

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnership Development Group
held from 10.00 on Monday 29 January 2018
in the Meeting Room at Bishops Lydeard Station

Present:

Paul Whitehouse (Chairman)	West Somerset Railway Association
Chris Austin	West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
Ian Coleby	West Somerset Railway Plc
Martin Howard	DEPG
Ryan Pope	Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust
Martin Adfield	West Somerset Railway Staff
Cllr David Hall	Somerset County Council
Cllr Clare Paul	Somerset County Council

In attendance:

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

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr Robert Habgood	Taunton Deane Borough Council
Cllr Andrew Hadley	West Somerset Council

Minute

01/18 Welcome to New Members

Action

There had been considerable changes to the membership of the committee since the last meeting. Introductions were made. Cllr David Hall introduced Cllr Clare Paul who would deputise for him from time to time.

It was noted that there was still a vacancy for a representative of the 'Friends' Groups.

At the request of members, the Chairman gave a short update on events since the previous meeting held on 30 March 2017. This included the highly successful visit of Flying Scotsman in September 2017.

02/18 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 March 2017 were APPROVED.

There were no matters arising as events had moved on and other matters would be covered within the agenda items.

03/18 Changed Plans for Bishops Lydeard Site

Ian Coleby gave a summary of the changed plans for the Bishops Lydeard site.

The previous plans (Southern Gateway) had included plans which had not found favour with many. These included the long footbridge, multi-storey car park and a longer platform which would have impacted on existing buildings.

It had been decided to re-start the process and include plans for the Norton Fitzwarren site in any future developments.

Chris Austin reported that since the last meeting, the Steam Trust had submitted a bid to the HLF for the Gauge Museum. This had been rejected but the Trust had received positive feedback and would be resubmitting a refreshed bid in February which had been scaled down. This had the same principles of updating displays and funding an Education Officer to develop school visits and other educational activities.

Ian Coleby was asked how the process would move forward. He indicated that this was still to be decided but the previous consultation had not been very wide. The plans had been too grand and expensive.

Paul Whitehouse suggested that the Norton item due later in the meeting, should be included in this discussion. He confirmed that the WSRA owned the land but the Trustees were very clear that they wanted to work with the Plc and other groups to consider developments there. An approach had been received from the Taunton Miniature Railway Group which had lost two other sites in Somerset to be able to utilise part of the site. This was still under consideration.

A further contact had been received via the Heritage Rail Association from Network Rail over the possible acquisition of a 7 road Carriage Shed now redundant at Peterborough. Discussions were proceeding slowly but it would be possible to fit a 4 or 5 road shed on the Norton site in the space currently used for the static engines during the annual Steam Rally. There would need to be a planning application, and the fact that this was on a flood plain would need to be addressed in the plan. This would allow winter storage of wooden carriages and other vulnerable items. There were also suggestions that Norton might become a terminus/interchange to improve parking issues at Bishops Lydeard.

Ian Coleby added that the Plc Board was looking at lots of suggestions and would be re-writing the Plc Business Plan which would incorporate those suggestions. The draft would be available in February 2018 and would be presented to the Stakeholder Meeting due on 24 February 2018. The final agreed version would be presented to the AGM in June 2018. Questions were asked over funding for these projects. As removal of the carriage shed from Peterborough would be beneficial for Network Rail's plans, there could be the opportunity to bid against the Railway Heritage Trust as well as HLF and other funding agencies. It was thought that re-erection of the building could be undertaken by known contacts and other volunteers.

Further questions were asked about the former proposals for a viewing shed at Bishops Lydeard. It was clarified that this was at an embryonic stage and not everything could be done at once.

Ian Coleby outlined the WSSRT concept of *a string of pearls*, where each location along the line had a unique attraction for visitors in its own right. It was important to try to make the most of all the assets along the line.

Questions were asked about rumours about a commercial company which serviced steam engines relocating to the West Country. Paul Whitehouse replied that there had been an approach but it had not progressed.

In moving forward, it was agreed that there was a need for further detailed consultations. It was agreed that the matter would be discussed at the next PDG meeting following the PLC Stakeholders Meeting on 24th February 2018.

PW/MHi

04/18 Williton Site Update

It was noted that developments on this restricted site would need to involve a variety of organisations including WSRA, Plc, Steam Trust, DEPG and others. There was a need to talk and take on board the wide variety of views so that everyone would gain benefit from the plans.

It was suggested that matters wait until the outcome of the revised Plc Business Plan.

05/18 Norton Site

This item had been covered under item 03/18.

06/18 Heritage Committee

Ian Coleby commented that he had been elected Chairman of the Committee in his absence and although dedicated to heritage matters, he could not continue this role since becoming Chairman of the Plc Board.

It was vital that the Heritage Committee was reformed and reconvened. Ian Coleby had had an exchange of emails with Chris Austin over the Trust taking on the Chairmanship of the reformed committee due to its experience in this field. It would also boost the credibility of the Trust. Chris Austin added that the suggestions were being considered in principle and agreed that the Trust could take a leadership role but should not be the sole arbiter of heritage matters. This should involve all aspects of the railway engaging 'hearts and minds'. Infrastructure aspects needed to take heritage considerations on board eg colour of doors, roof profiles and the level of restoration.

It was agreed that Chris Austin would make a start on the process and raise awareness of the 'one railway' approach. A Heritage Strategy would be produced for PDG to be considered at the next meeting. It was noted that there might be some costs for advice from specialists.

CA

Paul Whitehouse added that the charitable focus of the WSRA could provide the balance of funding between a basic restoration and one to a heritage level. There were already discussions between the Association

and Plc.

07/18 Minehead Rail Link Group

This had been included on the agenda to try to ascertain the current position. It was known that the Minehead Chamber of Commerce had dropped the idea of a commuter service to Taunton. The Minehead Railway Link Group remained active.

Martin Adfield mentioned the Department of Transport documents outlining proposals to consider re-opening former lines. Would there be support if others submitted an expression of interest?

The question was asked as to what the WSR would want. There would be major investment needed to upgrade the line to allow 45mph running for commuter trains, which would need to be operated run by paid staff. This would impact on the heritage nature of the WSR with its large volunteer staff base.

Chris Austin stated that he had been in discussions with Network Rail over a shuttle service between Bishops Lydeard and Taunton. This would be a modest seasonal service using the current facilities to connect with steam trains at Bishops Lydeard. This would not require upgrades to infrastructure or staffing and would relieve seasonal pressure if visitors could travel out from Taunton. The service could be run by Great Western with a possible starting date in 2019/2020. It was noted that funds could be available from the Department of Transport for developing such services but this could lead to greater regulation over the use of the funds and could affect WSRs freedom to manage its own railway. Other points noted could be greater use of Bishops Lydeard car park as a park and ride facility for commuters travelling into Taunton. It could also relieve some seasonal pressures for visitors travelling out of Taunton. Some thought could be given to developing the Norton platform as a park & ride facility. This would need much more thought including the substantial costs to upgrade the track for speeds up to 45 mph and also the possible alienation of volunteer support.

It was agreed to keep a watching brief on the Minehead Rail Link Group. It could not just be ignored. Services on the 28 bus route were being reduced on Saturdays and Sundays. It was noted that West Somerset had recently been identified as an area of social deprivation so better communication links, physical and digital, were needed. Cllr Hall indicated that the digital connections were improving and were currently around 82%. Thought could also be given to two through trains a day on changeover days at Butlins. These could run within existing infrastructure and timings.

08/18 Membership of the Railway

Paul Whitehouse reported that many visitors asked if there was a way to join the Railway in a seamless way. Membership is available in various ways for the Groups in the railway family. This required a closer understanding between the Groups and discussions would take this idea forward. A presentation to the Trustees of WRSA and the Plc Board by

the recently retired fund-raising manager of the Bluebell Railway was being arranged so that everyone would have a clear understanding of the way forward, which would only succeed by working together to raise funds.

09/18 AOB

- i) Hinkley Point Community Fund: It was reported that a joint WRSA/Plc bid had been made to this fund to for assistance in increasing volunteering opportunities on the Railway and to appoint someone to work on it to widen the scale of opportunities. Cllr Hall and Cllr Paul declared a conflict as they were involved in the Obligations Board of the Fund. Cllr Hall reminded the meeting that the criteria was to mitigate the impact of the construction of the new power station on the community. Paul Whitehouse assured the meeting that his had been the case in the bid.
- ii) Inward Investment: Martin Adfield queried what was happening to the previous plans for Inward Investment produced by Steve Williams. Paul Whitehouse indicated that this was unclear at the moment with the review of the Plc Business Plan. However, fund-raising via the WRSA was still taking place and this benefited from Gift Aid. Martin queried the amount needed for the Railway to move forward and how it would be found beyond fund-raising.
- iii) Washford Site: Ryan Pope gave an update on plans by the SDRT for the Washford site. The Trust held significant amounts of S&D artefacts and it was intended to proceed with previous plans to develop a suitable museum for these. It was also intended to provide a viewing gallery in the workshops for visitors. These ideas and the location of 'Kilmersdon' could add to the 'string of pearls' concept. Ryan added that the Trust had access to the only fireless steam loco in England which could be restored as another draw (there was already one in Scotland which had attracted much interest). This restoration would be helped by links with Bridgwater College over the interchange of apprentices and other workshop visits. The HFL application was still on-going. Chris Austin asked that the Trust keeps in touch with him so that applications were not duplicated.
- iv) Changes to the Plc Board: Ian Coleby outlined the recent changes to the Plc Board and Senior Management. Since taking over as Chairman of the Plc on 18 December 2018, he had instituted a review of the Plc and how it should move forward. The new structure was presented in a diagram (Appendix 'A' of these minutes). There had been a need to move to a much more professional approach. There had been a lack of clear objectives and targets and the draft budget for 2018 presented in November 2017 had raised concerns. There had been aspirational wishes included without a full scrutiny of needs. A new clearer budget for 2018 had now been agreed by Plc Board. There had also been concerns that the Plc Board did not reflect the whole of the WSR and there was still a 'silo' approach. A Board skills survey had taken place and it had been agreed to invite representation from other Groups with reciprocal membership of their Boards. There would be an invite for others who may be interested and maybe a need to advertise beyond the Railway. The new Finance Director (Richard Maw) would oversee the Commercial and Financial management. The General Manager would be the Head of Service and manage the whole Railway. Staff appraisal

CA/RP

processes were being introduced for all paid staff to set clear SMART targets within the overall objectives. Business Plans for Infrastructure and Mechanical Engineering were being produced to provide a clearer direction of the standards of operating required. A Business Plan Implementation Team would be established to drive the plans forward. There would be an in-depth review in May 2018 and any corrective action taken. A 5-year cash-flow projection was in course of preparation to ensure more robust management in future. The Finance Director would be assisted by a new Finance Committee to monitor, assure and challenge the financial plans. Briefings had been held with the management team and general staff.

- v) DEPG. Martin Howard commented that discussions on the extension of the DEPG lease at Williton were now becoming urgent to be able to settle matters and attract investment. Ian Coleby and Martin would discuss this outside of the meeting.
- vi) Stakeholder Meeting: There was a further reminder of this meeting on the afternoon of Saturday 24 February 2018.

IC/MHo

It was confirmed that the draft minutes would be circulated to all members for checking and then be made public before approval at the next meeting. This would aid communication across the whole railway.

MHi

10/18 Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting would be held from:

10.00 on Thursday 5 April 2018 in the Meeting Room at Bishops Lydeard Station.

WSR Management Structure - Jan 2018

