

It is about more than where we meet

March and District Model Railway Club

Introduction

The [March and District Model Railway Club](#) meets in the old steward's accommodation at the Royal British Legion building in March. It has a permanent layout set out and its members share a common interest in all things railway and especially modelling. Their main activities include:



- Researching, designing and building new layouts
- Attending various shows and displaying layouts
- Visits to exhibitions and railway heritage sites
- Socialising

Monies for layouts, rent and other costs come from member's subscriptions and donations. They also raise some monies from exhibitions and open days and recently from running a railway enthusiasts evening.

There are 20+ members, quite a number of whom are elderly.

The group was referred to CCVS by Fenland District Council and the first meeting was at one of the regular surgeries run in the district.

What was the problem?

The present meeting space in the British Legion is not meeting the needs of the group. It is accessible only by a narrow staircase which many of the more elderly members find difficult to climb. There is no other exit in case of emergencies. There are no toilets in the near vicinity of the room, and the British Legion does not have disabled toilets.

The main layout (which is permanently set up) takes up most of the space limiting the number of members who can meet there and the storage of other equipment and layouts.

The club members want to expand their activities and attract more new members, which the present site does not allow. It is not a particularly nice space to work or meet in.

Although the club saw the problem as being one of accommodation and space it quickly became clear that there were other associated issues.

What was done?

The first meeting discussed the problem the club would have in raising funds from public sources as just a members club. They were asked to consider what public benefit the club may have, what needs it met with present members, or what benefits it could meet with other

parts of the community. i.e. Encouraging modelling and interest in the railway heritage of March.

The issue of the venue was also raised, and the need to find a venue to rent where the layout could be left set up on a permanent basis. Many of the potential sites that had been explored were multi user spaces and this would mean dismantling and storing the layout each week.

The meeting finished with the group having to follow-up a number of issues;

- A review of the clubs aims and objectives, with an emphasis on how they could involve and benefit the community in the future
- Consideration of how they might change their club activities to make it possible to use venues where they only hired a room for short periods
- A thorough review of their policies and the types of policy they may need in the future to make them funding ready
- Consider CCVS membership to gain long term support, training and funding information

Following the meeting the group resolved to become full members of CCVS

In May 2013 two members attended a workshop on making funding applications at March town hall, followed by a support session with CCVS. They also spoke to several funders including WREN, The Heritage Lottery and CCF.

CCVS advised them to put together a specification for any potential venue so they could let other organisations know what they were looking for; this could also be used to evaluate possible venues and for funding applications. They were advised to include some wider aspects of the way the group wanted to function in the future and some ideas about how the group could grow. Questions they were helped to identify included:

1. The Activities of the club. What do you do, this should include the social aspects as well as the activity involving the layout.
2. How would you like activities to be undertaken. As a group, working as individuals or subgroups
3. What benefits do you bring to your members
4. What benefits do you bring to the public
5. Your venue specification. Include rough size, storage needs, socialising space. Include the facilities you need such as disabled access, and access to kitchens and toilets
6. What are your accommodation options. ie. Own room, port-a-cabin, clear away and store basis. What are the pros and cons of each? How you might get your club to work in each kind of space.

Following on from this a number of phone calls and e-mails were exchanged between the group and CCVS but progress was slow as the group developed their future plans.

In September 2013 two of the groups committee again attended a CCVS support session in March. Before this meeting they had sent their proposed development plan and venue specification. They had also planned a heritage evening and had sold about 60 tickets.

Once again the role of CCVS was to advise them and help them work through their plans. This included helping them take a realistic view of their situation and encouraging them to

consider all their options, as well as helping them develop a plan of action and providing information.

The information included the results of a Grantfinder search which showed that they might be able to apply to several landfill grant bodies, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Awards for All. CCVS were also able to suggest a number of other organisations that they may want to approach to find out if there was any synergy in their aims.

The group took away a number of actions.

- Talk to British Legion about what their plans for the site's future are and if it might be possible to extend the current space into other rooms, improve access and emergency exits.
- Meet with the Bramley Line heritage railway group and Friends of March Railway Station to discuss if they currently had any venue space or what their future development plans were and how the Model Club could be part of those. As well as discussing possible collaboration on projects, events or exhibitions.
- Look at other possible venues including local pubs, the Museum and learning centre.
- Explore how much a port-a-cabin would be and where it might be placed.
- Look at possible ways they could help people in March appreciate their railway heritage
- Look at how they might fundraise including putting on more heritage events and asking members to consider leaving a legacy in their wills.

What they have done since

The group have taken on board the CCVS advice and have started to develop a plan for the future; this includes having done the following

- Held a members meeting at which it was decided that the British Legion was not where they wanted to be long term
- Had been to see the Bramley Line and were excited by their plans. They too need some facilities for visitors and have space for a port-a-cabin. There is a possibility of sharing kitchen, toilets and meeting room and having a separate space for the layout and storage. They also discussed future projects together
- Had a meeting with the Friends of March Railway Station,
- Had started to research Marches railway history with the hope of creating an exhibition
- Putting on the heritage evening which was a fantastic success and which raised over £400 as well as created a lot of good will and contacts

The impact

The hard work of the group, facilitated by the CCVS development work has led to the March and District Model Railway Club being in a much stronger position as well as being a lot clearer about how they want to progress.

- The club's committee are more open to different options and have a clear idea of the pros and cons of each

- The group is networking with other organisations in the area
- The group are now considering how they benefit the community and how they might help other groups such as youth clubs, schools etc. by sharing their modelling/railway skills/experience
- The group are considering how they can use their knowledge to make the community aware of its heritage
- The group is looking at what it can do to raise some of its own income. This could be used to support their funding applications and for match funding
- The group has a more realistic understanding of what funding (or not) they may attract

Overall the group is becoming more vibrant and community focused, they have started to see the way in which they can make a bigger contribution to members and the community by promoting their interest in railways and modelling. The group has started to make realistic plans that will help it to continue and thrive into the future.

Testimony

“The March & District Model Railway Club found out about CCVS through Fenland District Council. I rang CCVS office, spoke to Frances Carter, she was very helpful and arranged a meeting with Mr Alan Turner at Chatteris.”

“On our first meeting we found Alan to be very helpful with information how to move our club forward. We then held a meeting with most club members, at this meeting The Club decided to become members of CCVS and take on Alan's recommendations. We attended a Funding Meeting at March Town Hall, also had a second meeting with Alan after the funding session. At this meeting we received from Alan further useful help and information on drawing up a Development Plan for the club, this has now been completed and moving forwards with Alan's involvement.”