

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnership Development Group
held from 14.00 on Monday 12 January 2015 in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard

Present:

Steve Williams (Chairman)	West Somerset Railway PLC
David Williams	Chairman - West Somerset Railway Association
Chris Austin	West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
John Cronin	Diesel & Electric Preservation Group
Cllr Karen Mills	West Somerset District Council
Cllr Jean Adkins	Taunton Deane District Council
Tim Stanger	Friends of Stations Group and FOWSR
James Stubbs	Somerset County Council
Martin Snell	Employees and Volunteers
Godfrey Baker	Somerset & Dorset Trust

In attendance:

John Irven	Chairman – West Somerset Railway PLC
Mel Hillman	Administrator

There were no apologies for absence

Minute

1/15

Welcome & Introductions

Action

Steve Williams welcomed every to the meeting and invited those who had been unable to attend the previous meeting to introduce themselves and give a brief outline of their organisations and roles:

Godfrey Baker – Somerset & Dorset Trust. Did not know what to expect. The Trust was a small group based at Washford since 1975. In earlier years the management of the railway used to visit regularly, however in recent years the Trust had felt distanced. Hopefully this was an opportunity to become involved again.

Cllr Jean Adkins – Taunton Deane District Council indicated that any decisions would need to be reported back to the Council for consent. As the Council was the Planning Authority for the Railway area up to Crowcombe Heathfield, there would be a need to be careful on what could be commented on. Conflicts of interest would be covered within the Governance Framework. A suggestion was made that members of the Group should undertake visits to the other Groups to widen their knowledge of the Railway activities. This was felt to be a good idea and it would be possible to put a programme together. This would be followed up.

SW/MH

Martyn Snell – Staff and Volunteers. Communication with the 1000+ staff and volunteers would be 'on-line'. In such a large workforce there was a wide divergence of views but Martyn would try to communicate as best he could. Two areas raised so far were uniform and tidiness.

Tim Stanger – Friends Groups. Tim had emailed out the minutes and terms of reference to the other Groups but had not received much response. The Groups did focus on their particular stations. He would feedback on each meeting on the potential impact on each site and allow the Groups to be involved at that point.

James Stubbs – Somerset County Council. James confirmed that the Governance arrangements had been referenced by the Leader of the Council who had a strong interest in the Railway and saw the PDG as the key route to engage with the West Somerset Railway.

2/15 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Thanks were expressed to Mel Hillman for producing the minutes.

It was noted that the wrong version of the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2015 had been circulated. A query against the final paragraph of Minute 2 was raised. John Irven commented that he had indicated that it was the view of SCC that the Group would be the vehicle for any future discussion of and consultation on, the Freehold. James Stubbs confirmed to the meeting that this was the case. Responsibility for this matter now lies with the Leader of the Council.

David Williams raised concerns about the Group discussing the freehold issue. The WSRA had made it very clear from the outset and had placed in writing (18 May 2014) this objection as it did not see the Group as the correct place for this to be discussed and/or agreed. John Irven indicated that SCC had written that it was their intention that this stakeholder group would be the forum in which they would expect consultation over the issue to be undertaken if required at any point in the future. This view was confirmed by James Stubbs on behalf of SCC and was supported by the majority of those present at the meeting.

With this amendment the minutes were APPROVED by a majority, with WSRA abstaining in line with the comments made by the Trustees that the Freehold should not be discussed by PDG.

3/15 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising that were not already on the agenda.

4/15 Terms of Reference

At the previous meeting all Groups had been asked to take the Terms of Reference back to their organisations for discussion and approval. Copies had also been sent to those Groups who had been unable to attend.

David Williams reported that the Trustees of the WSRA had indicated that as the Association was a significant land owner it had a different perspective on the position. Any proposals would need to be taken back to the Trustees. The Association would prefer any decisions to be made through consensus. David Williams could only represent the views of the Trustees who would prefer that the PDG did not discuss the Freehold. Steve Williams commented that although the Freehold would not

normally be under discussion, SCC could consult with the PDG in the future. David Williams replied that if there were to be any discussions over the Freehold, the Trustees would prefer that any meeting be chaired by SCC.

The question of a 75% majority threshold for making decisions by the Group had also been put to organisations. David Williams commented that the Trustees did not accept that the PDG could impose any spending proposals on the WSRA. Steve Williams assured him that PDG could not do this for any Group but would be making recommendations to each group including proposals for funding commitments where required. John Irven commented that the PDG cannot just be a 'talking shop' and that a mechanism for making decisions was necessary.

Steve Williams commented that as some Groups had not been able to attend the previous meeting when the 75% threshold had been agreed, it would be beneficial to take a new vote with all Groups represented at this meeting. The proposal was put to the meeting and AGREED by 9 votes to 1 (WSRA against). **The terms of reference were therefore adopted by PDG.**

5/15 Governance Framework

The Governance Framework had also been circulated and all Groups AGREED to them except from the WSRA in line with the comments made in the previous minute. The governance framework was therefore adopted by PDG.

6/15 Site Development Plan- Bishops Lydeard

Steve Williams reported that he had taken a paper to the November meeting of the PLC Board, highlighting the need for an overall development plan for the Bishops Lydeard site and not just Station Farm. The PLC Board had agreed to this proposition. It had been agreed that Steve Williams would chair the new Group to be established and that John Cronin be invited to join. It was confirmed that other Groups could make contributions. The first meeting would be held in February and Groups were asked to confirm with Steve Williams if they wished to be involved. New terms of reference and working brief would need to be agreed.

ALL

Cllr Jean Adkins commented that she would be very interested in joining but due to her appointment as TDBC's representative needing to be confirmed after the election in May 2015 might be unable to commit long term. John Irven commented that the PLC 10 Year Plan had been the result of consultations with some 70 stakeholder groups including the Railway 'Family' and Local Authorities. PDG supported the inclusion of TDBC Steve Williams undertook to update the Group on progress.

SW

Martyn Snell commented that the Bishops Lydeard site should be a 12 month attraction as the 'Gateway' to the Railway. The current situation did not compare favourably with other Heritage Railways.

John Cronin added that there was a need to produce a scoping document outlining the staged development. John Irven commented that

the Operational Executive Committee (OEC) had approved the partial capital expenditure for a cover to part of the loco compound. This would be taken to the January PLC Board meeting for consideration.

7/15 Taunton to Bishops Lydeard Link Group

Steve Williams reported that there had been work on-going over the past 12 – 15 months on a scoping document concerning links between Bishops Lydeard and Taunton. It was hoped to pull together the information for the first document by the end of January 2015. Discussions had been held with the District Councils, Bristol Metro Group and Steve Williams had also been accepted onto the Devon & Somerset Metro Group. These links helped access to the wider and strategic planning across the region. A meeting of the Group would be held early in February 2015.

David Williams asked that the WSRA be invited as the future use of the Norton Fitzwarren Triangle would be important. This was AGREED. The PLC Board had agreed to this proposal although with the caveat that Norton Fitzwarren would only be discussed in the context of its contribution to the Taunton to Bishops Lydeard Link. Chris Austin suggested that they should be a separate group established to look at the wider options in respect of future use of the Norton Fitzwarren site. It was agreed that the WSRA needed to look at how it wished to take these discussions forward as the lead organization.

SW

DW

Steve Williams reported that he had asked for a formal indication from SCC that the Link was being included in the SCC Integrated Transport Strategy. He asked James Stubbs if he would follow up on this as a view was required. A formal letter would be sent to the PLC [Steve Williams].

SW/JS

Cllr Jean Adkins commented on the future developments at Hinkley Point and the potential traffic disruption on the local road structure. The Railway could offer a vital access facility. Steve Williams replied that this was being considered in the scoping paper as was a potential commercial arrangement in conjunction with Butlins at Minehead.

8/15 Williton Site

This item was on the agenda at the request of the WSRA. John Irvn produced a coloured plan of the Williton site showing the various facilities and current users. This included WS Restorations (WSRA), DEPG and the Heritage Steam Trust. The DEPG occupied a 2 road shed in the south of the site together with a heritage centre in the old goods shed which was a listed building. The WSRA and Steam Trust occupied the Swindon Shed under a licence with the PLC. This was a listed building as part of the agreement to move the Shed from Swindon to Williton in 1994. It dates back to 1907. There were two carriages under restoration with another five stored in the Shearing's Yard at the back of the Shed.

David Williams commented that there was an urgent need to discuss the future use of the site as the licence was due to expire in May 2016 and sufficient notice would be required if the licence was not renewed. This was a very strategic decision and needed to be settled very quickly for continuance of provision. John Cronin supported the need to consider

the extension of the licence.

John Irven commented that approval from SCC was required for sub-leasing and there were on-going discussions between SCC and the PLC on wider sub-leasing arrangements and the ability to set up agreements with third parties. Overall there needed to be an agreement over the best use of the whole site. The station building was of Brunel design and there needed to be a balance between a Heritage Railway and a Tourist Attraction. Cllr Jean Adkins asked about the balance between the two aspects. John Irven replied that it was a delicate balance but confirmed that the agreement with SCC changes to services and site utilization. Cllr Karen Mills commented the Councils should not be involved in day to day railway issues.

John Cronin added that the original licence had been set up as part of the requirement to formalise Health & Safety issues on the site. He saw the provision of a dedicated paint shop as a high priority to improve the ongoing maintenance and appearance of rolling stock.

Chris Austin commented that all the aspects were interrelated as a lot of restoration work and storage took place at Williton. Any future bids for Heritage Lottery funding would be dependent on the tenure of the land.

In summing up the wide ranging discussion, Steve Williams identified the following actions;

- 1) The need for the PLC and WSRA to hold commercial discussions over a lease and/or licence. John Irven commented that this could not take place until confirmation over sub-leasing had been agreed with SCC. Discussions could continue in the meantime via the current Intermediaries Group.
- 2) The various strategies were not precursors to developments but may inform them. For example, it was felt that Engineering and Rolling Stock strategies needed to be included in the PLC 3 year Plan.
- 3) The need to re-form a Site Group as per at Bishops Lydeard. These Groups could become sub-groups of PDG.
- 4) Steve Williams agreed to draw up a brief proposition paper and circulate as a basis for moving forward. He would require project plans and a timetable as part of these proposals.

SW

9/15 Inward Investment

Tim Stanger was thanked for producing a discussion paper on possible sources of inward investment for the Railway which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Tim said there would be a need to raise considerable income from a variety of sources to fund the various ideas and suggestions being raised during discussions. Overall the Railway had been very poor at securing external funding.

During discussions it was accepted that there needed to be agreement on how external investment could be co-ordinated. Steve Williams commented that the PLC Board was looking to appoint a Director with

this responsibility. It would be very important not to duplicate submissions. It was noted that the District Council websites had links to possible external funding sources and the Councils did have expertise which may be tapped into. John Irven agreed to pass on data to Cllr Jean Adkins for her to investigate and report back.

J/JA

This item would require further discussion by PDG in relation to specific projects as they emerged. Steve Williams said that there would be more work done on this by the PLC as part of the three-year business plan.

10/15 Plc 3-Year Plan

Steve Williams reported that work on the 3 year Plan was about to start subject to PLC Board approval. Years 1 and 2 would be populated with an outline sketch for Year 3. He would be inviting formal comments through these minutes and would bring back comments for sign off.

SW/MH

11/15 AOB

- 1) Cllr Jean Adkins asked if the Norton Fitzwarren Triangle would be considered as part of the Taunton/Bishops Lydeard link. Steve Williams referred back to the discussion earlier in the meeting and the status of Norton Fitzwarren in relation to the working group proposals. It was known that the Highways Section had objected to increased use due to road access issues. It was not clear whether proposed housing would take place due to changes to flood plain regulations. Cllr Adkins undertook to check of the position.

JA

David Williams commented that there should be no piecemeal approach to developments. Cllr Jean Adkins added that there needed to be a master plan so that everyone knew exactly what was wanted. This would be for the WSRA to initiate in line with the previous discussion. John Irven commented that planning for the PLC was based on a needs, wants and wishes basis so items could be prioritised. There was a need to become much cleverer in agreeing developments.

- 2) John Cronin produced a list of small items which if dealt with could improve some aspects of the Railway very quickly. This included improvements to the Commercial Office at Minehead and improving pedestrian control at the road crossing outside Minehead station. PDG were asked to consider possible schemes in relation to the PLC three year plan and their own organization plans.
- 3) Steve Williams urged all Groups to submit future agenda items to him.

ALL

12/15 Future Meetings

The next meeting was agreed as:

14.00 on Monday 9 March 2015. Venue to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 16.25