

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnership Development Group held from 14.00 on Tuesday 3 May 2016, in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard

Present:

Steve Williams (Chairman)	West Somerset Railway PLC
Cllr Jean Adkins	Taunton Deane District Council
Frank Courtney	WSRA
Charlie Field	Somerset County Council
John Cronin	Diesel & Electric Preservation Group
Chris Bolt	West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
Cllr Karen Mills	West Somerset Council
Martyn Snell	Employees & Volunteers/Friends Groups
Godfrey Baker	Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust

In attendance:

Mel Hillman	Corporate Services Administrator
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Apologies for absence were received from:

Chris Austin	West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
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Chris Bolt was deputising for Chris Austin. Martyn Snell wished to clarify that although he was now a Trustee of the WSRA, his attendance at this meeting was solely as the representative of the staff/volunteers and Friends Groups.

Minute

Action

23/16 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 31 March 2016 were APPROVED and then signed.

24/16 Matters Arising

- i) Committee Administration. The Chairman confirmed that although Mel Hillman would be standing down from the New Volunteer Co-ordinator role from 22 June 2016, he would continue to service PDG in the new voluntary role of Corporate Services Administrator.
- ii) Minute 16/16(iv) Minehead Economic Plan. Cllr Karen Mills reported that this had been unanimously agreed by the West Somerset Council. The proposed seafront developments would impact on the WSR.
- iii) Minute 20/16 DfT Bid. Steve Williams reported that the bid had been unsuccessful. It was known that there had been 114 submissions. There had been no feedback on the quality of the bid but it had been felt it had been a good quality one drawing on local expertise. The process had shown the strength of the Railway Partnership which augured well for the future. Other funding streams were being identified.

- iv) Following the suggestion at the beginning of last meeting that SCC be asked to consider representation by an elected member, the Chairman had written to the Deputy Leader of the Council and awaited a reply.

SW

25/16 Southern Gateway Project

The Chairman reported that the Bishops Lydeard car parking commercial negotiations with TDBC were ongoing.

It was known that Taylor Wimpey had applied to vary the nature of the planning application for the Station Farm development. The Plc would be objecting to this. There was a dispute over the need for traffic lights over the railway bridge. It was understood that there was no intention for a re-negotiation over the main road roundabout plan. The proposals were out for consultation with a closing date of Friday 6 May 2016. It was on the agenda for the next meeting of the Parish Council where objection was anticipated. After four years, the traffic calming measures in the planning application had not been implemented.

Through the help of TDBC, the services of external consultant, Sam Hunt, had been secured to produce an investor prospectus. A master planner had been identified for the first phase work. With the agreement of the PLC/WSRA and Steam Trust, Ric Auger had been appointed as the Project Director on a voluntary basis. Thanks were expressed to the Steam Trust for a financial donation. A letter had been submitted to the WSRA for consideration.

The draft Consolidated Planning Brief was presented to the meeting by the Chairman. It identified the need to develop the Bishops Lydeard site as the 'Gateway' to the Railway to improve the customer offer. The plans would include car parking, catering provision, retail provision and improving capacity. In addition, the development will provide two sheds with covered accommodation for the display and storage of heritage carriages together with a Visitor Centre. Southern Gateway will be a multi-million pound phased development over a number of years. The Taunton to Bishops Lydeard link is a separate but important part of the overall plans. PDG was being formally asked to comment on the proposals.

A plan of the site was presented to the meeting for clarity. This only showed the eastern end of the site but included the temporary building to replace Brunel House. The planning application had been submitted. The Visitor Centre plans were still being produced.

Frank Courtney commented that there had been a meeting of the WSRA Trustees earlier in the day and written comments would be submitted shortly. It was accepted that in a worst case scenario the developments could take 20 years to complete. Steve Williams confirmed that the phasing information was included in the briefing paper. Frank Courtney added that there would be a need to identify the size of the market and resulting through-flow in an analysis. Steve Williams accepted that there would be a need to bring all the component parts of the Railway together so that precise bids for funding could be produced.

Quite separately from Southern Gateway, it was noted that the WSRA Trustees had also begun the process of considering the future use of the Norton Fitzwarren site and would be bringing this to PDG at a future meeting. Councillor Jean Adkins added that any Norton Fitzwarren developments would be linked to any future Ford Farm site developments and to resolving highway issues. **FC**

Steve Williams added that it was a PLC policy that Bishops Lydeard would always be the start for WSR services and Southern Gateway would strengthen that role. The proposed improvements would provide a much more rounded visitor attraction and not just the start and finish of a train ride. Cllr Jean Adkins added that the station was a historic site and museum in its own right.

Steve Williams concluded the discussion by stating the plans were aspirational and ambitious, but realistic in a strategic project. He would continue to report on developments. The PDG fully supported the plans seen. **SW**

26/16 SCC – Freehold/Leasehold

Charlie Field presented the revised version of the flow diagram indicating the process that SCC would invoke if the Freehold was ever to become for sale. The key amendment was the inclusion of WSC and TDBC as full partners in the decision making process as suggested at the previous meeting. This was endorsed by the meeting.

It was agreed that the PLC would draw up a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in a legal framework, including the amended flow diagram. It was intended that the document would be presented to the Plc Board in June in readiness for the AGM on 25th June 2016. In response to questions, Charlie Field confirmed that the MoU would be legally binding on SCC and its introduction was within delegated authority. **CF/SW**

In relation to the extension of the current lease with the Plc, there were still issues to confirm. There had been a positive meeting with the Plc in the last week which had clarified terms around the granting of sub-leases. It had been confirmed by SCC that the Plc can currently grant sub-leases to tenants but this was required in writing. There was also a better understanding of the selling off of small parcels of land adjacent to the Railway. It was hoped to resolve the outstanding issues shortly. **SW**

27/16 Taunton – Bishops Lydeard Link

Steve Williams reported that the working group had submitted proposals to GWR and Network Rail for a pilot Taunton to Bishops Lydeard link service and hoped to receive a response by the end of June and then to produce a draft timetable by the end of July with a current target implementation in 2017. It was hoped that the next meeting of the working group would complete the feasibility study and Steve Williams would report to the next meeting of PDG. One concern was the potential lack of rolling stock to cascade to the service with the delays to the mainline electrification programme. **SW**

It was accepted that there would need to be a major and well-resourced marketing campaign to launch such a service. It was also confirmed that Butlins were aware of the plans and had been part of the bid.

28/16 PLC/WSRA Working Arrangements

It was confirmed that day to day working arrangements remained positive. The Plc was waiting for the outcome of the proposed WSRA AGM due in October to reinforce the full legibility of the new Trustees but remained committed to supporting the WSRA in its future role.

One unintentional benefit of the changes had been the opportunity in refreshing the Plc Business Plan to bring some processes together with the WSRA, eg locos. The various working groups established would be able to assist in this process.

29/16 WSRA Update

Frank Courtney reported that there would be a Members Workshop in July which would help formulate plans to be presented to the October AGM.

Work was continuing on confirming the Membership List on a national basis.

The Trustees had not appreciated the scale of confusion and complexity of the financial planning and management. It would take some time to resolve and understand the true financial picture.

The Trustees were looking to the future and 8 working groups had been established. The Articles of Association would be reviewed.

It was hoped that the new Journal would be published in the next 4/5 weeks. Steve Williams reported that the Plc had withdrawn its restriction on Plc staff producing copy for the Journal. It was agreed that the PDG should write an introductory paragraph. Cllr Jean Adkins agreed to produce this. It was hoped that the new Journal would have a wider circulation and input.

J/FC

Work was progressing on a Loco/Rolling Stock Policy and a Land & Property Holding Policy to include the future of the Norton Fitzwarren site and Sherrings Yard at Williton. This would need to be done quickly in line with other Williton developments. Outline proposals would be ready for the Members Workshop in July to be taken to the AGM for ratification. There did not seem to be a management plan for the Norton Fitzwarren site. There was no intention to stop the annual Steam Rally but a discussion would need to be held to determine whether the site should be owned by the WSRA or transferred to a 'not for profit' Trust so that the asset was locked into the Railway Family for the benefit of all. Frank Courtney would keep PDG informed of developments.

FC

30/16 Williton Site Developments

Steve Williams confirmed that the Site Development Group had been reconvened and would meet on 26 May 2016. It was intended it would

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become a Project Board and catch up with the pace of developments at the Bishops Lydeard site. All the existing documents would be reviewed. The PLC now had a clear view of what it wanted strategically on the Williton site. Preliminary work had been undertaken with Williton Town Council around planning issues.

31/16 Minehead Chamber of Commerce Proposals

Steve Williams reported that he was setting up a meeting of the interested parties to discuss the proposals to reinstate regular service trains between Taunton and Minehead alongside the current heritage services. There were local political imperatives which should not be dismissed out of hand. He hoped that the meeting would try to match aspirations with reality but funding and feasibility plans would need to be produced. Steve Williams would keep PDG informed.

SW

32/16 AOB

- i) Washford Developments. Godfrey Baker reported that there had been a meeting between the Trust and Plc in the last week to discuss progress. There were issues to be addressed before a Heritage Lottery Bid could be submitted including revision of the existing lease following the earlier clarification of sub-leases with SCC. Car parking issues had been resolved with the local pub owner, although increased car parking would be part of the overall plan. It had been agreed to separate the extension of the 7F loco hire agreement from the site proposals. Cllr Jean Adkins reminded the meeting of the earlier agreement to provide suitable letters of support to Lottery bids. Steve Williams and Godfrey Baker would discuss this outside of the meeting.
- ii) Land & Holdings. Steve Williams asked that in view of ongoing discussions between the ONION Collective/PLC/WSC and SCC around access to the new pathway linking Watchet Boat Museum to Goviers Lane crossing and the legal position as to whether it was a permitted pathway or a public highway, whether this was a matter for PDG to consider? Members were unanimously agreed that it was a legal matter and outside the remit of PDG.

SW/GB

33/16 Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting would be held from:

14.00 on Thursday 14 July 2016 in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard.

The meeting closed at 16.00