



# Gauge O Guild

## Strategy Group Report - Summary

Planning the development of the Guild and its future is a key role of the Management Committee. The last decade has witnessed a revolution in how 7mm railway modelling can be practised. We have seen the number of RTR models increase exponentially, new control systems, new manufacturing techniques, new methods of information exchange and communication, as well as amazing developments in the complexity of scenery building.

The ability to connect people and share information has long been the benefit of joining a membership body like the Guild. Yet, the internet now enables people to create a group of like-minded individuals and share information for free and without the structure of an organisation. To remain relevant the Guild must continue to deliver clear and tangible membership value which cannot be sourced elsewhere.

We're already tackling some of these challenges. The quality of our quarterly publications, both in terms of content and presentation, has improved and will continue to keep pace with commercial offerings. We have unique products in the online shop and the range will continue to increase. We've dramatically cut the cost of administration through the use of real-time IT communications software. We're seeking ways to establish ourselves as the setter of O gauge standards which manufacturers can access to ensure conformity. Finally, we're actively managing the Guild in a much more transparent way so that members can understand the rationale behind the decisions we take.

This all needs to be underpinned by a robust and reliable IT infrastructure and a project is in hand to migrate our ageing systems to a commercial industry-standard platform. This will help future-proof our IT systems, in so far as that is possible, and eradicate single points of dependency amongst our volunteers.

The work of this Strategy Group has developed that of its earlier incarnation under John Birch's chairmanship and contains much of the output from that group. It has also benefited enormously from the new members who volunteered their input. The result is not a Book of Revelations, but it does suggest some useful and necessary changes in focus and to the management structure to help the organisation grow and meet the challenges of the next five years.

### Goals

1. To encourage modellers to grow their skills and abilities.
2. To develop our community of modellers, based on mutual support and benefit.
3. To communicate and engage effectively with our members, traders and other organizations.
4. To run an effective and resilient business.
5. To exploit digital opportunities and ensure that the Guild's IT systems are fit for purpose and future-proofed.

These five goals are not listed chronologically or in order of priority. However, for the first 3 to be achieved, the last two cannot be ignored.



# Gauge O Guild

## Strategy Group Report - Detailed Analysis

### Introduction

These strategic recommendations map out suggested goals and objectives for the next three to five years. This planning process is an important way of keeping the Guild focused, ensuring its committees pull in the same direction, and remain effective. The plan reflects the work of a Strategy Group whose terms of reference are given in Appendix 1.

The Plan sets out the overall purpose of the Guild, towards which all the recommendations point. It goes on to provide detailed information and analysis which support the key findings and helps to make sense of them within the context of the Guild and the environment within which it operates. The Plan identifies five goals that will inform our programmes of work over the next five years. Each goal is supported by a series of objectives which detail what we wish to achieve. A commentary against each objective is provided, providing rationale and explanation. The objectives identified against the goals are not exhaustive and are likely to evolve as the context changes. The plan is a working tool to be translated into action, monitored and regularly updated by the Management Committee as a cyclical process.

### Background information to help understand the recommendations

The Guild is a private company limited by guarantee. This means that the Company must comply with certain statutory requirements. It also means that all members of the Guild, rather than just the people who run it, are liable for its debts. The liability of each member is limited to £10 (as set out in the Company's Articles).

The purpose of the Guild is “to advance the hobby of railway modelling in scales and gauges associated with the designation O and the provision of whatever facilities, services and goods it may from time to time deem desirable for the enhancement of its members’ enjoyment of such hobby”.

The Guild exists to further all forms of railway modelling in 7mm scale or with O gauge track. This ‘broad church’ concept draws members from many different areas of modelling and provides an ‘umbrella’ for more specialist groups. The Guild achieves its purpose by providing members with a quality quarterly magazine, an in-house newsletter, technical information on railway modelling, three national scale-dedicated exhibitions a year, virtual exhibitions, a dedicated website and a membership of friendly expertise shared between beginner and expert. It also supports regional O gauge groups.

The Guild's Management Committee is legally responsible for the running of the Guild. The Management Committee consists of the President (non-voting); the Chairman; the Treasurer; the Secretary; the Chairs of the functional Committees for Publications, Events and Technical; four Regional Managers (responsible for 13 (Area 8 London is no longer in use) Area Representatives); and a member responsible for Membership and the Forum. The functional Committees include non-elected volunteers. Other volunteers provide specialist support such as publications editing and video production.

The Guild relies almost wholly on volunteers, with no payments (other than out of pocket expenses) and payments restricted only to outside services bodies, such as administrative, legal and accountancy services.

### **Taking the Guild forward**

The Guild's founding aims remain relevant and valid. But much has changed since the original purpose was established. Conceptions of what railway modelling is, trader and manufacturing support to the scale, and the interests and abilities of railway modellers, have all evolved and methods of communication, modelling and manufacturing have changed out of recognition. Social trends have also had an impact on the Guild and like many membership organisations it faces an ageing membership and a decline in volunteering.

This Plan reflects a detailed assessment of the Guild's current position, where we want to go, how we might get there - and what might get in our way. We used SWOT analysis as a planning tool. This process identified the internal and external factors that are favourable and unfavourable to achieving our goals:

- Strengths - attributes of the Guild that could help achieve the objective.
- Weaknesses - attributes that could obstruct achieving the objective.
- Opportunities - external factors that could help achieve the objective.
- Threats - external factors that could obstruct achieving the objective.

The results of our SWOT analysis are presented in Appendix 2. We also took into account the views of members expressed online and via Area Representatives.

From this broad analysis we developed the following high level Goals and supporting Objectives. The Objectives focus attention on the 'what' rather than the 'how', leaving more detailed or tactical matters to be decided subsequently by the Management Committee, but some illustrations and examples are given which may be applicable.

## Recommendations and Commentary

Goal 1: Encourage modellers to grow their skills and abilities	
Objective	Commentary
1.1. Assess what members want from membership and to align Guild products and services with these needs.	This aim is to enthuse modellers to develop so that they enjoy railway modelling in all its facets - locomotives, rolling stock, scenery, signalling, layout design, historical perspectives - and with a menu of appropriate skill sets.
1.2. Increase the Management Committee's focus on defining, steering and coordinating the Guild's modelling output and how it is delivered.	<p>We recommend a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to the services and products provided by the various arms of the Guild.</p> <p>This includes publications, the web site, videos and virtual events. The aim is to put modelling more at the heart of the Management Committee's focus.</p>
1.3. Revamp Guild information on modelling standards and practice to reflect current modelling practice and technologies.	<p>The Guild's information on modelling standards and practice, plus many other sources of help, have been pulled together and re-published as the Knowledge Base on the Guild's website.</p> <p>The technical team has published some new content but action is needed to edit the old material. The changes in modelling in recent years mean that the published information needs a major revamp rather than a simple update.</p>
1.4. Encourage the development of Special Interest Groups, especially those reflecting new skills and technologies	Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are a good way to grow skills and keep members informed, allowing them to focus their efforts on the areas that interest them most. SIGs also provide valuable information which can be used to improve services to members or identify new talent within the Guild.

**Goal 2: Develop our community of modellers, based on mutual support and benefit.**

Objective	Commentary
2.1. Review and develop membership benefits.	This focuses attention on activities that increase recruitment from within the growing community of O gauge modelers. The aim is to deepen and broaden the Guild offer to railway modellers, both 'what' and 'how'. The reference to mutuality reflects the ethos of the Guild.
2.2. Adapt as the demand for O gauge information changes.	<p>The rise of consumer power and the proliferation of online content has led to vast and often free access to the types of information and experience that hobbyists used to be able to access only through membership of a club. Members are likely to become more demanding in what they consider 'of value' in their membership subscription.</p> <p>This trend is being witnessed across society. Everyone is expecting better service and more for less. This highlights the importance of understanding how the Guild is currently providing members with value and if more can or should be done to improve our offer.</p> <p>Examples of actions include developing members' items for sale via a product development team, estates service, CAD drawings, and convention-style Guildex including live streaming of talks/demonstrations.</p>

<p>2.3. Target marketing at multi-scale shows and RTR buyers, noting that 'up-scalers' are likely to be older rather than younger.</p>	<p>Success in maintaining membership will depend on which groups we target and whether these potential members find our 'offer' compelling. We believe that the main growth will come from established modellers moving up a scale and from people attracted by the growing availability of RTR items.</p> <p>This has important implications for the type of advice and support that new members may need. For example, S4 modellers are already likely to be used to building their own track. New marketing initiatives - e.g. new media, messaging, incentives, and timing - need to be tested where possible. Some tests may not work, but others will.</p>
<p>2.4. Support Area Representatives so that they can grow the marketing part of their role.</p>	<p>The Guild stand can be a lively place, for meeting existing members as well as recruitment. Display content could include kit built items; modified RTR items and information about how the Guild can help members progress from a few items of stock to building a complete model railway.</p> <p>Audio visual aids and moving items of rolling stock (shuttle track, rolling road) help to create discussion points.</p> <p>Information from the online joining questionnaire is now available to Area Reps but needs to be promoted.</p>
<p>2.5. Update the Guild's image and to dispel any historic perceptions.</p>	<p>Rightly or wrongly, the Guild suffers from a perception that it is elderly, that it is hide-bound, and that it lacks relevance in a changing world. There have also been historic divisions. We have made significant progress in building trust, modernising, and developing new services, but these initiatives need to be publicised.</p>
<p>2.6. Track and act on key member statistics.</p>	<p>The Guild loses around 30% of new joiners at the end of their first year of membership. Obtaining information about members' interests and needs from the joining questionnaire and elsewhere is a vital part of this process. The information will then be used to direct magazine, website, online shop and exhibition content.</p>

**Goal 3: Communicate and engage effectively with our members, traders and other organisations.**

Objective	Commentary
<p>3.1. Conduct open two-way communication as required, acknowledging members' feedback and acting on it.</p>	<p>Increasing engagement with members is an important objective because it correlates to relevance - highly engaged members will view the Guild as more relevant (to them) than an unengaged member. Equally, unengaged members are significantly more likely to cancel their membership. An additional benefit of increasing engagement is gaining a better understanding of what members are thinking. Members' choices of what content to consume, the results of a survey, or listening to comments can all provide valuable information.</p>
<p>3.2. Implement the recommendations of the Communications Working Group.</p>	<p>Although the Comms Working Group has shut down, its recommendations should be periodically reviewed so they don't get sidelined.</p>
<p>3.3. Ensure we continue to consult members.</p>	<p>Anticipating issues, avoiding surprises and seeking feedback in a form that is easy to analyse, are all elements of this process.</p>
<p>3.4. Define the Guild's role in setting technical standards and assisting manufacturers to conform to them.</p>	<p>Unlike the NMRA, the Guild does not have an up to date set of modelling standards for manufacturers. These include a correlated set of limiting dimensions, electrical parameters, and communications parameters to assure compatibility.</p> <p>Such standards usually include the intricacies involved in the track-wheel relationship. Currently the Guild is not always consulted about proposed designs on a voluntary basis by manufacturers. Nor does the Guild certify conformity with any standards. Again, this contrasts with the NRMA position on inspection and conformity.</p> <p>We seek greater clarity about the Guild's role in this area, without necessarily attempting to match the NMRA's extensive role in setting and certifying standards.</p>

3.5. Demonstrate accountability to members.	Whilst the Guild has come a long way to transparently report finances to the membership, quarterly statements with commentary should be a standard communication.
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#### Goal 4: Run an effective and resilient business

Objective	Commentary
4.1. Review the composition of the Management Committee	<p>The last organisational restructure took place in 2019 and reduced a two-tier management structure into a single tier. Whilst that has been broadly successful in streamlining decision-making, there are a number of pieces of fine-tuning that we recommend to ensure that Guild's key business functions, including IT, are represented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redirect the Management Committee to provide more focus on the promotion of 7mm modelling and greater accountability.</li> <li>• Represent the 4 Regional Managers at the Management Committee by the Chair of the Representatives' Committee, to fall in line with the other functional committees.</li> <li>• Consider separating the role of Chair of Technical Committee/IT into two separate positions, with both members of the Management Committee</li> <li>• Consider where best to place management responsibility for internal and external communications, including website appearance and content and the Press Officer role.</li> </ul>
4.2. Review the existing requirement for all Committee chairs to be Company Directors.	This statutory requirement might well be a disincentive to some volunteers, carrying both legal responsibility and an element of risk.
4.3. Ensure that financial systems support effective decision making.	This includes accountancy software, whilst the Treasurer function should undertaken by a professionally qualified accountant or person with



	demonstrable experience in financial management. If no suitable volunteer is available, this should be contracted out to a professional.
4.4. Incorporate review and updating of the Strategic Plan in the annual cycle of business for the Management Committee.	<p>Reviewing progress against the Plan should be an ongoing process. The fit may not be perfect from the outset and the Management Committee may need to tweak the Plan as it progresses.</p> <p>Keeping the momentum going will be important. Simply carving out management time to talk about strategy periodically will help to keep the Plan in mind and reduce any tendency to get too diverted by operational issues or fire fighting.</p> <p>Creating an agenda centered on reviewing goals and initiatives can be useful. Such a review can explore questions such as - What has worked and what hasn't worked in the past 12 months? What has changed - new opportunities, assumptions and risks? What do we take out and what new things do we put into the Plan?</p>
4.5. Encourage volunteering.	<p>This may be achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving the identification of potential volunteers.</li> <li>• Addressing the factors that may inhibit volunteering such as the time commitment, the manageability of roles, and unjustified criticism of volunteers.</li> <li>• Effective management and development of volunteers.</li> <li>• Smarter promotion of volunteering opportunities at shows and online.</li> <li>• Encourage local volunteers wherever possible and consider "part time" volunteering at shows and splitting the work load.</li> </ul>
4.6. Provide opportunities for volunteers to develop.	<p>Older people's voluntary labour can no longer be taken for granted. Volunteering now has to compete against increasing demands on people's time and resources - including paid employment, caring for parents, spouses and/or grandchildren, as well as travel and leisure.</p>

	<p>Tackling the volunteer issue is a priority and vital for implementing this Plan. Role shadowing, mentoring and appointing assistants/understudies to key positions may be appropriate approaches to try.</p> <p>This will help increase the resilience of specialist functions and potentially help succession planning as long as the concerns and perceptions of some members, about election outcomes being pre-ordained, are addressed.</p>
<p>4.7. Use specialised contractors when appropriate.</p>	<p>Some roles are too big or specialised for volunteers to undertake. Where specific knowledge, guaranteed availability and long-term consistency are important, the Guild should continue its policy to employ contracted assistants. This is essential to maintain the professionalism of the business.</p>

**Goal 5: Exploit digital opportunities to ensure that IT systems are fit for purpose and 'future proofed'**

Objective	Commentary
<p>5.1. Seek IT-based solutions to improve access to Guild services.</p>	<p>Many of us are becoming 'on demand' consumers; able to purchase products and services that meet our needs as and when we need them. We are using our 'phones every day to access information and collaborate on social channels using the latest, content-rich websites and mobile apps. The user experience we get from these channels is driving up expectations for digital engagement within membership bodies like the Guild.</p> <p>Developing a closer bond with members and expanded member benefits will be key to long term survival. Members expect to have the ability to control and self-service their requirements online and for their online experience to be interactive and engaging.</p> <p>This will require investment in content creation to engage members on a regular basis, interpretation of information from analytics and action based on what is learnt. Meeting the digital expectation of the next generation of members will be challenging,</p> <p>Meanwhile some members with less IT familiarity will still want access through more traditional channels.</p>

<p>5.2 Migrate the Guild's business systems to an industry-standard IT platform.</p>	<p>There is already the intention to migrate the Guild's IT 'back-end' to a SQL Server database environment. This will not need to be purchased as it is included with the Guild's existing MicroSoft software bundle.)</p> <p>An action plan within a defined timeframe needs to be developed as a matter of urgency. This is essential to improve stability and help future-proof our IT infrastructure.</p> <p>Moving data storage and even applications to the cloud also offers certain benefits to security, accessibility and reliability. As a result, many organisations with a legacy on-premise IT system are looking for efficient, organised ways to move to the cloud. This is something to be explored.</p>
<p>5.3. Eliminate any business system dependency on a single person.</p>	<p>Spreading the maintenance workload and the expertise behind the systems will improve resilience in the case of illness, unavailability and role change.</p>
<p>5.4. Facilitate non-specialist data input.</p>	<p>Enabling volunteer input to the website's Knowledge Base and back-end databases by members with less advanced IT skills (e.g. the new member questionnaire, trader details and product information) will help spread the growing IT workload.</p>
<p>5.5. Have separate development and live environments to allow off-line development and testing.</p>	<p>This is standard practice which allows development and testing of new functionality offline before deployment into a live environment.</p>
<p>5.6. Ensure that a backup strategy exists and works.</p>	<p>Automatic, regular systems backups are standard throughout industry. However, integrity testing the backups at regular intervals is less so, but equally important.</p>
<p>5.7. Ensure that all IT systems are fully documented</p>	<p>This is essential as volunteers move on and new people need to maintain existing systems, but is historically poorly addressed within many spheres of business.</p>

## Conclusions and next steps

The foundation of the Guild remains valid and we are performing well across our core services. Members and the Strategy Group have however identified a need for change and improvement across several areas, so that the Guild continues to develop and flourish.

Following the approval by the Management Committee, we recommend that the Strategic Plan be posted to the Guild's website. Members will be invited to review the Plan and provide feedback. All feedback will be thoroughly considered by the MC, tracked and addressed as necessary.

The Plan sets a framework for more detailed work to follow. The Management Committees will incorporate the key objectives into the Guild's work plans and report regularly on progress.

The Management Committee will take advantage of new opportunities as they arise and if they support the goals set out in this Plan. All activities will need to operate within the financial limitations of the Guild's budget. New initiatives will sometimes require more detailed consideration and planning before implementation including, where appropriate, approval by the Management Committee. A review of progress will be published before the AGM in 2023.

For further information please contact: Charles Oldroyd, Chairman, Gauge O Guild.

## Appendix 1

### Terms of Reference

#### Background

The previous Chairman (John Birch) established an informal Strategy Group and in January 2022 reported on its progress to the Management Committee. The Committee valued this activity and regarded it as work in progress that should be moved forward more formally. The new Guild Chairman (Charles Oldroyd) invited members of the original Group to join a freshly constituted Strategy Group. He also invited Pete George and Stephen Wolstenholme to join the Group following their posts about strategic planning on the Guild's online Forum.

#### Purpose

The reconstituted Strategy Group will assist the Management Committee in determining the Guild's direction over the next five years. It will identify priorities, a strategic direction and deliver a range of recommendations for the MC to consider.

#### Remit

After taking into account and building on the work undertaken by the previous informal Strategy Group:

to understand the Guild's position today; to establish the desirable position in five year's time; and to identify the steps needed to get from where we are now to where we want to be in the future."

#### Deliverables

The Group will make recommendations and submit a draft Strategic Plan to the Management Committee by early August 2022.

#### Reporting line and authority

The Strategy Group reports to the Management Committee. The Group has no executive/ financial powers other than those specified in these terms of reference.

#### Status and duration

The Strategy Group is temporary and its term will expire on 31 December 2022. Its draft Strategic Plan will be reviewed by the Management Committee after new Officers are elected at the AGM 2022.

#### Membership

The members are: Charles Oldroyd (Chairman), Geoff Goddin, Chris Fry, Tim Humphreys, John Evans, Pete George, and Stephen Wolstenholme (Secretary).

#### Administration and way of working

Agendas and meeting notes will be circulated to members of the Group. A report will be made to each meeting of the Management Committee and so will be covered in the note of the MC meeting. The Group will consult other Groups (e.g. marketing) and Directors (e.g. the Treasurer) as needed. It will invite these

representatives to attend when it needs to understand what they are doing or obtain their advice. The Secretary of the Strategy Group will provide administrative support.

## Appendix 2 - SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large membership with low 'churn' (about 7% per annum)</li> <li>• Strong Community principle of area involvement with individuals and clubs</li> <li>• Massive body of expertise and experience</li> <li>• Well produced Gazette</li> <li>• Well established and managed exhibitions</li> <li>• Website with large amount of information</li> <li>• Adequate financial reserves</li> <li>• Stable income</li> <li>• Presence at shows</li> <li>• Covers "broad church" of O Gauge modellers so not as elitist or limited focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seen as old fashioned, elitist and stuffy – too steam orientated</li> <li>• Attempting to serve a disparate range of modellers and skill levels</li> <li>• Limited visibility of the tangible benefits beyond Gazette</li> <li>• Insufficient tangible benefits looking forward</li> <li>• No compelling reason to join with far more information available online than in the past</li> <li>• Sometimes a lack of cohesion in our different forms of marketing and publicity – largely historical.</li> <li>• Wholly reliant on subscription income</li> <li>• Membership level approximately 5% less than 20 years ago and of a 'certain age'.</li> <li>• Shortage of volunteers.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To build and develop our Community to be "the place to go"</li> <li>• Refresh our image and our structure to maintain our core values whilst appealing to newer membership</li> <li>• Encourage members to submit more 7mm articles to mainstream modelling magazines</li> <li>• Provide unique products to members not available elsewhere</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An online only non-subscription knowledge base could be established at very low cost which could potentially undermine the Guild's appeal to non-members</li> <li>• The demands and expectations on work and family time have increased and are increasing, limiting hobby and volunteer time</li> <li>• Reducing RM input to the MC may be seen as the Guild moving to management by an elitist few</li> <li>• Restructuring may reignite perceptions of concern, some of which like finance were previously real, and promote a new reform Group response</li> </ul>