price rises across a wide spectrum will impact in the short/medium term on customer's disposable income. External events will continue to be highly difficult to predict and the consequences difficult to plot with any accuracy eg major public health events, or geo-political impacts on coal sources. **The SR will need to build trading resilience to better manage these risks.**
- **Natural environment and climate change:** High levels of natural environment designation and protection create SE Dorset as a highly desirable place to live and visit whilst limiting future development. The Railway operates through a complex mosaic of designated sites of natural importance and at two locations the track bed is included in the designation. This impacts on some day to day activity on the railway particularly west of Norden. New policies to manage vehicular access to Purbeck Heaths NNR - the first super NNR in the UK - focus on Norden(Purbeck Park) present growth opportunities to the SR. Climate change policies such as Dorset Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and other heightened public awareness and expectations, will ensure that continued use of carbon fuels will remain in the public eye. Application of macro level UK policies to phase out coal production and use will continue to impact on coal supply, cost and use. **The SR will need to adopt proactive policies to optimise fossil fuel use, examining use of alternative fuels and demonstrating the positive benefits of continued use. In addition practical policies to manage assets respecting designations to**

protect nature and the environment should also take into account the impact of climate change.

- **Active travel:** The Government's strategy to promote walking and cycling has led to the designation of Norden (Purbeck Park) as the Purbeck Hub for both cycling and walking, including the promoted Poole Harbour Trails, based on public transport links. The SR should help to support suitable facilities for such trail users and maintain awareness of further local developments and link to commercial opportunities.
- **Congestion:** summer peak road traffic causes significant congestion 'hot-spots' and the A351 remains a route of significant congestion concern and is the focus of interventionist policies by Dorset Council to reduce car use. High seasonal road use brings pollution and pressure on car parking to the east of the area and at popular destinations particularly around the coast. The SR is a key community asset to achieve non-road based objectives and should lead on active promotion.
- **Volunteer demographic:** Changes in pension plans and state support are reducing the pool of potential volunteers, and in addition the original motivation to create and support the railway is changing as memories of mainline steam naturally decline. The result is an increasingly competitive environment in which to recruit and retain volunteers. The SR should develop and invest in recruitment and retention process that meet its aims with added emphasis and support to recruit young volunteers.



Engineering excellence:
newly restored T3 563
hauls its first SR
passenger train in
October 2023.

- **Planning:** Dorset Council are reviewing the town planning frameworks for Dorset following the local government re-organisation in 2019. These plans will direct future growth in SE Dorset and policies will directly impact on the ability of the Railway to develop. The SR must maintain awareness and advocacy skill to ensure these plans support our future development.
- **Regulatory compliance:** standards and expectations of both our charitable and railway regulators continue to develop and increase, requiring effective changes to processes and

methods of business activity and operation. This trend is not expected to reduce. Greater public visibility and scrutiny is expected. **The SR must continue to maintain and operate a safe railway service through compliance with its Safety Management System and relevant standards.**

- **Stakeholders:** the SR has a large and diverse range of stakeholders from local governments to individuals. To prosper requires awareness of stakeholder expectations and to engage with stakeholders ensuring wherever possible that our objectives align. **The SR should proactively identify people and a plan to engage with key stakeholders developing mutually beneficial relationships.**
- **Customer expectations:** customer expectations are constantly changing and are well informed by social media platforms, not living up to the standards of other visitor attractions could lead to revenue loss, as return visits decline and recommendations to visit are not be promoted. **The SR should ensure that customer experience is maintained by appropriate service and asset standards.**

The overall picture is of continued uncertainty at a UK macro level but with opportunities at a local level to position and grow the Railway to meet local needs and to address areas of local interest.

Internal factors.

- **Charitable objectives:** the litmus test for all our activity will be compliance with our published charitable objectives coupled with compliance with codes of charitable conduct published by the Charities Commission. **The Trustees are accountable for compliance.**
- **Asset condition:** core to the overall proposition of the 'living museum' Railway is the use of now obsolete historic assets that age and wear out. Maintaining these assets (trains, buildings, structures and track) to current standards to meet both customer needs and safe operation requires assets registers, forward asset condition assessment, repair funding and facilities for maintenance. **The SR must develop asset based management systems and condition based priorities.**
- **Business model:** for a considerable period of time the SR has been unable to consistently generate sufficient surplus to support repairs and renewals or developments: these works typically require top-up grant support either from the SRT fundraising or external grant sources. There are low reserves to ensure adequate cover to continue business operation in the event of a major catastrophic event. The situation is not sustainable in the medium term, a concern heightened by the recent experience in the pandemic. A sustainable business is one where income exceeds costs to afford repair and renewals and maintains a prudent reserve. The business may not necessarily be able to fund significant projects - these may need further fundraising or grant support from other sources. **The SR must adopt a business model incorporating a cost and revenue base that produces sufficient re-investable surpluses.**
- **Safe competent operation:** our business model relies on a blend of salaried staff and volunteers. All staff in safety critical and customer facing roles require valid competency in their tasks and staff in other posts need to be competent to meet the expectations of their posts. Maintenance of these competency standards are a key expectation of staff,

customers and regulators. Full implementation of a competency based system of training and development needs to be completed.

- **Competencies:** continuing to attract, develop and retain salaried staff and volunteers with appropriate competencies is essential to our current business model. The SR should continue to use a competence based selection process.
- **Project delivery:** despite our best intentions some high profile projects remain incomplete for a variety of reasons including poor projects cost estimation, changing priorities and funding difficulties. The inability to deliver to plan disengages donors and results in the Railway not having improved facilities and negative impact on credibility. The SR requires a more robust process and resources for project management, development and delivery.
- **Fundraising:** despite the importance of fundraising to deliver essential work it remains a challenge both to prioritise what to raise funds for and to resource the activity. Much good work, driven by the pandemic, was done making a material difference to our survival but the activity remains under resourced. Legacies, whilst unpredictable, offer immediate support when bequests are received and this area requires promotion as part of the overhaul of the activity. Given the increasing value that fundraising brings to achieving works on the Railway a longer term resourced solution is required.
- **Maintenance of locomotives and rolling stock:** currently facilities are basic - much work has to take place outdoors - to provide a daily service. Carriage stock is all stabled outside, and even though a new carriage shed at Herston will help when it is completed, it will be primarily used to store older carriages. This situation is not conducive to efficient maintenance and staff morale and impacts negatively on train presentation to customers and increases maintenance and repair costs. The SR should prioritise the construction of new maintenance and storage facilities.
- **Governance:** both the Trustees and Directors are accountable for good governance when discharging their responsibilities for managing the SR. The current structure has overlapping responsibilities, non-compliances with new regulatory standards and other structural issues that slow down decision making. In addition there are some financial gains to be made by adjusting responsibilities. Work underway to review and recommend ways to improve governance will address these issues. Recruiting senior staff with relevant experience will further improve business management whilst protecting the current status of members. The SR should progress changes to governance to improve business management and derive the financial gains from doing so.
- **Space:** space on the railway to create new facilities is very limited causing congestion at Swanage at peak times and occasionally constraining train services. The situation will be partially alleviated on completion of the Herston carriage shed. Acquisition of sites such as Furzebrook sidings will further ease the problem. The SR should prioritise the leasing of additional land that enables future development.

The systemic financial and structural problems inherent in our current business model need to alter and adapt to respond to these internal and external factors and to place the Railway on a footing to deliver its charitable objectives and to grow.

A sustainable basis - where surpluses are generated to re-invest in asset maintenance - is required.

Growth in facilities and services cannot be supported, even with positive business cases, on poor foundations: a thriving core heritage business is the first requirement supporting future development in affordable incremental steps.

4. STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Background.

The SR in 2022, continued recovery from the impact of the pandemic. The response to the pandemic in 2020-2022 required a rapid re-set of our business to reduce costs and re-defining our product to maximise the trading conditions presented by covid restrictions, securing further support by fundraising and government support. This experience demonstrated our capacity to respond quickly and effectively to changing circumstances.

Since our founding in 1972 the aim to reinstate the railway link between Swanage and Wareham has driven our work and we have through hard work and investment both by the SR and stakeholders, such as Dorset County Council (now Dorset Council), achieved the aim of re-establishing the physical rail link between Wareham and Swanage.



Heritage splendour:
With Corfe Castle in the background a train heads east for Swanage.

However, during that time much has changed and this plan needs to consider those changes and to respond to them, whilst setting future objectives for our continued development.

The SR has long established itself as a heritage based transport service between Swanage and Norden contributing to economic growth both through the spending power of its users (estimated at around £14M per annum) and our own spend (estimated at around

£3M per annum) to deliver train services and other activities. The SR removes an estimated 60,000 cars from the road each year between Norden and Swanage as most of our customers park at Norden Purbeck Park and use the train to enjoy days out in Purbeck. Residents use our train services to travel locally. Our volunteer base, drawn from a pool of around 450 active members, work alongside our employees to provide safe and comfortable journeys for our customers, who can number as many as 200,000 per annum in busy years.

The attraction of a mix of heritage experience as a living museum and performing a transport service is one of the SR's strengths especially when compared with other similar heritage attractions and is to Purbeck's overall benefit.

The factors that drove the desire to re-open the line in the 1970's remain only part of the story: new factors now drive our responses and ambitions for the future. These are considered in more detail in this section and section 5 of this plan.

Some of the most significant new factors concern increased societal awareness and expectation of managing the impact of our behaviours on the environment, including climate change and the need to improve connectivity between places to live, work and leisure.

Awareness and expectations fifty years ago were significantly different: now they are a fundamental concern and drive much local and Government policy.

The endorsement of SE Dorset's high landscape and ecological value by the establishment of the UNESCO World Heritage Site along the Jurassic Coast in 2001 along with significant designations of RAMSAR¹ sites by the EU, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Sites of Special Scientific Interest designated by the UK underline the natural importance and value of the SE Dorset landscape and topography. When that landscape is overlaid with the cultural development made by humans over millennia, including the construction of the SR in the 1880's, the overall attractiveness of SE Dorset as a place to live, work and to enjoy today becomes evident. However one of the consequences of this attraction relevant to the SR is seasonal high road congestion on the roads in SE Dorset to the detriment of those who live and work here as well as those who visit.

Improving connectivity between transport modes, to address congestion, provide choice and to level out are major themes of Government policy. Future development of Dorset bus networks and interchanges coupled with improved services by rail into the conurbation of BCP and east to Southampton will influence our direction and choices on services and connections.

There has been for some time recognition that the SR could contribute to reduce local road use, especially during peak congestion periods, by the provision of a rail link. Indeed the Dorset County Council and Dorset Council have maintained the provision of a train service as a key transport planning objective purposefully to assist in reducing road use and to reduce the carbon footprint of visitors. Expectations though are now much higher seeking reduction/cessation in the use of fossil fuels, the nurturing of landscapes with high deemed value and the need for greater non-car based transport connectivity.

¹ a wetland site designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Our response.

Since 2014 the SR has aspired in conjunction with stakeholders to deliver a trial train service between Swanage and Wareham to connect with London to Weymouth services. For various reasons this has proved challenging. A seasonal service in 2017 was provided by a contractor and lost money. Subsequently funding was obtained to overhaul heritage diesel trains to enable local delivery of the service but the difficulty in sourcing parts led to significant delays in completion of the overhaul. A plan for a further trial in 2020 was then postponed due to the pandemic and the wait for normality to return. In 2023 we



Mainline connections:
*The SR Wareham train
nears Worgret
Junction, Wareham in
April 2023.*

operated, in conjunction with our contractor West Coast Railways for 90 days. The financial performance will be the subject to discussion with stakeholders. The concern remains that the revenue risk, lying at present with the SR, is beyond the charity's ability.

Any future development requires either the ability to manage the Swanage to Wareham link within the SR's overall budget and resources or securing external financial revenue support. The former requires a sustainable business that generates surpluses for re-investment in asset maintenance and development. Without such a base there is no ability to take further risk.

Strategically the need to generate surpluses remains our greatest issue for survival, highlighted in the measures to reduce costs required during and since the pandemic to remain functioning and further emphasised by the recent impact of the war in Ukraine which rapidly drove up costs (coal prices for example increasing by 100%), and affected other economic factors that reduced our customers discretionary spend and hit our income by as much as 25-30% in 2022.

Our business model at present cannot sustain these levels of rapid shock. We have in the short term to firstly, re-base the business to improve robustness in the face of external

events, secondly to re-organise and build capacity to maintain our assets by returning surpluses and thirdly to afford support to a Swanage to Wareham service.

Moreover, performance of our business over the past five years further supports the need to change. Customer levels have declined due to economic conditions and remain under pressure and business performance has not generated enough investment surpluses.

Connected to this and integral to a robust business model is the level of secondary spend by our customers which remains proportionately low per visitor head. Our shops perform well. But we know that in other areas, such as catering, we can do better. Our estate is constrained both by size and by the character we wish to present as we recreate a vintage travel experience. We have more recently been constrained by a highly competitive job market that has limited trading opportunities. However, our customers expect not only a



On track treats:
Customers enjoying cream teas served by our volunteers in our restored heritage carriages.

higher quality experience but also a more diverse experience from the attractions we provide. We need to encourage customers to spend longer periods of time with us and to provide more opportunities to spend. There should be good reasons for customer return visits and for them to recommend visits by others

The ongoing development of our Museums - a key charitable aim - are also part of the diverse experience we need to offer. The six-point plan to develop the Norden based Purbeck Mining Museum will not only meet our aim to educate and promote awareness of local industrial history but also be an attraction to visitors to use Norden station to access the Purbeck Heaths National Nature Reserve. Similarly the Swanage Railway museum at Corfe Castle concentrates on presenting the SRs own history, complementing the historic environment that Corfe Castle and the castle provides for its visitors. Our museums aspire to Accreditation standards - Corfe Castle Museum has achieving the expected standard - to ensure the quality of administration of artefacts and interpretation and presentation that donors and visitors expect.

Our model is at present dependent on the services freely given by our volunteers. This has been a core value of the SR for over fifty years and remains at the heart of what we



Our fascinating museums: At Norden the Purbeck Mining Museum depicts the local ball clay mining heritage (left) and at Corfe Castle the Swanage Railway Museum sets out the history of our line (above).

do. In this area as well societal changes impact on our activity: pensionable ages are stretching out leading to a shrinking pool of potential volunteers. Memories of main line steam, so important to our founding members, are reducing. The challenge will be for the SR to continue to adapt and remain relevant to a volunteer who may no longer be solely driven by railway enthusiasm, but is looking for an activity that supports their wellbeing in an interesting environment and where they are respected and their support valued. We also believe that by continuing to foster volunteer engagement at an early age, through our Sygnets group, we can attract lifelong support and commitment that enriches a volunteers experience.

A further area of change concerns our pace of development. Here two resource factors are significant: capital for investment and competent people to manage delivery.

There is little doubt that standards and expectations around project definition and delivery are markedly different now: accessible transport systems are a case in point, representing particular challenges of application in a heritage environment. Our development plans require a much more significant level of resource and process than those used in the 1970s/1980s. Our plans to improve the SRs facilities such as locomotive maintenance, are hampered by a lack of capital and a tight land footprint. Fundraising to support major capital development plans remains a high priority across the whole plan period requiring more resources to achieve it. Investment and development is not just measured in terms of levels of grant but also on delivering completed projects. Our performance is patchy in this respect.

We have had notable and significant successes including building the connection through to the national network, creating our award winning signalling system or the overhaul with our partners of our steam locomotive fleet. However, other progress is patchy due to external factors, lack of available funds or projects that were not completed due to poor initial scoping and risking or have taken exceptionally longer to complete than initially promised. For whatever reason in the future our processes and resources for delivery

must take a higher priority than before so as to provide the facilities the business needs as well as to establish a track record for project management.

Lastly our governance structures need streamlining to improve management of our charitable obligations and business activity. This will also provide the platform to introduce skilled and experienced Directors, receipt of other financial benefits from charitable status such as Gift Aid whilst protecting the benefits and support of our members.



Volunteers for the future: our thriving Sygnets group celebrates 25 years. August 2022.

Our aim is to develop the Railway, to:

- become a sustainable living museum providing a high quality safe experience for customers;
- be an attractive place for volunteers to secure rewarding experiences across diverse opportunities;
- provide excellent customer facilities & services that are expected of visitor attractions and relevant attractions and experiences which contribute towards surpluses for reinvesting in our historic assets
- develop further opportunities for fundraising and grants;
- meet our environmental obligations and support the local economy;
- invest in training to increase competencies in priority areas such as project and asset management;
- meet our educational and interpretative objectives; and
- enable the SR to perform a future connected transport role in SE Dorset.

We will target our efforts and measure our success by:

1. growing our customer base to 250,000 per annum by 2030 and achieving improving customer satisfaction feedback;
2. increasing our volunteer numbers to 600 and improve volunteer retention rates by 2030; and
3. returning profits sufficient to reinvest in maintenance and repairs before 2028.

5. PLAN OBJECTIVES.

The foregoing assessment and analysis, suggests that there are four key objectives to be achieved in this strategic plan period:

1. Develop a whole railway sustainable business structure and model that will support the growth of our business whilst meeting our charitable objectives.
2. Prioritise fundraising to support strategic and business plan delivery.
3. Recruit and retain volunteer support for roles that provide volunteers with rewarding opportunities that match our needs.
4. Engage with our stakeholder's views and objectives

6. WORK STREAMS TO ACHIEVE THE PLAN OBJECTIVES.

Workstream	Responsibility	Key needs/measure	By when	
1. Develop a whole railway sustainable business structure and model that will support the growth of our business whilst meeting our charitable objectives.				
1.1	Maintain safe compliant operations with competent motivated staff.	SRC	Reducing number of incidents; all staff holding competencies recorded on a management data base.	Ongoing
1.2	Simplify and up-skill governance to comply with sector standards.	SRT/SRC	Implement changes to current structures and recruit skilled directors; up skill the management team and staff.	2025
1.3	Improve all business processes to achieve value for money, producing surpluses for re-investment.	SRT/SRC	Review processes to ensure targeted budgets with a profit. Measure profit achieved.	Ongoing
1.4	Grow our business by aligning our heritage product with customer expectations.	SRT/SRC	Invest in product quality: locomotives, carriages, other assets and improved customer services and facilities. Prioritise the backlog of repairs. Increase passenger numbers and turnover per head. Measure the growth generated and improved customer satisfaction.	2025

Workstream	Responsibility	Key needs/measure	By when	
1.5	Maintain assets based on a condition register and forward prioritised plan.	SRT/SRC	Prepare condition informed asset registers: fund business priorities.	Ongoing
1.6	Upgrade and expand customer services and facilities that have positive business cases: including engineering services and train services to/from Wareham	SRC	Review project planning to identify business cases, reduce scope and cost risks. Prepare a forward development plan to support fundraising. Acquire an interest in Furzebrook Sidings.	2025
1.7	Maintain appropriate financial reserves.	SRT/SRC	Maintain funds in line with the stated policy.	2025
1.8	Increase customer secondary spend by developing new facilities and services.	SRT/SRC	Target to grow contribution to 33% of turnover.	2028
1.9	Achieve accredited museums and deliver museum development plans aligned to support growth, recognising the opportunity for Museums to support SR growth objectives.	SRT	Achieve accreditation status for Norden museum: start delivery of agreed development plans eg Norden Museum six-point plan.	2025
1.10	Provide targeted education experiences to local schools and organisations including the SR need for recruiting younger volunteers.	SRT	Measure meeting educators needs. Meeting SR recruitment targets.	2026

2. Prioritise fundraising to support strategic and business plan delivery.

2.1	Diversify fundraising: expand grants and conventional fundraising including legacies targeted to business needs. Seek appropriate sponsorships.	SRT	Prepare a fundraising plan. Measure success at securing grants and support.	2023
2.2	Improve forward fundraising planning based on investment priorities.	SRT/SRC	Align fundraising with business plan priorities.	2023

3. Recruit and retain volunteer support for roles that provide volunteers with rewarding opportunities that match our needs.

3.1	Review and improve our volunteer opportunities across whole age spans.	SRT/SRC	Identify needs of volunteers and match with SR opportunities.	2023
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Workstream	Responsibility	Key needs/measure	By when	
3.2	Review and maintain our values by improving our Human Resource processes and procedures.	SRT/SRC	Publish values and maintain application.	Ongoing
3.3	Improve diversity of volunteer base by recruitment based on competencies for the post.	SRT/SRC	Promote diversity and implement plans.	2022
4. Engage with our stakeholder's views and objectives.				
4.1	Engage with strategic direction of the heritage sector.	SRT/SRC	Identify lead responsibility. Actively support sector.	Ongoing.
4.2	Meet commitments given to stakeholders eg Wareham trial service: Herston carriage shed and water tower.	SRC	Deliver trial services (2023): complete projects to time and budget with improved project management and realistic project plans.	Ongoing
4.3	Identify and deliver the expectations of Members through more accessible Open Forums designed to improve dialogue.	SRT	Identify and resource needs of Members through the governance review.	2023
4.4	Proactively engage with stakeholders at County and local levels to build capacity for sustainable integrated transport solutions.	SRT/SRC	Attend/convene meetings.	Ongoing
4.5	Deliver our response to climate change plan ensuring adequate inclusion in our policies and procedures.	SRT/SRC	Measure performance against plan.	Ongoing

7. HOW THIS PLAN WILL BE ACHIEVED AND MEASURED

Considerable planning work will be required to turn these objectives into work programmes and projects. The SRT Strategic planning Group will lead on this engaging with employee and volunteers across the whole Railway to draft and agree plans for delivery. These plans will need prioritising and in most cases will be dependant on additional capital funds. Practical work will be dependant on obtaining these funds.

Each work plan/programme will have a sponsor who is accountable for detailed development and delivery to agreed timescales.

All work plans will be routinely monitored and progress communicated to staff and members.

SRC business plans and budgets and associated processes to prepare and agree them will need to align with this plan.

Reviews to the plans will be undertaken using revisions to the risk register and other business information and data. Any significant variances identified may cause the need to up date this plan.