

# **PURBECK COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP NOTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY VIA TEAMS ON 11 OCTOBER 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), Steven Booth (SB - Community Rail Officer), Mick Stone (MS - Secretary), Gavin Johns of Swanage Railway (GJ), Paula Aldridge of SWR (PA), Dan Wright of Community Rail Network (DW), Kelly Flynn of Dorset Council (KF), Richard Wade (RW) of Morebus/Go South Coast, Claire Wood of First South Buses (CW), David Budd (DB) of Wareham Town Council, Rachel Martin of RSPB (RM).

## **Apologies**

Andrew Ardley of South Western Railway (AA), Cllr Ray Bryan of Dorset Council (Cabinet Member for Transport, Travel, and Climate Change - RB) Alex Brocklesby of National Trust (AB), Ade Parvin of Perenco UK (AP) Jack Wharton of Network Rail (JW), Cllr Andy Hadley of BC&P Council (AH), Tony Smale of Purbeck Transport Action Group and Friends of Wool (TS), Rory Pilcher of Network Rail (RP).

## **Agenda Item 1 - Chairperson's Welcome, Introductions, & Opening Remarks**

MW welcomed all to the meeting and advised that the recent weather had resulted in a lot of visitors coming to the area, giving a late Summer economic boost. He also said that the trial Swanage - Wareham train service had come to an end for now, pending assessment of financial outcomes and other factors.

RM and CW briefly introduced themselves and gave a brief description of their roles.

## **Agenda Item 2 - Notes of the Stakeholder Group Meeting held on 11th January 2023**

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 first year of Hampshire CRP's role as the Accountable Body for PCRCP had been satisfactorily completed and the arrangement had been renewed for a further year from October 2023.

## **Agenda Item 4 - New Stakeholder Members Since the Last Meeting**

Claire Wood of First South introduced herself and explained her role within the company. BE asked her what services could be expected in the Purbeck area in 2024? CW was unable to answer at this stage but would let Stakeholders know when the information was available.

Rachel Martin of RSPB also introduced herself and referred to her role in the Arne bus service which had operated. PA reminded the meeting that SWR had contributed funds toward the promotion of this service.

Cllr Andy Hadley of BC&P Council was unable to be present.

## **Agenda Item 5 - Update on Reaccreditation**

MS reported that Reaccreditation had been obtained, with thanks for the efforts of SB and DW in doing so. SB reminded the meeting of the benefit of this status when seeking funding.

## Agenda Item 6 - Funding Report

SB reported that whilst core funding had been received for 2023/24 from SWR there had not been any uplift from the level of the previous year. However, some core funding had been provided by both Swanage Railway and Dorset Council for the current year.

There had been Project funding from SWR towards promotion of the Arne bus service referred to earlier. An application had been made to the Dorset Council Organisational Support fund, as well as a prospect of funding from CRN's Integrated Sustainable Transport fund. Finally, an application(s) was planned to Perenco UK.

It was pointed out that it was a fine line for SB, both locating funders and submitting applications, and giving sufficient time for the carrying out of the activities required of him.

There were no questions.

## Agenda Item 7 - CRPO's Update on Progress of Projects undertaken since the last Meeting

SB had circulated a report which had been sent round with the agenda. He spoke via a Powerpoint presentation. Key issues which he referred to were:

- The Arne bus service;
- The new video for Arne/Studland/Purbeck Heaths/Norden;
- The Coronation event with SWR;
- Community Rail week at Waterloo in late May, when the Minister visited;
- Waterloo 175 event in July;
- Plans for an Evacuee Day, working with SR;
- Plans for a Try The Train event with SWR;
- Totem information points at Wareham and Dorchester South;
- Stations In Bloom events;
- Banners at Wool Station, indicating the bus services to Lulworth etc;
- SR's Community Day, held in February 2023;
- Friends of Dorchester South group up and running and plans for improving the station environment;
- The Wareham Strategic Station Plan inputs and report.

SB cross-referenced the above with the latest version of the Activity Plan, which had been circulated just before the meeting. He commented that decisions would need to be taken by Steering Group on which projects and proposals he should be concentrating on in the future.

BE said that the Friends of Wareham Station needs new volunteers. She was looking forward to the judging of Stations In Bloom on 17 October.

MW advised that SR had a new Volunteer Recruitment & Retention Officer in place, who had a role to play in finding new volunteers for maintaining gardens at the main line stations.

SB showed the new video highlighting the Studland, Arne, and Purbeck Heaths area's attractions.

### Agenda Item 8 - Report on 'Raise The Profile' visits to the Swanage to Wareham Trial Service

MS advised of the series of visits to this service, hosted by GJ, SB, and himself. These included some senior Rail Industry managers, chief among them being the Rail Minister.

The next step was to follow up on these visits to see what support might be offered to help to operate similar services in 2024 and thereafter.

One of the other visitors to ride the service was Cllr Ray Bryan of DC. It was acknowledged that RB was very busy and not always easy to contact. KF suggested going to his Deputy, Cllr Noc Lacey-Clarke, if necessary.

BE added that the MP for Mid-Dorset was also present when the Minister visited. She said that she had been advised that the Network Rail report on options for replacing the existing level crossing at Wareham was due to be received shortly. DB added that he hoped for an acceptable outcome on the level crossing. BE and KF also said that the Stage 2 of the new cycleway/footway over the A351 by-pass bridge design work had moved to its next step (boreholes).

### Agenda Item 9 - Updates from Stakeholder Partners

**South Western Railway** - PA reported on the SWR Community Rail Conference held two days earlier and which was a great success. She confirmed that her Managing Director, Claire Mann, was very supportive of CRPs and had reconfirmed her commitment to try to safeguard core funding going forward.

Stations In Bloom was very important, too, and she looked forward to the outcome of this year's competition. She was very supportive of the planters proposed at Dorchester South and hoped that the provision of water butts on the Down platform would be authorised. Finally, she said that SWR hoped to install a power socket in the car park adjacent to the Down platform at Wareham, to enable coffee vendors and others to operate there when invited.

**Swanage Railway** - GJ reported that:

- the Wareham service operated on all but 1.5 days of those planned, the balance being due to faults with the train;
- The views of NR and SWR on train performance were awaited;
- The industrial action on the main line network had undoubtedly impacted on the ridership on the SR services, implying that a significant number of people used the SWR train service to reach Wareham;
- Financial information would not be available for a week or two from SR;
- The 200th anniversary of the first passenger railway in the world would occur in 2025. It was a great opportunity to plan to do something special.

BE thanked SR for its efforts, and commented that the £2 bus fare had had an impact, too. She underlined that SR is, after all, a Charity and thus can't be expected to shoulder losses indefinitely.

**Community Rail Network** - DW advised that the next national Community Rail Conference was due to be held in Nottingham on 13th/14th November, and the next Awards were to be held in Swansea in March 2024. BE thanked CRN for the small grants award for the new planters.

**Network Rail** - no report available.

**National Trust** - No report available.

MoreBus/Go South Coast - RW said that he was pleased to hear the breadth of discussions with Stakeholders, and he liked the new video, despite there being no MoreBus vehicle in the scenes.

The £2 fare had undoubtedly helped them in 2023. He thought it likely that MoreBus would sign up to the extended timeframe as advised by DfT. His biggest gripe is the continuing congestion on Ferry Road, at the Sandbanks side. This created serious problems for timetabling etc.

MW asked if all bus operators had the £2 fare - RW replied, no, it has to be applied for, and not all operators do.

First South - CW had replaced David Garney as the representative on Stakeholder Group.

RSPB - RM advised that the draft report on the Summer 2023 '2RN' bus services was almost ready. The 'wash-up' meeting was due to be held on 18th October. There were local people and tourists using the services. In general terms, RM thought that ridership numbers had doubled over 2022 figures. She was investigating whether funding could be available to continue services in a limited way over the Autumn and Winter 2023/24.

### Agenda Item 10 - The Year Ahead - Plans and Projects for 2024

SB reminded the meeting of the latest version of the Activity Plan, which had been circulated previously. There were lots of ideas and they needed to be prioritised. AB, who was not present, had her own ideas for new projects, working in partnership. Steering Group was due to meet in person in November to discuss, amongst other things, the priorities for 2024.

### Agenda Item 11 - Q&A

BE asked if there was any update on the proposal to change ticket office opening hours etc. There was not, but a reported 680,000 responses had been received nationally by Transport Focus following the extended consultation period. The report from Transport Focus was expected later in October.

### Agenda Item 12 - Any Other Business

- SB mentioned the temporary signage to Wareham Station. These signs were due to be removed from the roadside by Dorset Council staff and placed in storage at SR's Herston depot. Thanks were offered to SR for offering this storage facility.
- BE thanked SB and MS for organising the Raising The Profile visits.

Date of Next Stakeholder Group Meeting - to be advised

MS - 17 October 2023  
V2

ENDS

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