

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnership Development Group
held from 11.00 on Thursday 8 September 2016, in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard
(Postponed from 14 July 2016)

Present:

Steve Williams (Chairman)	West Somerset Railway PLC
Cllr Jean Adkins	Taunton Deane District Council
Frank Courtney	West Somerset Railway Association
Cllr David Hall	Somerset County Council
John Cronin	Diesel & Electric Preservation Group
Chris Austin	West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
Cllr Karen Mills	West Somerset Council
Godfrey Baker	Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust

In attendance:

Ric Auger	Plc Director for Infrastructure and Southern Gateway Project Manager (to item 37/16)
Mel Hillman	Corporate Services Administrator

Apologies for absence were received from:

Martyn Snell	Employees & Volunteers/Friends Groups
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A welcome was extended to Cllr David Hall who would be representing Somerset County Council for future meetings. Cllr Hall outlined his responsibilities including being Deputy Leader of the Council and a Cabinet responsibility for Business, Inward Investment Policy, Economic Development in Somerset and the economic well-being of the community. Additional activities included oversight of waste services, libraries and Trading Standards. He was also a member of the Somerset and Devon Heritage Trust. Cllr Hall added that there were massive opportunities which would benefit the West Somerset Railway and he hoped that that he would be able to help in gaining access to those opportunities.

Ric Auger was welcomed to the meeting to give a presentation on the Southern Gateway Development.

Minute	Action
34/16	Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 May 2016 were APPROVED with one small amendment in Minute 28/16 – 'legitimacy' instead of 'legibility'.

35/16 **Matters Arising Not on the Agenda**

- i) Leasehold/Freehold Update. Steve Williams reported that he had met with Cllr David Hall on 7 September to follow-up on his concerns in the delay by the County Council in responding to his detailed letter dated April 2016. Cllr Hall had promised a detailed response by the end of September 2016. Steve Williams said that the delay had impacted on the ability of the Plc to grant on-going

extension of leases to partner organisations.

36/16 **Election of Chair and Vice-Chair**

The Chairman reminded the meeting that Cllr Jean Atkins had been elected as Vice-Chairman with the intention that she would take over as Chairman from the next meeting. However, for personal reasons, Cllr Atkins had informed Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) that she would be standing down as their representative on PDG. She had been asked by the Leader of the Council to attend this meeting as a replacement had not yet been agreed. With the agreement on 7 September 2016 by West Somerset Council to merge with Taunton Deane, future representation was now unknown. She would not be able to take on the Chairmanship of PDG.

The Chairman asked for new nominations/volunteers for Chairman and Vice-Chair. For various reasons no other members felt able to commit. After a discussion it was unanimously agreed that Steve Williams would continue in the Chair for another year. Frank Courtney offered to become Vice-Chair until the WSRA AGM on 24 October when he would be standing down as a Trustee. It was felt that there may be a new Trustee wishing to stand and it would also give time for TDBC to consider a new representative. The Committee would re-visit the Vice-Chairman position early in 2017 once the new representatives to PDG were known. This was unanimously agreed.

SW/MH

Thanks were expressed to Cllr Jean Atkins for her valued contribution to the work of PDG since its creation.

37/16 **Southern Gateway Project**

Ric Auger was welcomed to the meeting to give a screen presentation. He confirmed that this was a major project to improve the visitor experience at Bishops Lydeard. The first Planning Brief had been generally supported. External consultants were now developing options and a draft prospectus had been produced. Planning consultants would further develop the plans within the overall concept.

Members were reminded that much of the information remained 'confidential in confidence' at this point. The proposals would be presented to Plc Board on 24 September 2016 for approval. A formal programme of consultations with stakeholders would then take place.

The presentation pointed out the restrictions of the current site, including a major water main. It was confirmed that the proposals would be very much a phased development taking many years. The rate of progress would be very much determined by the funding available.

Two options were shown, indicating known advantages and disadvantages.

There was a short discussion on balancing the improvements at Bishops Lydeard as an attraction in its own right against the need to encourage more passenger journeys. In answer to a question from Frank Courtney on projected passenger numbers, it was confirmed that the Commercial

Department would be undertaking detailed customer surveys over the next couple of months.

Chris Austin added that the Steam Trust had taken Heritage Lottery Fund advice and a small application would be made for the Gauge Museum in order to develop a track record for any future applications. The preliminary feedback on the bid had been positive. The plans included a curator role, creating more space for interactive displays as well as plans for a stronger educational role with schools. Discussions had taken place between the WSRA and Steam Trust over the future management of the Museum and a position statement would be required for the WSRA Trustees.

CA

Ric Auger was thanked for his presentation and input and left the meeting.

38/16 **Inward Investment**

The Chairman had circulated three supporting papers prior to the meeting. The papers reflected decisions and strategic approach already approved by the PLC. The proposals included the creation of a Fund-Raising Committee which it is proposed would meet quarterly, together with the provision of a Fund-Raising Manager post which had already been approved. This person would help a co-ordinated approach across the whole Railway Family. Members were asked to discuss whether they would support a co-ordinated approach or would prefer that individual proposals and fund-raising by organisations remained an option within an overarching approach. Fund-raising for the Southern Gateway project needed to progress.

Chris Austin stated that the Steam Trust supported the principle of a shared fund-raising approach and welcomed the possibility of specialist help and support whether it was from a paid or voluntary post. Chris did raise concerns that the proposed Fund-Raising Committee would have Executive powers. Individual groups should retain an independence but share ideas and experience. Steve Williams agreed to amend the terms of reference to reflect this based on proposals from Chris Austin.

SW

Frank Courtney mentioned the need for the Railway to raise money and not just for structures. Steve Williams added that he had talked to at least six other Heritage Railways in an attempt to understand how their successful funding-raising was organised.

Concerns were expressed that the job description for the Fund-Raising post made the person responsible to the General Manager. It was felt that this was inappropriate as he would not have the time to take on the extra responsibility. Steve Williams agreed to review the job description.

SW

Overall it was AGREED that PDG supported the principle of a joint fund-raising approach. Members were asked to send any further comments to Steve Williams.

ALL

39/16 **WSRA Update**

Frank Courtney gave a verbal update and explained that the

Development Plan had been drafted following responses from the extensive consultation exercise. The Development Plan was not yet finalised but would be made available to Association members for endorsement at the 22nd October Annual General Meeting. Frank commented on some key areas, but stressed that the Plan was still subject to further revision and also that members' endorsement was essential if the plan was to be implemented:

These key areas were commented upon:

- It is considered important to increase membership
- Completion of the ongoing programme to improve Governance arrangements is a high priority
- Members were very clear that they did not wish the Association to dispose of the two locos 4561 and 7821. Discussions with the PLC were continuing positively to develop an agreement for the locomotives to have a long term future on the railway. This is seen as critical. There would need to be a major fund raising programme and there is likely to be benefit in the programme including also funds to support the restoration of the PLC's large prairie 4110.
- There had been considerable support for setting up a new 'not for profit' organisation which would hold the freehold of the Norton Fitzwarren site and ensure that it is retained for railway use. The new organisation would include the WSRA, the PLC and the Steam Trust as members.
- Talks are continuing with the Plc on the future operating of the QB.
- There had been substantial support for the WSRA continuing to manage the Shop and Café at Bishops Lydeard for the time being but with more discussions with the PLC about collaboration. Similarly, Association members wanted the Promotions trading subsidiary to continue to manage the Restorations engineering facility at Williton but with further negotiation with the PLC concerning closer collaboration. These discussions are on going.

(Cllr David Hall left the meeting at this point).

40/16 Taunton to Bishops Lydeard Link

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

SW/MH

41/16 Minehead Chamber of Commerce

Steve Williams reported that ongoing contact had been made with the Chairman of the Chamber and recent pronouncements had seemed to have reduced expectations.

42/16 Williton Site Developments

Steve Williams reported that the Project Group had meet two weeks ago and work on a Planning Brief for Phase 2 had been agreed.

Steve Williams assured the meeting that the work would be undertaken in the same manner as the Southern Gateway Project and that Williton was not a second choice. Both schemes would be given equal consideration.

43/16 **Taunton Deane Borough Council Core Strategy and Transport Plan**

Steve Williams reported that he would be writing to the Council to ask for discussions to take place which would help ensure that the West Somerset Railway was reflected in its Strategy and Core Plans so that the Railway became as visible as possible in future planning. Statutory Transport Authorities needed to be seen to be supporting Heritage Railways.

SW

44/16 **Plc Matters**

Steve Williams reported on the following items:

- David Horton had been appointed as the Head of Mechanical Engineering with effect from 14 November 2016 to replace Andy Forster who would be retiring from the post of Chief Mechanical Engineer at the end of October 2016.
- Chris Austin was leading work on the development of a Museums Strategy which would help support funding bids. The item would be a future agenda item for PDG in developing suggestions.
- Ian Harrison, a long serving volunteer in the Loco Dept, had been appointed as the Commercial Director. Ian was considering arranging a cross-Railway Commercial Conference where ideas could be shared.
- The Plc Stakeholder meeting would be held on 29 October. Members were invited to submit any agenda items to Steve Williams.

SW/MH

ALL

45/16 **AOB**

Cllr Jean Atkins suggested that the WSR should consider investigating whether other local organisations would be arranging any activities to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the start of WWII in 2019. These activities may attract some grant funding, especially the educational aspects.

46/16 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would be held from:

11.00 on Thursday 1 December 2016 in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard.

The meeting closed at 13.05