



WSRA Reform Group

Statement

Over 1,000 members have required the Trustees to call a General Meeting. We do not know what information they have sent out with this paper, so we shall be writing to you again as soon as we do. **Meanwhile it's vital that you wait to hear from us again so that you have the whole story, and are fully informed before casting your vote.** Unless you do this the future of the Association is in doubt. You can find out more at www.wsra-action.org

Why an Extraordinary General Meeting?

Some history: the Minehead line was closed by British Rail in January 1971. In May a company was formed to acquire it, supported by Somerset County Council. SCC was wary of the lucrative Minehead site falling into private hands if the railway failed, so it purchased the line and leased it back to the West Somerset Railway Company (the plc).

The inaugural meeting of West Somerset Railway Association (WSRA) was held on 7 June 1971 (after the plc was formed) to support it with voluntary funds and labour.

WSRA adopted new Articles in 2010. These state that the object of the WSRA is: *“to promote education by restoring, preserving and displaying railway locomotives, carriages, wagons and other artefacts of historical interest and buildings connected therewith in particular, but without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, those connected with the South West of England and the preserving and displaying of books, drawings, records, documents, sound and visual recordings, cinematograph films and photographs relating to such artefacts and vehicles, their history and development”.* **There is no mention of the West Somerset Railway.**

Since then WSRA has increased its staff, reduced its support for the plc, tried to compete with it, and lost touch with its membership.

SO WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

• **LAST YEAR'S AGM**

Last year's AGM saw 160 members walk out in protest about the Chairman's conduct of the meeting. Candidates favoured by the WSRA Trustees were given an advantage through a WSRA mailshot not offered to other candidates. **Is that fair? Was this reported in the Journal?**

• **SUPPORT TO THE RAILWAY**

In the past WSRA provided invaluable support such as the acquisition of locomotives and the creation of Bishops Lydeard Museum. By 2006 WSRA had 5 staff costing £93,042. In 2007 it provided £120,000 capital to the plc. The 2013 accounts show no further significant funds spent on the railway but do show 15 employees costing £220,365. **Is this the correct use of your money?** Several volunteer groups now undertake projects that the WSRA used to deliver. **Why?**

- **RELATIONS WITH WSR PLC**

Many working volunteers resigned from WSRA in protest at its activities and in 2012 the Company issued a statement setting out its position in "On Line", a *private* newsletter for paid and volunteer staff. WSRA replied on *public* websites without referring to the original publication. This made matters worse. The situation has deteriorated to the point that a mediation group is now required to facilitate normal discussions between the WSRA and the WSR plc. **Did you know this?**

- **THE FREEHOLD BID**

This adversarial policy continued with a surprise bid to buy the land on which the Railway operates which was announced in Journal no. 142 (Spring 2013). WSRA Trustees used confidential plc information to assist their bid and squandered your money on lawyers and third parties to negotiate in secret. **Were you consulted?** SCC released documents under the Freedom of Information Act which revealed that the WSRA negotiator participated in improper discussions. This led to disciplinary hearings and the resignation of a senior SCC cabinet member. This was reported by the BBC programme "Inside Out" on 23 March 2015. **Did you see it?** The plc had to spend considerable time and money that could have been better employed on our Railway.

MEMBER ACTION SO FAR

You may have found this letter to be astonishing if the only communication you have read is the quarterly Journal. The editor is the WSRA Chairman, David Williams. You are told only what he wishes you to know.

This Reform Group has come together solely to ask you, the membership, to take the first steps towards change. We do not seek control of the WSRA. Over 1,000 WSRA members already support us. The Reform Group tried to negotiate a peaceful transition inviting the present leadership to step down. This was rejected leaving an EGM as the only option.

OUR VISION OF THE WSRA

For the West Somerset Railway Association (WSRA) to be the principal supporters' organisation for the Taunton to Minehead line, working in open, constructive co-operation with all other bodies and organisations on the Railway for the good of the Railway as a whole. For the WSRA to be so relevant and well thought of that all WSR volunteers, staff and supporters would wish to be members of the WSRA.

OUR STRATEGY

To ensure that a root and branch review of the WSRA's purpose, objects, structure and activities is held to move the WSRA back to its proper position and purpose, in consultation with its members.

To ensure that appropriate Trustees are in place, willing and able to make the necessary changes to the WSRA in co-operation with its membership and to ensure that the business of the WSRA is conducted with fairness, openness and in the best interests of the Railway as a whole. That is why the present Chairman, and Trustees Peter Chidzey and Nick Nichols need to be removed as the three people most closely associated with the recent policies actions and approach of the Trustees.

Remember it's vital that you wait to hear from us again so that you have the whole story, and are fully informed before casting your vote. See www.wsra-action.org

Nigel Adams, Ken Davidge, Brian Fraser, Jeff Price, Dr David Randles, Mike Sherwood, Chris Tucker, Robin White, Paul Whitehouse and 1,000 more.