

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnership Development Group
held from 10.00 on Monday 8 October 2018
in the Meeting Room at Bishops Lydeard Station

Present:

Paul Whitehouse (Chairman)	West Somerset Railway Association
Steve Williams	West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
John Jones-Pratt	West Somerset Railway Plc
Martin Adfield	West Somerset Railway Staff
Cllr Roger Habgood	Taunton Deane Borough Council
Cllr Andrew Hadley	West Somerset Council

In attendance:

Mel Hillman	Administrator
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Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr David Hall	Somerset County Council
Martin Howard	DEPG
Ryan Pope	S & D Trust.

Steve Williams was deputising for Chris Austin. Jon Jones-Pratt was also welcomed as the Acting Chairman of West Somerset Railway Plc.

Minute

Action

31/18 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 August 2018 were APPROVED.

32/18 Matters Arising

- i) Minute 25/18 Williton Site. The Chairman reported that there was nothing to report although it would be important to revisit matters for the sake of all the Stakeholders on site. The need for covered carriage storage was known. Steve Williams reminded the meeting that considerable work had been done on a site development plan and a document already existed.
- ii) Minute 26/18 Peterborough Wagon Shed. The Chairman reported that a date was awaited from Network Rail to visit the site to look at plans and dimensions and to take photographs to ascertain if it was a suitable and viable building for the WSR. This was a long term project if it was agreed to proceed.
- iii) Minute 29/18 Hinkley Point Community Fund. The Chairman reported that the grant bid was undergoing due diligence and the outcome still awaited.

33/18 Steam Trust – Update

Steve Williams had circulated a briefing paper prior to the meeting which was noted. There were no direct questions. It was intended to invite tenders for the project later in the day with a view to contracts being awarded by the end of November 2018. This included the Learning Officer post.

34/18 Development Proposals

Martin Adfield had circulated a paper prior to the meeting outlining suggestions for ongoing developments. His intention was to get all the organisations working together. He had talked with previous Chairmen of the Plc in the recent past but everything had gone into abeyance. There was an accepted need to raise more income and attract more visitors to Bishops Lydeard station. The Southern Gateway plans had been abandoned and the site was not being fully utilised due to investment restrictions. It was felt that a good news story about the site might just start to generate interest and additional income.

Jon Jones-Pratt commented that the Plc would support but, could not, fund any new developments. The planning consent for the proposed new sidings would lapse during 2019 and something would need to be done before then. Steve Williams indicated that the Steam Trust would be willing to work with others to raise funds. The covered storage of wooden bodied carriages was essential. It was accepted that the 'Railway' needed to operate in a better way including the ongoing restoration and maintenance of carriages and locomotives.

After a brief discussion, it was agreed that there needed to be a concerted approach across the 'Railway' on the way forward. It would need someone to lead and deliver development as remaining stagnant was no longer an option. Steve Williams added that most of the preparatory work had been completed and the documents were available to make a start. Cllr Roger Habgood added that the concerted effort would be as important as raising money. Good ideas would attract support. The willingness to work together would be essential.

Paul Whitehouse reported that the WSRA had agreed to appoint a fund-raiser with a soft target of £400k in the first instance. Everyone acknowledged that there been no successful grant bids for many years until this year.

Both District Councillors pointed out that from May 2019, there would be only one new District Council covering the entire line. There would be changes of vision, focus and policy.

It was AGREED that there needed to be further discussions between the Plc, WSRA and Steam Trust to discuss how funding could be most effectively managed.

**PW/JJP/
CA**

35/18 Norton Site

Jon Jones-Pratt asked what the vision was for the site. Paul Whitehouse replied that there was no vision at the moment apart from the possible wagon shed. Jon Jones-Pratt saw the site as an asset to be developed with more incoming services from the national network. It was now known that there was sufficient national rolling stock available to run shuttles. The Plc would be open to suggestions.

A slight caution was raised as the current access was poor and would need investment to improve it. It was a floodplain and any building would need to take account of those restrictions. There would need to be a discussion with the Environment Agency as part of any proposals.

It was also accepted that there would also need to be clarity of the future of incoming ballast trains as the planning permission will expire in 2019.

36/18 Heritage Committee

The brief notes of a Steering Group set up to re-establish a Heritage Committee had been circulated prior to the meeting. It was being suggested that the Committee reported to PDG. There was still considerable work to be undertaken to re-established the Committee. It was confirmed that previous Terms of Reference already existed.

37/18 Great Western Rail Franchise Stakeholder Brief

On-line copies of this paper had been made available prior to the meeting. The Brief included future community developments including the Bishops Lydeard to Taunton shuttle proposals.

In discussion it was felt that this was something that needed careful consideration. It might be feasible to operate a commuter service outside of heritage railway hours. However, there were concerns about the signalling improvements needed to operate above 25mph as well as the costs of the wear and tear on the track. There was no business case as yet. There was one comment that it might be feasible to operate an express through train from Minehead. It was confirmed that some timetabling work on this idea had been done in the past. It was also felt that this could be an opportunity as the Plc 2019 timetable had not yet been confirmed.

In his absence, Chris Austin had sent a message indicating that following a very positive meeting with Great Western Railway on 21 September, the WSR would be applying for a grant from their Customer and Communities fund for the Taunton – Bishops Lydeard shuttle to run on a limited number of days in the summer of 2019 to test the market. The prospect of a scheduled service was the best Chris had seen in 20 years and he was quite optimistic that this could happen. When required, the support of the Railway Family and Councils would be essential. The closing date for applications was 31 October 2018.

38/18 AOB

Cllr Roger Habgood commented that from his perception, the profile of the WSR was higher than previously. The high level of activity was attracting local interest. He was encouraged by this and the positive impact of the WSR on the local economy.

39/18 Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting would be held from:

10.00 on Monday 7 January 2019 in the Meeting Room at Bishops Lydeard Station.

The meeting closed at 11.00