

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY
PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the PDG held on-line via Zoom software
from 1.30pm on Wednesday 24 February 2021

Present: Steve Williams, West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust (Chair)
Justin Kerr-Peterson, West Somerset Railway Plc
Mike Sherwood, West Somerset Railway Association
Cllr David Hall, Somerset County Council
Ian Young, Somerset and Dorset Trust
John Parsons, Station Masters Representative
Richard Newton, Friends Groups Representative
Martin Adfield, Staff Representative

In attendance: Mel Hillman, PDG Administrator

Apologies: There were no apologies.

Minute

**Action
by**

1. Introduction

Steve Williams explained that there would be a change to the planned agenda and that Mike Thompson would not be joining the meeting. He had been involved in an internal seminar held by the Plc Board earlier in the day. This had discussed current issues, including the suggested Charity Led Organisation. The next version would be brought to PDG and it may be necessary to hold a special meeting to discuss it.

SW

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2020 were AGREED.

3. Matters Arising (not on the agenda)

- i) Minute 3(v) Volunteer recruitment. Richard Newton confirmed that he had spoken with Clive Hardy at the Swanage Railway but had not heard anymore.
- ii) Minute 4 Governance Framework. Steve Williams confirmed that the amendment had been made and he would circulate the revised version.
- iii) Minute 5 Volunteer Recruitment Proposals. Mike Sherwood reported that circumstances had changed since the presentation by Diana Ricketts-Tanner at the previous meeting. Responsibility had been handed back to the Plc although a Volunteer Team was still in place to move plans forward. A new voluntary Volunteer Manager post had been advertised. Steve Williams reported that there had been some expressions of interests. The closing date was 8 April 2021.

SW

4. Williton Strategy Paper

A briefing paper had been circulated prior to the meeting. Mike Sherwood explained that whilst consideration was being given to the repairs to the Goods Shed, it had been considered prudent to look at the whole Williton site. Discussions had been held with all interested parties so far. The Group were indebted to Chris Austin for his research into the listed building status on the site. It had been confirmed that more buildings than previously known had various listings. In answer to questions, it was confirmed the likely timescale for action would be around two years. The remedial work on the Goods Shed was more urgent. The plans for its future use would be included in the ongoing overall plans. These would be presented to forthcoming Boards meetings of the Plc, Association and Heritage Trust.

Steve Williams added that the planning process had changed with the amalgamation of Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils. Pre-discussions with officers were no longer permitted. Pre-planning drawings needed to be submitted and a fee paid before any discussion with the planning office.

The Group was gaining momentum with integrated planning towards a framework for approval. An option appraisal would be completed on the future use of the Goods Shed. It would require stabilisation and a structural survey was in hand. A report would be presented to the Plc and a future PDG meeting on the scope and scale of the work required to bring the building to an acceptable condition. This would include costs.

SW

5. New Charity Proposals

The charity led organisation work next stage work will be a PLC Board seminar to understand the work to date and to determine next steps including engagement with stakeholders. The group was due to report to the Plc, Association and Heritage Trust Boards in about 6 weeks' time. These discussions would include what a new charity could look like and its relationship to the Plc. There was more work to be completed before being presented to PDG. It was accepted that the pace of work needed to be accelerated as it was intended the proposals would be ready to be discussed at the forthcoming round of AGMs across the various organisations.

Mike Sherwood added that there had been a sense of support from members of various organisations and others within the 'Railway Family'. Steve Williams commented that a lot of high-quality work had already taken place by the group. It would be a significant body of work with clear recommendations. The final consultation process still needed to be clarified. In answer to a question from Martin Adfield about the overall timetable, Steve Williams indicated that this would emerge once the various AGMs had been held and comments received.

6. Provision of Covered Accommodation

A briefing paper had been circulated prior to the meeting. Concerns had been raised about the lack of effective covered accommodation for rolling stock on the Railway. The Association had a small amount (£35,000) to donate towards the overall costs. A small group had been formed to investigate the needs and formulate proposals. The Terms of Reference had been agreed, based on a paper produced by the Association. There would be a further meeting within the next week where option appraisals would be discussed. Steve Williams asked if any organisation wished to have an input, they should contact him.

ALL

Mike Sherwood indicated that this project would be the key fund-raising plank for the coming year.

7. Railway Re-opening

Justin Kerr-Petersen reported that this had been discussed in detail by the Plc Board earlier in the day.

It seemed likely that the earliest date would be 17 May 2021 with pre-booked trains on the BL – Williton section.

Work was progressing on the Seaward Lane level crossing at Minehead and a completion date in June was being planned for. This would help provide a through, but social distanced, service. This was a complex project with new requirements for managing use of the crossing.

It was also confirmed that many other projects were ongoing during the same time scale.

Martin Adfield asked about the update of volunteer qualifications and whether online solutions would be available. Justin confirmed that anyone 'out of ticket' could not be used and the rostering through HOPS would control this. Steve Williams added that competency renewal was part of the Charity Heritage Funding. Justin also added that it would be necessary to build up a team of available and qualified staff to be able to run trains. There would be no Spring Gala this year. There would be no promises, but Galas later in the year may be possible.

Mike Sherwood commented that he had recently completed his PTS renewal course online and it had worked well. Justin added that other subjects were being considered for online presentation but there would always be a balance of courses offered.

8. CHRF 1 Update and CHRF 2 Application Paper

A briefing paper had been circulated prior to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the initial funding awarded (just under £865,000) was being overseen by a Programme Board. There were some 40/50 projects underway along the Railway including signalling

and other technology items. It was probably the biggest ever infrastructure work ever undertaken by the Railway. It would need to be completed by the end of March 2021 under the terms of the funding agreement. All the stops were being pulled out by to achieve this. Steve Williams thanked all the members of staff involved for their commitment to the work. Hopefully, everything would be signed off by the ORR ready for the new season.

Two further grants had been applied for with a closing date of 31 March 2021. These were for £432,000 and if approved, a programme of works was in place for a prompt start.

10. Review of Plc Infrastructure Engineering Configuration

Steve Williams gave a verbal update on this item. The Plc Board had signed off the Infrastructure Capital Programme having shared it with the Association Board who had agreed to help with fund raising. There would be ongoing discussions to help identify the configuration needs into the future so that items can be renewed and enhanced for the levels of materials and equipment required.

There would need to be further work to identify how this work can link to other projects eg Williton Site. No timescale had been identified but engagement would be made with other organisations. It was hoped this would be within the next three to four weeks.

Martin Adfield asked if volunteers would be involved in this work. Steve Williams indicated that with the current restrictions, it would likely need to be contractor-based work. If the plans are ready by 17 May 2021, it might be possible to allow volunteers back to be deployed in crucial areas. Discussions still needed to be had over this and individual safety concerns would be paramount. In answer to a further question from Martin about the possibility of extending timescales, Steve indicated that it was unlikely the grant funding deadlines would be extended. There was still much more work to be undertaken.

11. Any Other Business

- i) Richard Newton raised some concerns about the reputational issue at Minehead Station after the removal of the canopy outside the Turntable Café. The café was now being considered an eyesore. The Friends of Minehead Station had done all it could to date. The issue required further consideration. Justin Kerr-Petersen assured Richard that the matter was on the 'radar' of the Plc Board. It was agreed this would be an agenda item for the next meeting.
- ii) Justin Kerr-Petersen assured Cllr David Hall that the work at the Seaward Way crossing was progressing satisfactorily with all parties working in a co-operative manner. What was out of the control of the WSR was the statutory two-month consultation period with the local community required by ORR. It was hoped this would start shortly to be completed by the end of May so that the final project could proceed.

JKP/MHI

10. Date and Time of Next Meeting

With the need to link the timing of future meetings with the Project Group meetings to be able to discuss progress, it was AGREED that Steve Williams and Mike Thompson would liaise and future proposed dates be circulated.

SW/MT

The meeting closed at 2.30pm