

PURBECK COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP NOTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY VIA TEAMS ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2020



Present:

Cllr Bill Trite of Dorset Council (Chairman - WST), Cllr Noc Lacey-Clarke of DC (NLC), Mike Whitwam of Swanage Town Council (MWm), Andrew Ardley of SWR (AA), Beryl Ezzard of Wareham Town Council and Friends of Wareham Station (BE), David Budd of Wareham Town Council (DB), Dru Drury of Corfe Castle Parish Council (DD), Tony Smale of Friends of Wool Station and Purbeck Transport Action Group (TS), Paul Webster (PW) and Dan Wright (DW) of Community Rail Network, Mark Woolley of Swanage Railway (MWy), Jonathan Cowe (JC) and Rob Hodgkinson (RH) of Network Rail, Fiona King of DC (FK), Amanda Evans (AE) of Community Transport at DC, Ewan Wilson of Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole Council (EW), Kulvinder Bassi of Department for Transport (KB), Ade Parvin of Perenco UK (AP), Kelly Marshall of PCRP (KM), and Mick Stone of PCRP (MS).

Apologies

Cllr Ray Bryan of Dorset Council, Andy Harrowell of SWR, Steve Clarke of Corfe Castle Parish Council, Kelly Flynn of Dorset Council, Claire Lodge of Dorset Council, Steve Barker of Network Rail, Cllr Andy Hadley of Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole BC, Jaime Rockhill of Network Rail.

Welcome from the Chairman:

WST welcomed all to the virtual AGM and expressed his disappointment that it was not possible to meet face-to-face. He reminded the meeting of the sad passing of Cllr Mike Lovell, a former Chairman of the Partnership. He also advised that the AGM was the last meeting for Kelly Marshall, following her decision to leave her role as Partnership Officer, and thanked her for her input to Partnership matters. He thought that the Partnership could not have employed a better person for the role and wished her well.

Review of the Notes of the General Meeting held on 17 September 2019:

WST reminded the meeting that the notes of the General Meeting had been approved by the next following meeting of the Steering Group, on 29 October 2019.

Matters Arising Therefrom:

BE enquired whether the meeting should appoint a Chairman. WST replied that, in accordance with the Constitution that would not be necessary. BE also asked that there be a key to the initials used in the notes in future.

BE further enquired about the 'up' side waiting room at Wareham and why it was still frequently unavailable. AA advised that the remote locking system had been fitted but had not yet been commissioned due mainly to Covid, but he would seek an update and report back. BE went on to ask about a supply of water at Wareham. The summer flowers had been very well received but those undertaking the watering needed access to a water supply at times when the toilets were locked out of use. KM and BE mentioned discussions with Dorset Council about access to a water supply from the crossing attendants' accommodation. This was ongoing.

MWm asked if there was any update about the foot crossing. There was not and, in any event, this issue was effectively outside the Partnership's purview.

Address from Dorset Council

NLC advised that it was very early days for him in his new role. Covid had changed a lot of the ways in which the Council operated. He expected there to be radical change in Dorset in the next year and now was the time to be putting ideas forward. KM commented that there had been a lot of road traffic during the Summer, but also an increase in walking and cycling.

The proposed scheme for a new footway/cycleway from the north side of Wareham station to the roundabout on the A351 by-pass was still at Design Stage.

Update from Community Rail Partnership Officer - Kelly Marshall

KM updated the meeting on the work she had been engaged in since the last General Meeting. Key amongst the issues was the achievement of Accreditation, followed by the launch of a new, dedicated, website. Part of the work on the website was the production of the first Annual Report.

There had been activity at all of the SWR and SR stations within the Partnership's remit, involving such things as new signage, planters, and in one case (Herston) a compost toilet, part grant funded by Community Rail Network. A grant from Wareham St Mary's Solar Fund had assisted with a new information sign at Holton Heath.

Various new contacts had been made, including with Dorset AONB, RSPB, Sustrans, MoreBus, PTAG, and the Station Friends Groups. Assistance had been given to SR's bid to the SWR CCIF fund in respect of the Volunteer Recruitment & Retention post. Current work included a bid to CRN's Integrated Sustainable Transport Fund (ISTF), in respect of a contribution to a new and enlarged bus waiting shelter at Wareham.

One project which it had not been possible to progress was the cycle ramps for the footbridge at Holton Heath, where there was no step-free access over the railway. This was one for the future.

BE offered her thanks to KM for all of her efforts and asked that she continue to volunteer at Wareham station. These comments were echoed by PW on behalf of CRN.

Update from Community Rail Network

DW also thanked KM for her work, and commented how he had enjoyed working with her. He explained that advice was available to the Partnership on an ad hoc and a formal basis. Grant funding was available for certain types of project, including some funded via SWR's small projects fund. Accreditation had been undertaken by CRN on behalf of the Department for Transport. PCRPN had ticked all of the boxes.

Lockdown had presented some challenges for CRN, which meant that seminars and conferences were now attended remotely via Zoom. Best Practice papers were still being produced and updated. A bid to the ISTF in respect of the Wareham bus shelter was awaited with interest.

The 2020 CR Awards ceremony was another event which would be handled virtually, on 9 December. It had been due to take place at Southampton, which it was hoped would be the venue in 2021.

Further, CRN had now produced a Covid Recovery paper. PW advised that there were bursaries available to attend training events

MWy asked if CRN had considered obtaining Charitable status. PW said that there had been previous consideration but he was unsure whether it was still a live proposal.

PCRP Constitution

This item was on the agenda because, a year ago, proposals had been put forward to update the previous version in light of the requirements for Accreditation. WST asked if there were any proposed amendments. There were none raised.

Update from SWR

In the absence of Andy Harrowell on Paternity Leave AA gave a general update on the position with SWR and its franchise, which was currently being managed under an Emergency Measures Agreement. The DfT was expected to announce its proposals for the Franchise within the near future.

AA expressed satisfaction that the Partnership had obtained Accreditation. Project funding applications for 2021/22 could be accepted up to 27 September, while the Station Adoption fund was still open and available to Station Friends' Groups. There was also recently-announced funding for BioDiversity schemes. There were 17 nominations from the SWR area for the CR Awards in December, a pleasing number.

AA closed by thanking KM for her work and wishing her well for the future. BE asked that her thanks to Andy Harrowell be recorded.

Swanage Railway Update

MWy reported on a challenging year for SR. The railway had closed in mid-March and re-opened on 11 July, albeit with a restricted timetable and seat availability. August had seen a pleasing increase in visitor numbers, which meant that more trains were operated to cater. There were emerging plans for operating in the rest of the year.

Clearly, it had not been possible to operate the Wareham Trial Service which had been planned. When lockdown came SR had been very close to obtaining its Operating Licence. The current hiatus meant that the process would have to be re-started when the opportunity arose. However, staff training had re-commenced and final work to the diesel multiple units continued. Looking forward, it was not possible to give a commitment to when the Trial Service could start. SR would not get any revenue support and so had to be sure that the time was right to start.

An application had been made to Restoring Your Railway, a fund of the DfT's, and a response was due later in September. He confirmed that discussions had and were still continuing with SWR over ticketing and station access at Wareham. KM referred to the commitment from SWR to jointly market the Trial Service. MWy said that the Leisure and Tourism market was very important to the Railways generally, with the fall off in commuting. Finally, he thanked KM for all of her work.

DD asked for more information about the likelihood of the Trial Service operating in 2021. MWy was optimistic but there needed to be progress with a vaccine, or other measures which would increase the public's willingness to travel by train.

There was then a general discussion about the usage level of Purbeck Park in 2020 (well used) and the need for an improved 'active travel' (cycling & walking) route from there to Corfe village. DD advised that this was his Parish Council's top priority for the area. BE said that she was aware that Dorset County's officers were working to obtain all of the land needed for the new route.

Network Rail Update

JC spoke about the commencement of work on the Dorset Connectivity Continuous Modular Strategic Plan (CMSP), and progress thereon. The aim was to make the most of opportunities which may arise. A timetable study of the various options for future service patterns was underway and this would lead into an exercise to identify the extra infrastructure needed and, from that, costs could be calculated. He thanked Swanage Railway for its input and confirmed to MWy that its thinking would be part of the base case. The CMSP findings would be consulted on early in the New Year and then published around Easter 2021.

RH reported that he was looking for ideas for murals on blank walls at stations and structures. He asked for suggestions and confirmed that KM had put forward a suggestion of a wall at Wool station, which was being considered. Another idea was to use a mural as a marketing tool for the Trial Service, if a suitable structure could be identified. In this regard, BE asked about the former signal box at Wareham, and whether there might be an opportunity there, or perhaps on the new bus shelter. RH agreed to look at these possibilities.

MWy reconfirmed that SR would like a lease from Network Rail of the former signal box, and understood that we would all have to wait until the future of the foot crossing was resolved before any lease could be agreed.

Questions & Answers

There were no further questions forthcoming. WST, in making his closing remarks, advised that there would be a meeting of Steering Group in the next week or two, whose prime aim would be to discuss the recruitment of a replacement for KM.

ENDS

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