

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY
PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the PDG held on-line via Zoom software
from 2pm on Friday 26 June 2020.

Present: Steve Williams, West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
Justin Kerr-Peterson, West Somerset Railway Plc
Mike Sherwood, West Somerset Railway Association
Martin Howard, Diesel and Electric Preservation Group
Ian Young, Somerset and Dorset Trust
John Parsons, Station Masters Representative
Richard Newton, Friends Groups Representative
Cllr Mike Rigby, West Somerset and Taunton Council

In attendance: Mel Hillman, PDG Administrator

Apologies: Cllr David Hall, Somerset County Council

Minute

Action by

1. Governance Framework

Steve Williams confirmed that a draft Governance Framework had been sent to everyone prior to the meeting and asked if anyone had any comments. There were none and the Framework was adopted unanimously.

Steve Williams indicated that a Chairman needed to be elected. Mike Sherwood suggested that in the longer term, someone independent should be sought to Chair the Group after one or two meetings. In the short term, he nominated Steve Williams. This was seconded by Ian Young and agreed. Thought would be given to a suitable independent person for the longer term.

Mike Sherwood offered to become Vice-Chairman, and this was unanimously agreed.

Steve Williams indicated that members would need to declare conflicts of interests at each meeting and confirmed he was a Trustee of the West Somerset Steam Railway Trust and a Director of the West Somerset Railway Plc. He would need to decouple himself at times. His substantive position was the Steam Trust representative and Justin Kerr-Peterson would be the PLC representative. There may be instances of confidential items which he will not be able to comment on. This was acknowledged.

Steve Williams said that it had been recommended that there be separate representatives from station masters and Friends Groups. John Parsons was representing the station masters and Richard Newton, the Friends Groups. There was still a need to find a staff representative. After a short discussion it was agreed that this should be a rolling representation to spread out the ideas and input. Justin Kerr-Peterson agreed to deal with this using the HOPS system to ask for expressions of interest.

JK-P

2. Terms of Reference

Steve Williams had circulated a draft set prior to the meeting. These were adopted unanimously.

3. Local Authority Perspective

Cllr Mike Rigby was welcomed to the Group and explained that after several years as a County Councillor he was now a District Councillor for the area which included Bishops Lydeard. He held the planning and transport portfolio for the West Somerset and Taunton Council. He tried to remain close to matters on the WSR and the positive impact it had on the local community. It was important as it was still the second largest tourist attraction in Somerset by visitor numbers.

He wanted to see the WSR survive and prosper and could help. He needed to get a proper handle on the actual worth per annum to the local economy. He had seen figures for the benefit of two cycle tracks and felt that the worth to the economy of the WSR could be in excess of £20m. Justin Kerr-Peterson replied that the last known valuation was £8m although an up to date figure was being sought. This would be key intelligence and a major aid to fund-raising. It was agreed to suggest a survey to update to the figure. Steve Williams agreed to draft a tight specification and framework for such a survey.

SW

Cllr Rigby added that the WSR was also an important part of the local transport provision. These were difficult times, but he would like to help the WSR get through them and flourish. He and a colleague had been holding fortnightly meetings with the Chairman of the Plc to discuss matters. The Council had been helping all sorts of organisations through COVID19 and had distributed £40m. This would continue as part of the recovery plans and could include the WSR.

Steve Williams added that the Group welcomed the support of the Council and to be able to work together to achieve what's possible.

4. Re-Opening the WSR

Justin Kerr-Petersen reminded the meeting that the railway had effectively been closed since January 2020. There were ongoing issues around maintaining competencies, medical inspections, number of turns.

There would be a phased re-introduction, and it was unlikely the full Bishops Lydeard to Minehead service would open for some time. Consideration was being given to some activities within the station confines at Minehead but this was still being firmed up. He felt that a full service was unlikely until 2021 but this was being kept under review.

He also noted that revenue generating ballast trains had started to

use the Norton area.

Mike Sherwood suggested a Bishops Lydeard – Norton- Williton service might be possible. Justin replied that only Minehead was under consideration due to the wide platforms. Large crowds on the Bishops Lydeard platforms would be problematic. It was noted that certain conditions would need to be met. It was hoped that an announcement could be made soon.

Richard Newton added that the stations' Friends Groups needed to be involved in discussions in order to be aware of plans in the lead up time to any re-opening. He was not sure the current lines of communication were joined-up.

5. Minehead Business Development District (BID)

Steve Williams gave brief details of this new project in the Minehead area. A Project Manager had been appointed. This could benefit the WSR and Steve Williams had joined in his Plc Director role with his partnerships responsibilities.

He had attended a positive meeting which had been keen to support the WSR. It was a small step towards trying to pull all the strands together. Steve Williams would feedback on developments.

SW

6. Williton Goods Shed

Martin Howard from DEPG had been delayed by traffic. John Parsons reported that there were concerns about the condition of the roof of the goods shed. Tiles were blowing off and it had been considered too dangerous to pass trains through station. Justin Kerr-Petersen commented that there was a need to sort out the lease conditions. Steve Williams offered to tease out the issues and possible dedicated fund-raising with Martin.

NB – Martin Howard did arrive later in the meeting and explained the situation. The DEPG required access to specialist advice and skills. The goods shed was a listed building and any repairs required would need this to be considered. It was agreed that Martin and Steve Williams would discuss this outside of the meeting.

SW/MHo

7. Gauge Museum

Steve Williams updated the meeting on developments to the Gauge Museum at Bishops Lydeard. The Steam Trust had taken over management of the museum and successfully applied for a £40,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Trust had also committed £20,000 towards the scheme. The Trust wished to obtain Accreditation for the museum and had worked with an external consultant. There needed to be some modifications. Trust volunteers had completed some internal work but this had halted due to the COVID19. An official re-opening had been planned for 11 April 2020 but needed to be postponed.

The Heritage Lottery Fund had been consulted over the delay and had indicated satisfaction with the delays and new plans.

8. New Volunteer Recruitment Group

It was reported that a new cross-railway Group had been established to oversee new volunteer recruitment. The Group was chaired by Diana Ricketts-Tanner from the WSRA.

The Group had reviewed and update 53 profiles under a common template. These covered all aspects of the WSR. Work was underway on a proper induction process in preparation for re-opening. The Group had made good progress. Prior to furlough, Catherine Dance, Project Worker with the WSRA, had assisted in the work.

Mel Hillman, as a previous New Volunteer Co-ordinator, added a private view that unless Head of Departments were fully agreed with the proposals, it could be difficult to place new volunteers. He had experienced blocks in several departments over the years. It was accepted that there had been some cultural issues in the past.

Richard Newton raised the issue of succession planning for volunteers and asked that this be included as part of the process. He had a contact on the Swanage Railway which was investigating this issue. He would make enquiries. It was agreed to place this feedback on the next agenda.

RN/SW

SW

It was agreed to invite Diana Ricketts-Tanner to a future meeting.

9. What do we want PDG to achieve?

Steve Williams asked for comments and what the Group wished to achieve within its Governance Framework and Terms of Reference.

Justin Kerr-Petersen asked that with the recent internal strife, that people kept talking positively with each other. It would be best to talk and deal with thing internally. Mike Sherwood added that the known conflicts did not help and could impact on fund-raising efforts. There was a need to avoid conflicts and be more out-ward looking and become more a part of the local community. Ian Young felt that communications were important so that 'there were no surprises'. From previous management experience, he had always been asked to present a possible solution to any problem raised with a superior. There was a need for a 'can do' approach.

(Justin Kerr-Petersen left at this point to attend another meeting).

10. PR & Communications

It was accepted that a mature, open and professional approach was required from all Groups. There was a need for an agreement on internal communication channels and then external websites.

A question was raised about the circulation of the minutes of these

meetings. Once agreed, and subject to the removal of any commercially confidential or personal information, the Minutes would be published on the normal WSR websites and other social media platforms.

11. Any Other Business

- a) **Fund Raising Group.** The new Fund-raising Group had met earlier in the week and an update report had been circulated to members of PDG earlier in the day. The fund-raising would run parallel to any fund-raising for COVID19 issues. The Group was being led by Robin White. There was a core membership but offers were being invited from others who could help. The Williton goods shed could be added to the list of requirements. Mike Sherwood added that, in his opinion, the WSR would require a minimum charitable investment of at least £1m per annum for at least 10 years. Inflation may make that sum even higher. It was agreed to return to this issue in future meetings.

SW

12. Date of Next Meeting

In line with the Terms of Reference, it was agreed that meetings should be held at least quarterly. The next meeting would be held in September 2020. The Administrator would seek availability from members.

MHi

The meeting closed at 3.10pm