

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnership Development Group
held from 14.00 on Thursday 20 August 2015 in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard

Present:

Steve Williams (Chairman)	West Somerset Railway PLC
Peter Chidzey	Chairman WSRA
Chris Austin	West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
Cllr Brian Leaker	West Somerset Council
Cllr Jean Adkins	Taunton Deane District Council
Tim Stanger	Friends of Stations Group and FOWSR
James Stubbs	Somerset County Council
Godfrey Baker	Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust
John Cronin	Diesel & Electric Preservation Group

In attendance:

Mel Hillman	Administrator
-------------	---------------

Apologies: were received from Martyn Snell (Employees and Volunteers)

Minute		Action
46/15	Welcome	

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked members for agreeing to the later starting time for the meeting.

47/15 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 25 June 2015 were APPROVED.

48/15 Matters Arising (items not on the agenda)

- i) Minute 35/15 (i) Cllr Jean Adkins reported that there was no further information about the Norton Fitzwarren flood plain area or plans.
- ii) Minute 35/15(ii) Washford Site. Discussions were continuing.
- iii) Minute 35/15(iv) It was confirmed that Geoff Evens had been appointed as the Plc Director for PR & Communications and that he would be looking at issues around submission of material for the WSRA Journal. In response to the question of SEPT not being able to obtain information about the costs of events, Finance Director Chris Bolt was due to attend a meeting of SEPT later in the day to address this point.
- iv) Minute 36/15 It was noted that Chris Bolt was leading a wider brief of discussions around the commercial negotiations with the Plc including the Friends Groups.
- v) Minute 37/15 Heritage & Preservation Group. It was confirmed that Mark Smith would be taking this forward.
- vi) Minute 38/15 Chris Austin reported that Network Rail had followed up on progress of the installation of the water tower at Bishops Lydeard.

This was part of a general audit on donated items.

- vii) Policies. Steve Williams reported that he had not received any comments on the two policies and took this as assent by all Groups. Peter Chidzey commented that the matter would be discussed at the next Trustees' Meeting on 24 August. He would inform Steve Williams who, in turn, would inform the Plc Policy Committee.
- viii) Minute 44/15(ii) Steve Williams confirmed that he had taken the request over advertising on trains to the Plc Board and awaited a response.
- ix) Minute 44/15(iv) It was also noted that staffing levels in the Minehead Commercial Office had improved and that other issues were being worked through.
- x) Minute 44/15(iii) Tim Stanger asked if the Loco Policy was yet available for distribution. Steve Williams replied that the CME was working on it.
- xi) Minute 44/15(iv) The draft Terms of Reference for SEPT would be discussed at the SEPT meeting later in the day.

PC/SW

49/15 Heritage & Preservation Group

Steve Williams reported that the draft Terms of Reference had been circulated and that the Group would be a Sub-Group of PDG.

Chris Austin raised a concern over the suggestion that all buildings should be regarded as Grade 2 listed in the Artefacts Register, even if they were not. There could be a danger that unsuitable later structures could be included and then be difficult to remove. There needed to be a principles and philosophy paper to address such matters from the outset taking on board the views of the relevant experts. Steve Williams commented that the Terms of Reference had not been too specific and it would be up to the Group to define its work and how it interpreted the Terms of Reference.

Chris Austin also indicated that it would be difficult in many cases to use only traditional materials and tools. This would be impossible in small workshops and the Railway could not replicate Swindon Works. There would be a need to change the Terms of Reference to state that traditional materials and methods would be used 'where possible and practical.....'

Steve Williams confirmed that Chapter 14 of the PLC Corporate Plan cover Heritage aspects. Peter Chidzey asked 'what is heritage and what would be heritage in the future?' Steve Williams replied that there was no intended time scale.

In response to a question from Chris Austin, Steve Williams confirmed that the Group would have delegated authority from the Plc and PDG.

In response to further questions, it was confirmed that the membership of the Group would be at the invitation of the Chairman of the Group but this would also be undertaken in consultation with core members of the Group.

Cllr Brian Leaker raised concerns about the methodology to be used in identifying which items would be listed in the Artefacts Register. Steve Williams agreed to pass on these concerns to Mark Smith. **SW**

Godfrey Baker queried the use of 'GWR' items in the Terms of Reference and asked what the situation would be for the Somerset & Dorset items. Steve Williams replied that he thought that any existing stock would be included but new acquisitions may need approval. He agreed to pass the comments onto Mark Smith. **SW**

The PDG agreed to ask Mark Smith to proceed with the Group. All members were asked to take the Terms of Reference back to their member groups for information. **SW**
ALL

50/15 Bishops Lydeard Site Development Plans

It was noted that reasonable progress was being made in developing a core brief. Discussions had been held with the Plc, WSRA and the Steam Trust.

Chris Austin added that a meeting with local residents was due. Planning work with Ric Auger had continued but there was nothing ready to circulate at this point.

Peter Chidzey confirmed that the WSRA Trustees would discuss the matter on 24 August 2015.

It was intended that the master site plan would be 'chunked' into phases and a chronology of development and management agreed. This would identify the options and approaches which could be used to apply for inward investment. There would be a process of soft consultations with external bodies such as the Parish Council, Station Green residents and the District Council. There would be a presentation to the Parish Council on 9 September. A Parish Councillor would be appointed to the Group and a meeting with the residents would be arranged.

There had been two discussions with Taunton Deane Borough Council arranged through Cllr Jean Adkins. These discussions had covered the play area and the role of the Railway in the local economic structure as well as the site issues such as car parking and toilets.

At a recent meeting of the Parish Council, a planning application from Taylor-Wimpey for 15 additional houses had been rejected although the final decision lay with the District Council. Taylor-Wimpey had also indicated ongoing issues around proceeding with enabling works and the calming works with the main road junction including the proposed roundabout. Steve Williams indicated that the Plc could not agree with the implementation plan as it would impact on access to Bishops Lydeard during the core running period.

Tim Stanger commented that additional car parking needed to be provided and asked if any area had been identified. Steve Williams agreed to forward this as an agenda item for the next meeting of the Site Group. **SW**

Tim Stanger also queried the provision of a long obtrusive footbridge to link the various areas of the station site if all the proposals were undertaken. This would impact on the heritage aspects. Would it be possible to consider a pedestrian subway? This would be forwarded to the Group for discussion.

SW

Tim Stanger also queried the current position for the unloading of coaches. Steve Williams agreed that this needed to be included in the access management proposals. John Cronin added that the whole question of the car parks/station approach and toilets needed to be addressed urgently. Steve Williams assured him that this was in Phase 1 of the Plan. Cllr Jean Adkins commented that it would be necessary to ascertain the future plans for Station House and Derby's field as part of the plans and whether planning consent would be required from Taunton Deane Borough Council.

SW

John Cronin added that consideration should be given to raising income from car parking at Bishops Lydeard. This was the case at most, if not all, other heritage railways. Steve Williams added that there would be a need to attract inward investment and additional income would be required.

Cllr Brian Leaker added that the Government had made an announcement earlier in the day of the need to provide more housing on green field sites and also to utilise railway lines to help promote economic growth. There might be some potential to release current land to raise capital. Steve Williams stated that this was part of the assessment process and the need to maximise opportunities.

Chris Austin commented that in any plans to dispose of the current volunteer accommodation at Bishops Lydeard, consideration should be given to rescuing the coach as part of the heritage provision. Steve Williams would follow up on this.

SW

51/15 Plc 3-Year Business Plan

Steve Williams stated that the Plan would be finalised in the next week and would be circulated.

SW

52/15 PLC Corporate Plan

The Plan had been circulated prior to the meeting and was NOTED.

53/15 Meeting – Minehead Chamber of Commerce

Steve Williams reported that a meeting had been held in Minehead with local businesses, West Somerset Council and the Plc over suggestions to develop an open dialogue over regular scheduled train services between Minehead and Taunton. The Plc had indicated that as a heritage railway there would not be the resources to provide such a service.

Questions were asked on the possible Bishops Lydeard/Taunton link. Steve Williams confirmed that the Taunton Link Group would be returning to this proposal in the autumn and was committed to producing a scoping paper for the Plc and SCC to provide the basis for inward investment. The proposals of the Devon Metro Group would need to be included in the discussions and a pilot feasibility plan produced.

James Stubbs commented that there had been proposals to provide a foot/cycle path alongside the Railway between Taunton and Minehead. Steve Williams replied that the Link Group had identified that there was sufficient room for both between Taunton and Bishops Lydeard but not onto Minehead. James Stubbs agreed to feed back any further proposals.

JS

John Cronin added that the Railway was losing revenue by not providing a 365 day service over parts of the line.

54/15 Williton Site Development Group

It was reported that an initial meeting had been held and useful ideas put forward. Steve Williams confirmed that the Plc view was being produced and all ideas would be presented to the next meeting.

John Cronin commented that Williton Station was the only existing Brunel designed building left and that the Railway ought to be using this connection to attract inward investment which had proved very successful for the SS Great Britain site in Bristol.

Peter Chidzey added that there were exciting developments, provided genuine cooperation could be achieved.

55/15 Commercial Services User Group

Steve Williams reported that there had been an initial meeting at Bishops Lydeard on 6 August and the notes had been circulated prior to the meeting.

It was noted that the lease on Brunel House expired in March 2017 and Peter Chidzey confirmed that discussions with the owner had indicated that there would be no possibility of an extension. Alternative arrangements were under review.

In the short-term plans to provide a canopy over the ramp area to the booking office at Bishops Lydeard were being produced.

56/15 On-train Advertising

Cllr Brian Leaker commented that the Railway was missing a marketing opportunity for discrete on-train advertising on up to 10 trains a day. He accepted that there were heritage considerations. Likewise there could be opportunities for advertising on stations. The possibility of sponsorship on the back of car parking tickets could be explored.

Cllr Leaker also commented that there was considerable support for the Railway in the local area and the local accommodation providers could be willing to display Railway related leaflets/material. There could also be the possibility of discounts for volunteers when staying in the area.

It was agreed that these ideas should be fed in the Commercial discussions and Cllr Leaker offered to make a presentation. **SW/BL**

57/15 SCC – Leasehold Update

James Stubbs reported that the County Council Asset Management Group had considered the comments from PDG over the lease. The Leader of the Council and the new Portfolio Holder, Cllr Harvey Siggs, had been briefed. There would be ongoing discussions with the Plc over the lease.

58/15 Rotating Chairman

Steve Williams reminded the meeting that the PDG Terms of Reference required an annual rotating Chair for the Group. The first year ended on 1 October 2015 and a new Chairman would need to be elected at the next meeting. He asked for suggestions on how this should be conducted as it was felt that although the Plc had provided the initial Chair, PDG should not be seen as being run or controlled by the Plc. It was important that PDG was seen by all as a multi-organisational Group.

After a lengthy discussion when none of those present felt able to take on the role, the Administrator pointed out that the the Terms of Reference stated 'annual/biannual' rotation. It was agreed that Steve Williams be asked to continue for a second year but at the next meeting there would be a discussion on the election of a Vice-Chair to provide succession planning. Steve Williams accepted but commented that if any member had concerns about improper influence of the Plc he/she should make those concerns known to him. Peter Chidzey commented that he had a few such concerns. It was agreed that he and Steve Williams would meet outside of the meeting to discuss this. **MH**

Members were asked to explain the mechanics of the process within their Groups. **SW/PC**

59/15 AOB

Tim Stanger commented that he had picked up concerns across the Railway over the changes to the 10 year Long Service Awards eligibility. Although this was a Plc matter, there had been no consultation with the other Groups and did impact on volunteers across the Railway Family. There seemed to be no mechanism for such consultation and Tim felt that PDG might have such a role. He accepted this was probably a commercial decision but many volunteers had been upset at the lack of consultation and communication. **ALL**

It was accepted that a review had been undertaken by David Baker, Vice-Chairman of the Plc, but concerns remained. John Cronin commented that this issue reflected the distancing of the Plc senior management from the various strands of the Railway in recent years and **SW**

consideration should be given to reinstating this on a regular basis. Steve Williams would feedback to the PLC. Steve Williams replied that responsibility lay with the Plc Remuneration Committee but he would speak to David Baker. There was a feeling that this issue did not have exclusive ownership by the Plc.

SW

A comment was made that considerable damage had already been done to volunteer morale.

60/15 Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting would be held from:

11.00 on Thursday 15 October 2015 in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard.

The meeting closed at 16.00