

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnership Development Group held from 14.00 on Thursday 30 April 2015 in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard

Present:

Steve Williams (Chairman)	West Somerset Railway PLC
Peter Chidzey	Joint Vice-Chairman WSRA
Chris Austin	West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
Cllr Ian Melhuish	West Somerset District Council
Cllr Jean Adkins	Taunton Deane District Council
Tim Stanger	Friends of Stations Group and FOWSR
James Stubbs	Somerset County Council
Martyn Snell	Employees and Volunteers
Godfrey Baker	Somerset & Dorset Trust

In attendance:

Mark Smith	PLC Director & Vice-Chairman HRA
Mel Hillman	Administrator

Apologies were received from:

John Cronin	Diesel & Electric Preservation Group
David Williams	Chairman - West Somerset Railway Association

Minute		Action
23/15	Welcome	

Mark Smith was welcomed to the meeting to contribute to the item on heritage and preservation.

Peter Chidzey was also welcomed to the meeting, deputising in the absence of David Williams.

24/15	Minutes of Previous Meeting	
-------	------------------------------------	--

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 9 March 2015 were APPROVED which correction of the spelling of Cllr Jean Adkins.

25/15	Matters Arising	
-------	------------------------	--

- i) Minute 15/15 (v) Norton Fitzwarren Floodplain. Cllr Jean Adkins reported that there was no further information on developments in this area. She agreed to speak to the planning office and report back to the Chairman when and if there were developments planned.
- ii) Minute 17/15 Washford Site. Godfrey Baker reported that the planning was ongoing but the Somerset & Dorset Trust would like the PDG involved in the process.
- iii) Minute 19/15 List of Projects. Martyn Snell reported that he had spoken to the local County Councillor about the traffic control

JA

outside of Minehead Station. The Councillor had offered to speak to the Highways Office and report back. Martyn Snell added that following comments at the last meeting about the starting point for passenger visits to the Railway, he had confirmed with John Cronin that only around 40% commenced from Bishops Lydeard.

- iv) Minute 21/15 (i) WSRA Journal. The Chairman confirmed that the comments made by David Williams had been placed on the agenda for a meeting of the Plc Board Planning Group at the end of May 2015. No response had been made as yet but once a Lead Director for PR & Communications had been appointed this would be addressed. SW
- v) Minute 21/15 (ii) Plc Committees. The Chairman reported there had been some late tinkering with the structure. He would send out the final version with the minutes of this meeting. Plc Policies were a later agenda item. SW
- vi) Minute 21/15 (iii) Heritage & Preservation. This was the next agenda item and Mark Smith had been invited to contribute to the discussion.

26/15 Heritage & Preservation Discussion Group

The Chairman commented that there had been considerable support across the Railway for this issue to be considered. Chris Austin stated that there needed to be a clear view on the preservation of heritage artefacts balanced against the commercial activities of the Railway. Items could be lost through subtle changes over time. Locos were well taken care of but other items were not. His work with a working group through the Science Museum had triggered this idea and this would be an excellent time to look to identify such items on the West Somerset Railway.

In discussion, members agreed that there needed to be a strong heritage ethos which was sustainable moving forward. Peter Chidzey quoted loco 4561 as a good example of preservation to one standard but not to an operating one. There was an overlap between restoration and repair.

Mark Smith commented that Chapter 14 of the Plc Corporate Plan could be used as the baseline template for discussions. This document had been finalised after considerable consultation across the Railway. There was a need to protect what was cherished. Creeping modernisation could impact on the credibility of the heritage aspects. Cllr Jean Adkins raised concerns that continuous welded rail would remove the old 'clickity clack' essential for heritage railways. Mark Smith suggested that all buildings on the line should be treated as having Grade 2 Listed status and eventually all the storage shipping containers should be removed.

It was AGREED to set up an informal group as a sub-set of the PDG. Mark Smith agreed to co-ordinate the Group with his experience as Vice-Chairman of the Heritage Railway Association. Peter Chidzey would liaise with David Williams on who would represent the WSRA. Chris Austin and Godfrey Baker also offered to serve. Cllr Jean Adkins would also serve subject to re-election on 7 May 2015. Chris Austin stated that he would hope that the Group would be more than a discussion forum. The Chairman replied that the terms of reference would set out the remit for the Group. PCZ

Mark Smith was thanked for his input and left the meeting at this point.

27/15 SCC – Leasehold Paper

James Stubbs had circulated a briefing paper prior to the meeting.

A meeting had been held in County Hall on 14 April 2015 with the Acting Chairman and General Manager of the Plc where a request had been made to extend the current lease for a period of 150 years. This request would be presented to the County Council Asset Strategy Group on 11 May 2015. The County Council wished to ascertain the views of the PDG as this was the body that SCC saw as the one to ensure the future security of the Railway Family and the benefits to the people of Somerset and its economy.

The proposals also included including three small parcels of land adjoining the Railway at Norton Fitzwarren, Stogumber station and Turks Camp into the extended lease as well as allowing the Plc to sub-let parts by sub-leases or licences of up to 25 years maximum. The extension of the lease would not affect the operating rights under the existing 1975 Light Railway Order, No 1449. The County Council would continue to hold the right to nominate a representative to the Plc Board although this had never been exercised.

It was reported that David Williams had emailed a response directly to James Stubbs indicating that the WSRA had not had sufficient time to consider the proposals. This email had not been shared with other members of the Group and Peter Chidzey was unaware of its contents. The Chairman commented that in future such communications should be shared with members of the Group in the cause of openness and transparency.

The Chairman commented that from the Plc point of view it was a clear paper. The Plc had made its position clear. This proposal would take forward the Corporate Plan and give the certainty required for future investment.

Cllr Jean Adkins stated she could see no reason why Taunton Deane Borough Council would object. This length of lease would be essential for bids for inward investment.

Several members raised concerns about the maximum 25 year period of sub-leases and licences. James Stubbs commented that these proposals were aimed at streamlining the process so that the Plc did not have to ask for extensions. Members still felt that the 25 years was too short to attract investment and Chris Austin queried whether there needed to be an upper limit to sub-leases and licences. Peter Chidzey commented that whilst he would agree with longer periods for sub-leases he could not make a decision as the WSRA had not yet discussed this. The WSRA would respond once that discussion had been held.

The Chairman asked if the Group would be able to agree to support the proposal subject to re-consideration of the length of sub-leases and licences. The item remained Commercial in Confidence at this point. Peter Chidzey commented that in line with his previous comments he

would abstain from any vote. Cllr Ian Melhuish commented that he would be disappointed if the Group became divisive at the first hurdle. All other members agreed to the proposal to be put to the Asset Management Group on 11 May.

Martyn Snell reported that following a recent meeting between members of the Reform Group and Trustees of the Association he had been asked in his role of representative of the volunteers and staff to ask the WSRA Chairman to confirm whether the WSRA still intended to purchase the freehold of the line following a commitment from the SCC that it would not be sold outside of the Railway Family. This request had been sent as an email. A written two page letter was tabled at the meeting from the Chairman of the WSRA indicating that an answer to the whole of the PDG was the most appropriate response. This letter confirmed that the WSRA still considered that it's owning of the freehold would have huge benefits for the Railway. Peter Chidzey confirmed that the Association had not given up and it would be the best way forward. James Stubbs confirmed that the SCC view had not changed since the last meeting that the freehold would be retained by the County Council. Martyn Snell expressed disappointment that the Chairman of the Association had made no direct response to his question.

28/15 Plc 3 Year Business Plan

The Chairman had circulated a draft version prior to the meeting. The final version would be presented to the Plc AGM on 23 June 2015. This would be an internal document and had been circulated for openness and transparency within the Group. Comments were invited back to the Chairman by 16 May 2015 at the very latest.

Jean Adkins asked that reference to Taunton Deane Borough Council be added as this may improve support for bids for inward investment under economic well-being.

Tim Stanger offered a purely personal view. The proposals in the draft were a wish list with no budget allocation. After 40 years the Railway was a mature organisation and the pioneering days were long gone. There was a need to bring one large project to galvanise the whole Railway. There had been no such project for some time. He saw two possible options. One was the Taunton/Bishops Lydeard link. The more pressing was the Bishops Lydeard site improvements. This should sit at the top of the Corporate Plan. The Chairman thanked Tim for his view and stated that the 3 year Plan was only a sub-set of the longer term plans. The prioritisation of projects had yet to be agreed. The next agenda item would provide an update on from the Bishops Lydeard Site Group.

29/15 Bishops Lydeard Site Group

Cllr Jean Adkins apologised for missing the last meeting of the Group. She had made enquiries about the children's play area on the Station Farm development. She had been told that local children were being consulted on what they would like provided. The contractors had made funding available to TDBC for this. There was hoped to be some action during May 2015.

There were ongoing discussions with SCC, as the Highways Authority, over the replacement of the subway and provision of a roundabout at the junction with the main road.

The Chairman added that the Group had made some progress:

- i) Version 1 of a planning brief had been presented to the Group from the Plc. This needed comprehensive plans from WSRA and the Steam Trust to complement the Plc plans.
- ii) There had been confirmation that the configuration of the railway operations would remain broadly in line with plans already issued. A suggestion that Bishops Lydeard became the base of the Infrastructure Department had not been supported.
- iii) There were a number of enabling works to consider including the road junction improvements. There were also commercial issues to consider including the Brunel House lease due to expire in May 2017 and the Rexco site and former Quantock Motors site.
- iv) There had been a recognition of the need to start thinking of inward investment. Chris Austin added that the ideas would be discussed further at the end of June 2015 with a more detailed brief produced in the Autumn. The need to retain the capacity to receive trains from Taunton had been accepted.

30/15 PLC Approach to Commercial Agreements

The Chairman had circulated a briefing paper prior to the meeting. The contents remained Commercial in Confidence but could be shared within partner groups for consultation. The paper outlined the Plc approach to future commercial agreements and was being shared in line with transparency to show the Plc was taking negotiations with partners seriously.

Tim Stanger raised some concerns about the content of the text regarding the role of the mediation group. Peter Chidzey agreed and objected to reference to the Quantock Bell being included. As far as the Association was concerned this agreement had been settled.

It was agreed that James Stubbs could share elements of the Business Plan with the Asset Group.

The Chairman asked for comments to be sent to him by 16 May 2015 at the latest.

31/15 Williton Site Developments

Following the comment at the previous meeting to include the local council in any discussion, the Plc Board had agreed to delay proceeding on this issue until after the elections on 7 May 2015. Once this was settled the Group would be established and the Chairman would write to the partnership groups to organise this.

SW

(Peter Chidzey left the meeting at this point having indicated at the beginning that he would have to leave early).

32/15 Plc Policies Paper

The Chairman reported that the Plc Board had been undertaking an overall review of Policies. Some of these would be generic across the Railway. A list of the current policies had been circulated prior to the meeting.

He suggested that PDG agreed to review a small number of the generic policies at each meeting especially those relating to the safe operating systems across the railway. This was AGREED. The Plc would remain ultimately responsible for policies.

33/15 List of Projects

The Chairman asked if members had shared the suggestions offered by John Cronin within their Groups. It was noted that some were already in the 3-year Business Plan and many of the Bishops Lydeard site suggestions were already under review.

It was confirmed that the Minehead café belonged to the Railway.

Any further comments should be forwarded to the Chairman.

ALL

34/15 AOB

- i) Cllr Jean Adkins made reference to a recent press article concerning the possible re-doubling the line between Bishops Lydeard and Norton Fitzwarren. She wondered if this meant that suggestions for a cycleway had been abandoned. The Chairman replied that the plans accommodated both provisions.
- ii) Cllr Jean Adkins and Cllr Ian Melhuish commented that subject to the outcome of the elections on 7 May 2015 they hope to continue their membership of the Group. Cllr Jean Adkins added that as a Parish Councillor in Norton Fitzwarren she would continue to take a keen interest in the work of the Group whatever happened.

32/15 Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting would be held:

11.00 on Thursday 25 June 2015 in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard.

The meeting closed at 15.45