

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GROUP (PDG)

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnership Development Group
held from 10.00 on Thursday 31 March 2016, in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard

Present:

Cllr Jean Adkins (Chairman)	Taunton Deane District Council
Frank Courtney	WSRA
John Irven	West Somerset Railway PLC
Chris Austin	West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
Cllr Karen Mills	West Somerset Council
Martyn Snell	Employees & Volunteers/Friends Groups
Godfrey Baker	Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust

In attendance:

Mel Hillman	Administrator
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Apologies for absence were received from:

Steve Williams	West Somerset Railway PLC
Charlie Field	Somerset County Council
John Cronin	Diesel & Electric Preservation Group

In the absence of Steve Williams, Cllr Jean Adkins took the Chair as Vice-Chairman of the Group. Frank Courtney was welcomed as the new representative of WSRA indicating that he would be the regular member at least until the WSRA AGM.

Martyn Snell wished to clarify that although he was now a Trustee of the WSRA, his attendance at this meeting was solely as the representative of the staff/volunteers and Friends Groups. John Irven pointed out that although he had been instrumental in creating PDG, he had taken a back-seat and was the official PLC representative only for this meeting, standing in for Steve Williams.

Cllr Jean Adkins commented, that in the absence of Charlie Field due to pressure of work for SCC, there might be a need for SCC to be represented by an elected member as well as an officer at future meetings. This would help give a wider perspective to the representation. Disappointment was expressed at the absence of the SCC Officer as the meeting date had been set for a presentation to be made on the extended leasehold situation and the tabling of a draft heads of terms agreement for PDG to consider and ratify in time for the PLC AGM in June. John Irven confirmed that during recent discussions with the SCC, it had been confirmed that SCC remained fully committed to resolving the extended leasehold and Freehold protection issue. It was agreed to ask SCC about a member representative and to have this matter resolved at next meeting. Cllr Jean Adkins declared that her husband had recently been elected as a member of SCC.

(Action – SW)

Minute

14/16 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Action

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 February 2016 were APPROVED and then signed by the Chairman.

15/16 Matters Arising

Minute 11/16 Representative of Friends Groups. Martyn Snell confirmed that he had been invited to future meetings of Friends Groups. No one had yet come forward to represent the Friends Group so he would continue in that role.

16/16 Chairman's Briefing

In his absence, Steve Williams had circulated a Chairman's Briefing Paper prior to the meeting. The following items were considered:

- i) Williton Planning Brief – a later agenda item.
- ii) Inward Investment – Southern Gateway Project – Taunton to Bishops Lydeard link. The PLC would be bidding for funding to fund an external consultant for inward investment. Sam Hunt, who had presented the Washford proposals at the previous meeting, had been approved by the PLC to take on this role. The PLC Board had also delegated funding for a Master Planner for the site plans to Steve Williams. The PDG unanimously agreed its support of the proposals.
- iii) Taunton to Bishops Lydeard Link. These discussions and negotiations were ongoing.
- iv) Minehead Economic Plan. Cllr Karen Mills confirmed that the Coastal Communities Development Plan would be presented to West Somerset Council in April. Steve Williams had indicated that the WSR had not been involved in draft discussions. Cllr Karen Mills commented that this Plan did not directly impact on the Railway but the WSR PLC was a member of the team. The overall economic development of an improved train service to Minehead had been included. The Group asked for this Plan to be an ongoing agenda item as appropriate. Watchet Town Council had also secured funding under the Coastal Communities Plan and John Irven agreed to speak to Steve Williams and the Head of Commercial Services on the matter. Cllr Karen Mills also reported that West Somerset Council had secured funding for a seafront strategy and this would include the WSR. The item would be brought to a future meeting of PDG once finalised.
Cllr Jean Adkins asked if there were any further plans for the Norton Fitzwarren site. Frank Courtney replied on behalf of the WSRA that a Development Plan was being produced for the AGM which would most likely be held on September 2016. It was hoped to have it completed during June or July and input from PDG would be welcomed. It was agreed to include this as an agenda item for a meeting during June or July 2016.
- v) Car Parking and other developments at Bishops Lydeard. Cllr Jean Adkins declared that she had been a member of the planning committee as a substitute but had abstained from voting on the subject. The main issue remained of who would be paying for any work on the car park. Cllr Adkins also commented that planning permission had been refused for the 15 proposed

KM/SW

JI

KM/SW

FC/SW

houses by Taylor Wimpey at Station Green. She had not been a member of that committee. An appeal was expected. It was confirmed that under the terms of the original planning approval, Taylor Wimpey were still obligated to complete the enabling traffic and safety work. John Irven confirmed that the car park issue would be included under the overall Bishops Lydeard improvements but would be a major part of those improvements within the overall plan and be subject to inward investment opportunities.

- vi) PLC Director Vacancies. The paper reported the resignation of David Baker as a Director, although he would remain as the Share Registrar together with the resignation of Geoff Cox as the HR Director. Adverts would be placed for a Commercial Director and a HR Director.

17/16 WSRA Update

Frank Courtney gave a brief update on the structure of the WSRA since the EGM on 27 February 2016. There had been an overwhelming vote by the members for the existing Trustees to stand down. None had attended the EGM. A new Board of Trustees had been co-opted after that meeting. In implementing the recommendations of the Coombes Report, new Co-optees would be appointed at a meeting on 4 April 2016. Some of these would be the recent co-optees. The core operations were in place.

Frank Courtney added that whatever the WSRA did in future it must be member driven with an open and collaborative approach as possible whilst supporting the WSR Family. In answer to a question from Cllr Jean Adkins, Frank Courtney confirmed that he was working very well with Robin Coombes.

Chris Austin asked if there were any outstanding legal issues to resolve. Frank Courtney replied that the new Trustees had taken legal advice and felt they were as watertight as they could be. Work continued on recognition of the bank account. The former Trustees had caused some difficulties. Chris Austin added for the record that David Williams who had been a trustee of the Steam Trust had resigned from this position on 24th March.

John Irven, on behalf of the PLC, added that he fully endorsed the wishes of the WSRA to work openly and transparency with the whole Railway family and the PLC fully recognised the WSRA as part of the Railway Family. It was also noted that the Charity Commission had decided not to intervene in the issue.

John Irven then distributed copies of a letter sent to Frank Courtney following a joint meeting on 11 March 2016. This summarised the PLCs' position that the PLC could not engage with the WSRA Trustees fully until the Governance issues raised in the Coombes Report had been resolved. These had been addressed in supporting the Coombes Report recommendations. The PLC had taken the stance of not becoming involved in the internal affairs of other Groups. The working arrangements would evolve going forward. John Irven as Chairman of the PLC and relevant Directors have been delegated to continue to be

involved in joint discussions of how to resolve remaining issues.

John Irven also confirmed that a 3-month rolling renewal process had been agreed for the Williton site licence to continue from the end of May 2016. This would provide continuity for WS Restorations until the new Development Plan had been finalised. Simon Stretton would represent the WSRA on the Williton Site Group, which would now be reconvened.

It was confirmed that Association Manager, Jacquie Green, would represent the Association on the Bishops Lydeard Site Development Group.

It was intended to work with the WSRA in implementing the Coombes Report and help repair the tainted reputation of the WSRA.

Frank Courtney replied that he had not formally responded to John Irven's letter due to the Trustee meeting due on 4 April 2016. Simon Stretton was leading the trading subsidiary at Williton. Roles and responsibilities were being clarified. There had been no policy or protocol for Chairman's/Manager's/Trustee's action outside of meetings and these had been put in place. The role of the WSRA would continue to be worked through with members.

John Irven re-distributed the flow diagram presented at the last meeting outlining the potential process to be followed should circumstances change and the Freehold became available in the future. The intention was still that any such sale would only be within the current Railway Family. This would include the PDG taking the lead in consulting over how this should be done and with the HRA and ORR and undertaking due diligence. Frank Courtney commented that the new Trustees had passed a resolution not to action the resolution passed at an earlier EGM for the existing Trustees to continue to seek to obtain the Freehold from SCC and would commit to working through the PDG. A new resolution would be taken to the next AGM (likely to be in September 2016) to rescind that resolution. Frank Courtney stated that the WSRA Trustees appreciated the support from the HRA and PLC.

Cllr Jean Adkins raised a concern that the councils would be excluded from the process. Cllr Karen Mills supported this concern. John Irven re-assured the meeting that the process as proposed by SCC in the flowchart was still open to consultation. It was AGREED that this should be an agenda item at the next meeting. Everyone was asked to submit comments to Steve Williams prior to the next meeting to feed to SCC.

SW/MH

ALL

Cllr Jean Adkins stated that PDG had voiced Governance concerns about the WSRA at the last meeting but things had since moved on and PDG now recognised Frank Courtney as the legitimate representative. The PDG would also offer any support to the WSRA that it could.

18/16 Williton Site Plans

A briefing paper had been distributed prior to the meeting. Chris Austin mentioned the unique listed planning status of the station building and goods shed with its link to Brunel. The tourist potential for using this link was understood.

There was now a need to reconvene the Site Development Group and move forward. Steve Williams would be asked to action this quickly.

SW

Frank Courtney stated that WSRA Promotions had produced a development plan. It was confirmed that the current sub-lease was for 10 years but the PLC was committed to supporting longer term plans for the whole site, including Sherrings Yard although this was leased by a third party to the WSRA. Constructive discussions needed to take place.

Martyn Snell commented that with three proposed large developments at Bishops Lydeard, Williton and Washford (subject to funding), there would be a need to keep the Railway Family and the wider community informed of the developments and the ongoing economic benefits to the community. Cllr Jean Adkins added that it would be important to see the proposals in totality and not to resort to a 'silo' mentality. There were common issues along the Railway eg parking. Cllr Karen Mills added that there would be a need for a form of external overview of the proposals including oversight of funding sources.

It was AGREED that the PLC letter to the WSRA should be published and it was emphasised that PDG would help towards the work of restoring the reputation of the overall WSR after recent events.

JI

19/16 PLC Business Plan

In a briefing paper, Steve Williams had asked if PDG wished to become involved in refreshing the PLC Business Plan. In discussion it was felt that PDG needed to be consulted, but the Plan remained the responsibility of the PLC Board. PDG welcomed details being shared and could contribute as required.

It was agreed that PDG could consider whole Railway issues and through consultation help inform overall planning issues. Any member of the Group could ask the Chairman to place items on PDG agendas.

ALL

Members welcomed the improving transparency of ideas and plans within the Railway Family.

20/16 DfT Bid for Funding

In a further briefing paper from Steve Williams, the meeting was informed of a bid to the DfT for developmental funding. Chris Austin outlined the background to the process, explaining that this was part of the overall Government policy for more inward tourism away from London and the richness of Heritage Railways was part of this policy. Grants of up to £75,000 could be bid for. The proposed Taunton to Bishops Lydeard Link met the criteria for a bid.

It was confirmed that bids needed to be submitted by 4th April and successful bidders would be required to give a 'Dragon's Den' type presentation at the DfT on 10 May. The proposed 2017 Pilot proposals would be presented if invited.

The PDG AGREED to fully endorse this bid as a support group and would send a letter of support to Steve Williams. The Administrator

would produce a headed notepaper template for the purpose and send to Cllr Jean Adkins for signing and submission to Steve Williams. **MH/JA**

Godfrey Baker confirmed that the S & D Trust would certainly support the bid and would submit a letter of support. **GB**

It was hoped that a suitable press release would be produced by the PLC for local and heritage railway media. **JI**

21/16 AOB

There were no items of other business.

22/16 Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting would be held from:

14.00 on Tuesday 3 May 2016 in Brunel House, Bishops Lydeard.

The meeting closed at 11.50

Three documents are appended to the minutes for information:

1. WSRA Members Resolution on the Freehold
2. Letter to Frank Courtney by Chairman of the Plc - 19 March 2016
3. Flowchart outlining the Lease Extension/Protection Clause Process.