VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

Shildon Railway Institute Limited

A Shared Understanding of Voluntary Contribution and Support

Document Information

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1. Welcome and Purpose

Volunteering at Shildon Railway Institute is founded upon people freely choosing to contribute their time, skills, knowledge and enthusiasm towards the life and purposes of the Society.

In return, the Society has a responsibility to value that contribution, provide appropriate support and seek to create an environment in which volunteers can contribute safely, confidently and with a sense of belonging.

This Volunteer Agreement records that mutual understanding.

It describes what someone volunteering with the Society can reasonably expect from Shildon Railway Institute and what the Society can reasonably expect from them in return. It is intended to provide clarity and confidence on both sides and to support a positive and sustainable volunteering relationship.

This Agreement is not a contract of employment and does not create an employment relationship or an obligation upon either party to provide or undertake work. Volunteering remains freely given.

The Agreement should be read alongside the Society's Volunteer Code of Conduct, which describes the culture and standards of behaviour through which volunteers agree to contribute to the Society and support one another.

Guiding Principle

Volunteering is freely given, but it is also a relationship: one in which contribution, support, consideration and respect should flow in both directions.

2. About the Society

Shildon Railway Institute Limited is a **Community Benefit Society**, registered under the **Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act**.

Throughout this document, and the wider governance framework adopted by the Institute, the terms **"the Society"** and **"Shildon Railway Institute"** refer to the same organisation.

The term **"the Society"** is used where these documents describe the Institute in its legal, constitutional or governance capacity. The term **"the Institute"** may be used where the document refers more generally to the organisation, its premises, activities or community role.

This distinction is intended solely to aid clarity and consistency and does not imply the existence of separate organisations.

3. Our Shared Understanding

Every volunteering relationship is different. People contribute for different reasons, bring different strengths and interests, have different amounts of time available and may want different things from their experience.

The Society does not expect every volunteer to contribute in the same way or to make the same level of commitment.

Wherever reasonably possible, volunteering should therefore begin with a shared understanding of the activities or role in which someone wishes to become involved, the contribution they feel able to make and any support, information or guidance that may help them to do so.

That understanding may change over time. A volunteer may develop new interests or skills, wish to contribute more or less time, try something different, take a break or decide that volunteering with the Society is no longer right for them.

The Society similarly may need to change the way activities are organised or the opportunities it is able to offer.

Changes should, wherever reasonably possible, be approached through open conversation. Neither the volunteer nor the Society should feel that an arrangement established when volunteering begins must remain unchanged when circumstances, interests or needs have moved on.

Volunteers are encouraged to find ways of contributing that make good use of what they bring while recognising that the needs and opportunities of the Society will also influence what is possible.

Guiding Principle

A good volunteering relationship should be able to grow and change with the people who are part of it.

4. What You Can Expect from the Society

Shildon Railway Institute recognises that volunteering is a contribution freely made. The Society should therefore seek to ensure that the time, skills and goodwill offered by its volunteers are treated with respect and that volunteers receive appropriate support in making their contribution.

As a volunteer, you can reasonably expect the Society to:

- welcome you and treat you with dignity, fairness, courtesy and respect;
- value your contribution regardless of whether you volunteer frequently or occasionally, undertake a specialist responsibility or simply help where you can;
- help you understand the activities or responsibilities you have agreed to undertake and how they contribute to the Society;

- provide an appropriate introduction to the Institute and induction into your volunteering activities;
- provide reasonable information, guidance, training or support necessary for the activities you undertake;
- provide access to relevant Society policies, procedures and guidance and help you understand them where necessary;
- provide an appropriate person to whom you can turn when you need advice, assistance or support;
- take reasonable steps to provide a safe and supportive environment in which to volunteer;
- provide appropriate equipment or resources necessary for agreed volunteering activities where these are the Society's responsibility;
- respect the time you freely choose to give and avoid placing unreasonable expectations upon your availability;
- listen to your ideas, questions, suggestions and concerns and treat them with appropriate consideration;
- encourage you to ask questions, acknowledge uncertainty and seek help without feeling that doing so diminishes your contribution;
- respond fairly and proportionately when difficulties or mistakes arise;
- respect your privacy and handle information about you responsibly;
- consider, where reasonably possible, opportunities for you to develop your knowledge, confidence or skills or explore different ways of contributing;
- keep you appropriately informed about matters affecting your volunteering;
- recognise that your circumstances may change and be willing to discuss changes to your volunteering arrangements;
- provide a reasonable opportunity for you to raise concerns about your volunteering experience or the way you have been treated;
- recognise and appreciate the contribution you make.

The Society cannot guarantee that every volunteering opportunity, activity or arrangement will always remain available, nor that every request or preference can be accommodated. Where something cannot reasonably be provided or continued, the Society should seek to explain this openly and respectfully.

Most importantly, volunteers should be able to expect that the standards of dignity, respect, fairness and consideration asked of them through the Volunteer Code of Conduct will also be reflected in the way the Society treats them.

Guiding Principle

If we ask volunteers to give their best to the Society, the Society should seek to provide the conditions in which they are able to do so.

5. What the Society Can Expect from You

Volunteering is freely given, but a positive volunteering relationship depends upon reasonable consideration and commitment on both sides.

The Society recognises that volunteers have responsibilities, commitments and circumstances beyond the Institute and does not expect volunteering to take unreasonable precedence over them. Where a volunteer has freely agreed to undertake an activity or responsibility, however, the Society should be able to place reasonable reliance upon that commitment.

As a volunteer, the Society can reasonably expect you to:

- contribute your time, skills and knowledge freely and in good faith to the activities or responsibilities you have agreed to undertake;
- take reasonable care to fulfil commitments you have made and communicate when circumstances mean that you are unable to do so;
- participate in induction, information, guidance or training reasonably necessary for the activities you undertake;
- follow relevant Society policies, procedures, safety arrangements and reasonable instructions applicable to your volunteering;
- work within the reasonable boundaries of your role, knowledge, competence and authority, asking for guidance or assistance when you need it;
- let an appropriate person know about problems, concerns, accidents, mistakes or changes that may affect your volunteering or the wellbeing of others;
- take reasonable care of Society property, information, equipment and other resources entrusted to you;
- communicate openly where your interests, availability, circumstances or volunteering needs change;
- let the Society know if you wish to change, pause or bring your volunteering commitment to an end;
- uphold the Society's Volunteer Code of Conduct, to which volunteers make a separate personal commitment.

The Society does not expect volunteers to know everything, be available whenever needed or accept responsibilities they do not feel able to undertake. Asking questions, seeking support and being honest about personal limits are all part of volunteering responsibly.

Nor should a volunteer feel obliged to continue with an arrangement simply because they previously agreed to it. Where circumstances or interests change, the Society asks that this is communicated so that, wherever reasonably possible, a different arrangement can be explored or an orderly conclusion reached.

Guiding Principle

What matters is not how much someone is able to give, but that what they freely choose to give is offered with care, honesty and consideration for those who may rely upon it.

6. The Voluntary Nature of the Relationship

Volunteering with Shildon Railway Institute is freely undertaken. The Society values the contribution made by its volunteers, but recognises that volunteering must remain compatible with the other responsibilities, commitments and circumstances of their lives.

This Agreement is intended to record a shared understanding and does not create a contract of employment or a relationship of worker and employer. Neither the Society nor the volunteer intends the commitments described within it to create contractual obligations.

The Society **does not** expect a volunteer to:

- provide a minimum amount of time unless a particular activity has been mutually arranged on that basis;
- be available whenever assistance is required;
- accept every task or opportunity offered to them;
- place volunteering ahead of their employment, family, caring responsibilities, health, personal commitments or other reasonable priorities;
- continue undertaking a role or activity that they no longer wish, or reasonably feel able, to undertake; or
- remain a volunteer for any particular period of time.

Similarly, volunteering does not guarantee particular hours, activities, responsibilities or opportunities. What the Society is able to offer may change according to its activities, resources and circumstances.

A volunteer is free to decline an activity, change the amount of time they contribute, take a break or bring their volunteering to an end. Where other people are relying upon an arrangement already made, the Society simply asks that changes are communicated as early as reasonably possible.

The Society may also need to change or bring a volunteering arrangement to an end. Wherever circumstances permit, this should be discussed openly and respectfully with the volunteer and handled in accordance with the principles and relevant procedures of the Society.

Nothing in this section diminishes the value of commitments freely made. Rather, it recognises the distinction **between being relied upon because we have chosen to make a commitment and being obliged to make that commitment in the first place.**

Guiding Principle

Volunteering is a gift of time and contribution freely made: it should be valued, never taken for granted.

7. When Things Change

Volunteering arrangements do not need to remain the same throughout someone's involvement with the Society.

People's circumstances, interests, confidence and availability change. Volunteers may discover new interests, develop new skills, wish to take on additional responsibility, prefer to contribute in a different way or need to reduce or pause their involvement.

The Society's own activities and needs will also change over time.

Where circumstances change, volunteers are encouraged to talk openly with an appropriate person within the Society. Wherever reasonably possible, the Society should seek to understand what has changed and whether a different arrangement would enable the volunteering relationship to continue positively.

This might include:

- changing the activities a volunteer undertakes;
- contributing more or less frequently;
- moving between different areas of volunteering;
- sharing a responsibility with somebody else;
- receiving additional guidance, training or support;
- taking a temporary break;
- stepping back from a particular responsibility while continuing to volunteer in other ways; or
- bringing the volunteering relationship to an end.

A change should not automatically be regarded as a failure of the original arrangement. Discovering through experience what someone enjoys, where their strengths lie or what does and does not suit them is itself part of volunteering.

Where the Society proposes a significant change affecting a volunteer's established activities, it should wherever reasonably possible explain the reasons and provide an opportunity for the volunteer to discuss what that means for their involvement.

If a volunteering relationship comes to an end, the Society should seek wherever appropriate to recognise and thank the volunteer for the contribution they have made.

Guiding Principle

Finding your place as a volunteer is not necessarily something that happens once; it may continue throughout your time with the Society.

8. Support, Concerns and Difficulties

Volunteering should be a positive experience, but there may be occasions when a volunteer needs support, encounters a difficulty or wishes to raise a concern about some aspect of their volunteering.

Volunteers are encouraged to speak to an appropriate person within the Society when they need advice or support, are uncertain about something, feel uncomfortable about a situation or believe that a problem is affecting their ability to volunteer positively.

Where appropriate, difficulties should be discussed openly and at an early stage. Many concerns can be resolved through conversation, clarification, additional support or a change in arrangements before they develop into more significant problems.

The Society should:
- listen to concerns raised by volunteers and treat them with appropriate seriousness and respect;
- seek to understand the circumstances before reaching conclusions;
- provide appropriate guidance or support where this may help;
- respond fairly and proportionately to difficulties;
- respect appropriate privacy and confidentiality;
- explain where a matter needs to be considered through a particular Society policy or procedure;
- ensure that volunteers know where they can find information about the appropriate people to contact for advice, support or particular types of concern; and
- recognise that raising a genuine concern in good faith is itself a responsible contribution to the Society.

Volunteers should similarly seek to raise difficulties honestly and respectfully and provide information that helps the Society understand the concern.

Where a matter involves safeguarding, safety, serious misconduct, unlawful activity or another issue requiring a particular response, it should be referred through the appropriate Society arrangements rather than treated simply as an informal volunteering difficulty.

Current information about Society responsibilities and appropriate points of contact is available through the Institute noticeboard and website. Volunteers who are uncertain about whom to approach should feel able to ask any Committee Member or the duty member of paid staff for guidance. They may not always be the person best placed to resolve the matter themselves, but they can help the volunteer identify and contact an appropriate person.

Nobody should feel that they need to understand the Society's organisational structure or determine the correct procedure before they are entitled to ask for help. Finding the right route for a concern is something the Society should help with.

Guiding Principle

A volunteer should never feel that they have to manage a difficulty alone simply because they do not know who to ask or what process applies.

9. Related Documents

This Agreement forms part of the Society's wider framework for supporting and managing volunteering and should be read alongside other documents relevant to a volunteer's activities.

Key related documents include:
- the Volunteer Code of Conduct;
- the Society's Governance Philosophy;

- the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Policy;
- the Safeguarding Policy;
- the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy;
- the Site Security Policy;
- the Disputes & Complaints Procedure; and
- any other policies, procedures or guidance relevant to the volunteer's particular activities or responsibilities.

The Volunteer Code of Conduct has a particularly close relationship with this Agreement. This Agreement describes what the Society and its volunteers can reasonably expect from one another; the Code describes the culture and standards of conduct through which volunteers make their contribution.

Volunteers are not expected to memorise every Society policy or procedure. The Society should make volunteers aware of those relevant to their activities, make them reasonably accessible and provide guidance where someone is uncertain about what applies.

Guiding Principle

The Society's documents should help volunteers understand and contribute with confidence, not create unnecessary barriers to volunteering.

10. Document Review

This Agreement should normally be reviewed in accordance with the Society's agreed governance review arrangements and sooner where changes in legislation, guidance, Society activities or experience indicate that revision may be necessary.

Review should consider whether the Agreement continues to provide a fair, clear and realistic description of the mutual understanding between the Society and its volunteers.

The experience and feedback of volunteers should form an important part of that review. Consideration should be given not only to what the Society reasonably needs from its volunteers, but also to whether the support and commitments offered by the Society remain appropriate and are being reflected in practice.

Where experience identifies difficulties in volunteering arrangements, review should consider whether improvements are required to the Agreement itself or instead to induction, communication, support, training, guidance or other aspects of the volunteering experience.

The purpose of review should be to ensure that this Agreement continues to support positive, sustainable and genuinely voluntary relationships between the Society and the people who choose to contribute to it.

Guiding Principle

A mutual agreement remains meaningful only if we continue to ask whether it is working fairly for both sides.

11. Our Agreement

This Volunteer Agreement records the shared understanding upon which volunteering with Shildon Railway Institute is based.

It recognises that volunteering is freely undertaken and that a positive volunteering relationship depends upon contribution, support, communication, consideration and respect flowing in both directions.

As a Volunteer

I confirm that this Agreement reflects my understanding of the voluntary relationship I am choosing to enter into with Shildon Railway Institute.

I understand what I can reasonably expect from the Society and what the Society can reasonably expect from me, and I know that I can ask for guidance or discuss my volunteering arrangements if I am uncertain or if my circumstances change.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

On behalf of Shildon Railway Institute

I confirm that the Society welcomes the contribution of this volunteer and accepts the responsibilities towards its volunteers described within this Agreement.

On behalf of the Society, we undertake to seek to provide the support, consideration and volunteering environment described within it.

Name: _____

Role: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Our Shared Understanding

Volunteering is freely given and freely received. We will seek to make it a relationship in which contribution is valued, commitments are respected, support is available and both the volunteer and the Society can benefit and grow.