

# PURBECK COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETING

HELD VIRTUALLY VIA TEAMS ON 11 JANUARY 2023



## Present:

Mike Whitwam of Swanage Town Council (MWm - Chairperson), Beryl Ezzard of Dorset Council, Wareham Town Council, and Friends of Wareham Railway Station (BE - vice Chairperson - item 6 onwards), Steven Booth (SB - Community Rail Officer), Mick Stone (MS - Secretary), Cllr Ray Bryan of Dorset Council (Cabinet Member for Transport, Travel, and Climate Change - RB), Gavin Johns of Swanage Railway (GJ), Stephen Dru Drury of Corfe Castle Parish Council (SDD), Tony Smale of Friends of Wool Station and Purbeck Transport Action Group (TS), Dan Wright of Community Rail Network (DW - item 6 onwards), Ade Parvin of Perenco UK (AP), Alex Brocklesby of National Trust (AB), Jack Wharton of Network Rail (JW), Alistair Chisholm of Dorchester Town Council (AC), David Garney of First Bus Hampshire, Dorset & Berkshire (DG), Kelly Flynn of Dorset Council (KF), Andrew Ardley of South Western Railway (AA), Robert Potter (RPo - Friends of Dorchester South), Richard Wade (RW) of Morebus/Go South Coast.

**Apologies:** Jaime Rockhill (JR) and Rory Pilcher (RP) of Network Rail, Fiona King (FK) of Dorset Council, Nick Ward of Purbeck Transport Action Group (NW), Paula Aldridge of South Western Railway (PA), David Budd (DB) of Wareham Town Council, Peter Robinson (PR) of RSPB.

## Agenda item 1 - Chairman's Opening Remarks and Welcome -

MW welcomed all to the meeting and wished them well for the New Year. He particularly welcomed SB in his role as the new Community Rail Partnership Officer. He noted with regret that the PCRPs joint bid with SR for CCIF funding from SWR for an extension of the VR&RO post had been unsuccessful.

## Agenda Item 2 - Notes of the Stakeholder Group/AGM Meeting held on 1st September 2022

MS pointed out that these notes had been agreed by Steering Group in accordance with the Constitution. MWm asked for any comments or corrections. There being none, the notes were agreed as a true record.

## Agenda Item 3 - Update on the Transfer of the Accountable Body Function to Hampshire CRP

MS reported that the transfer of the function from SR to Hampshire CRP had taken place in October 2022. The funds and the employment of the CRPO had therefore been transferred to the latter organisation.

## Agenda Item 4 - Update on Reaccreditation

MS reported that discussions had started and the Reaccreditation process should be dealt with in the next two months or so.

## Agenda Item 5 - CRPO's Update on Progress of Projects undertaken since the last Meeting

SB referred to the latest version of the Activity Plan, which had been sent round just before the meeting. He then went through the funding bids which had been made since the AGM, incl Wareham Station new planters, support for year 2 of the RSPB bus service to Arne, and electronic information Totems for Wareham and Dorchester South. With regard to the latter, AA suggested that the order for the Wareham Totem should be made as soon as possible, if it is to be acquired and installed in 2023. An application had also been made to Dorset Council for support towards PCRPs core funding.

SB went on to refer to the Wareham Station Strategic Plan, in respect of which an initial meeting had taken place recently, organised by Network Rail. Further, a meeting of Western Gateway Sub- National Transport Body had taken place, with all CRPs in its area.

The Friends of Dorchester South Station was now in place, and Robert Potter of that Group was at the meeting. SB was also in touch with Emma Scott of Dorchester Town Council. SB had met with TS of Friends of Wool to discuss working with Dorset Innovation Park and improving transport links.

SB had made contact with SR's Passenger Services Manager and the Chairman of the Company Board, partic about working together on Marketing and Education opportunities. The Interpretation Board at Moreton station was now in place, and the design was shown to the meeting.

There were now three Jurassic Coast videos available for sharing - the one for Swanage and Corfe was shown to the meeting. SB suggested that another video, encompassing Arne, the Heaths, and Studland might follow. On this latter point AB mentioned the Purbeck Heaths Sustainable Travel Plan which was being drawn up. KF asked SB to send the videos to her and that a good contact at DC was Chris Peck. SDD asked that his Council also be sent the videos so they could share, and also to DTC. SB said that he was in touch with both Emma Scott and Matilda Manley at DTC.

The PCRCP website was updated regularly, and Line Guides were being distributed. Wool Goods Shed proposal had been deferred temporarily whilst consideration was given to a use for the building. SB listed his training events both those completed and those coming. He further mentioned the upcoming events in the wider network - The Coronation, the Waterloo 175, and the International Dinosaur Week.

### **Agenda Item 6 - Updates from Stakeholder Partners**

**Dorset Council** - KF was pleased to report that the Council was prepared to make a grant of £2,000 per annum for three years towards core funding of PCRCP. She would discuss this further with SB and MS. She also reported that the phase 2 submission for a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for Dorset would be ready to submit within a few weeks. The design work of the A351 footway/cycleway improvement at Wareham had been 'paused' in common with other such works in the County, due to cost pressures.

The resolution of the level crossing issue at Wareham was awaiting news from the discussions between the local MP and the Rail Minister. However, there was due to be further news in the next week or two.

**South Western Railway** - AA advised that he did not expect there to be an issue with the 2023/24 core funding, although this and everything else was the subject of the Annual Business Plan Review between SWR and DfT. Further, he hoped that design work on the Dorchester South Mid-Tier Accessibility Scheme would re-start shortly, with a start on site expected later in the year. That station had recently been re-painted. The decision on Access for All lifts at the station was expected from the DfT in the Spring of 2023. The former Red Star building demolition awaited Network Rail agreement.

**Swanage Railway** - GJ re-iterated that 2022 had been a challenging year for the Railway, with cost increases etc, but that there was optimism for 2023. There would be special events planned for each month. He looked forward to working closely with PCRCP and the Purbeck Heaths group to promote connectivity throughout Purbeck. There would be Educational events, including perhaps an 'Evacuee Day'.

The 2023 Trial Service of Wareham-Swanage trains was planned to start in April or May, dependent on finalising details. The service was an obligation on SR to DC, and he would be writing to the Council soon to explain details of what was proposed. He welcomed the opportunity for a closer working relationship.

The Waterloo 175 celebration in July 2023 offered the opportunity for an SR steam locomotive to visit that station, together with a publicity stall. There was an opportunity for PCRP to attend also. SDD asked GJ to expand a little on what the service in 2023 might consist of. The plan was for 4 return trips per day on four days per week (T/W/Th/Sat). KF pointed out the need to obtain some baseline data in 2023 that could be used to assess the demand for subsequent years. GJ pointed out that a continuation of the current Strikes was but one of the possible barriers to obtaining meaningful data. AA advised that a meeting was planned for the following week between SR and SWR to discuss access to Wareham Station, ticketing etc. GJ had heard nothing more from the DfT about SR's application for Restoring Your Railway funds, in regard to which he favoured the sending of a joint PCRP/SR letter to the sponsoring MPs, asking for their continued support. MS had drafted a letter and this would be followed up.

There had been no news regarding the proposed lease of Furzebrook sidings. However, AP advised that Perenco's solicitor had recently heard from an officer at Dorset Council (Nicholas Cook).

SDD asked if his Parish Council could be consulted as plans develop for Furzebrook. In essence, the Parish Council wanted to know when the diesel facility at Corfe station might be relocated to Furzebrook.

AC suggested that the proposed letter to the South Dorset MP might usefully also be sent to the West Dorset counterpart, and GJ acknowledged this as a fair point. SB asked who would drive the trains to Wareham, which GJ advised would be SR drivers.

**Network Rail** - JW confirmed the commencement of the work of the Wareham Station Strategic Plan and reported that the former 'Up' bay land might become the subject of more regular maintenance, in view of its importance regarding sand lizards. GJ asked JW to bear in mind the commitment which NR made at the time of the Poole to Wool re-signalling scheme, to keep the land available for a possible bay platform for SR trains to use, should funding become available.

**National Trust** - AB advised that work continued on a Masterplan for sustainable travel around Studland. Beryl Bikes based there would be funded via the Perenco fund plus some other NT funding, and it would be integrated with BC&P Council's scheme.

Ray Bryan wanted to give an important update on the future of rail and bus services in Dorset. He had been invited by the West Dorset MP to attend a meeting with the Rail Minister on 25th January, to discuss improvements to both rail and bus infrastructure. He asked that any points that PCRP members wanted raised specifically should be sent to him by the morning of the 24th at the latest.

**MoreBus/Go South Coast** - RW firstly advised that he would let RB have any specific issues by the 24th. The last few months had been dominated by the taking over of the former Yellow Buses services and, shortly, some of the Yellow Coaches contract work. Further, following First Group leaving Southampton there would be additional services to take over, where possible. RW explained his view that Rail and Bus were not in competition with each other, but it is the private motor vehicle which is the competition. Traffic congestion was a major issue for him - some services had been three and a half hours late in 2022. Multi-agency solutions were needed, and joined up thinking.

**First Wessex** - DG anticipated that services in Summer 2023 would be similar to Summer 2022. He reminded the meeting of the £2 flat fare per single journey, which was available till end of March 2023, courtesy of the DfT. Friends of Wareham Station - BE gave a brief update.

## Agenda Item 7 - Statement on the VR&RO Post

As mentioned by the Chair earlier the application to SWR's CCIF programme for an extension of the post had not been successful. GJ said that he had been in contact with SWR's CCIF Officer to discuss the funding of the post going forward, bearing in mind that it had been unfilled since October, when the former post holder had transferred to another post at SR. GJ offered to keep partners informed.

## Agenda Item 8 - The Year Ahead

SB had already set out some of his thoughts for 2023 earlier in the meeting. He did, however, indicate the need for the prioritising of projects so that he knew where to use resources. Community engagement was key, not just Stakeholders. GJ pointed out that SR would be holding a Community Weekend on 11th/12th February, which would be an opportunity for the PCRCP to be involved.

## Agenda Item 9 - Q&A

There were no additional questions beyond those mentioned earlier in the meeting.

## Agenda Item 10 - Any Other Business

- BE was interested in the Wareham Station Strategic Plan and the level crossing issue. On the former point, RP had indicated that further information would be available within a week or two. On the latter, RB advised that Cllr Simon Gibson was leading.
- TS asked if the funds held by Friends of Wool station could be passed over to Hampshire CRP, to be kept alongside PCRCP's funds. MS and SB thought this could be accommodated. He also asked about the progress of LTP4. This process is currently held up awaiting advice from the DfT.
- KF said that she had asked the lead officer at Western Gateway to contact PCRCP, and MS/SB were able to say that a first meeting was to take place on the following day.
- MW asked about the proposed access through the gate at Wool, adjoining the Goods Shed. AA advised that this could not be progressed until a new use for the building had been identified and agreed.

Date of Next Stakeholder Group Meeting - 7th June 2023 at 11.00 (online).

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