

Dean Forest Greenway

Steering Group Meeting 20th October 2021, 10:45 am Via Zoom

Present:

West Dean Parish Council

P Dunford (PD) (Chair), A Grant (AG), A Moore (AM), K Carpenter (KC) (Notes)

Cycleroutes & Greenways

J Grimshaw (JGri), C Levett (CL), J Linden (JL)

Forestry England

T Sagar (TS)

Forest of Dean District Council

P Hiett (PH), C McFarling (CMcF)

West Dean Community

S Freeman (SF), E Highfield (EH)

Parkthatbike

P Andrews (PA)

1) Apologises

Kate Thoday, Alan Preest, Dan Lewis, James Greenwood.

KC to send minutes of the meeting held on 22nd April 2021

2) Planning Application Progress

This is on track for submission at the end of November 2021, with the final documentation being prepared. The ecological reports, including the dormouse and bat studies are being finalised and there is a small tree survey being done by John Linden on the island belonging to Light Fantastic, Lydney. These are all on target for the submission date of the planning application. PH offered to be on standby if the application needed to be called in for discussion by planning committee at FODDC but needed to do so within predetermined timescales.

TS asked about the working parties and whether any work was being done on Forestry England land, JG confirmed that all works being done was on other landowners' properties. There have also been some revisions to details of the route at Parkend, New Mills and The Cut to satisfy some concerns.

ACTION - AG was advised to arrange a site meeting for the resident concerned with visibility of the track from their property.

3) Ecological Reports

The bat reports are ongoing and are scheduled monthly.

The dormouse report is currently monitoring some 2,000 tubes but there have been no reported sightings.

There is no intention to monitor the crayfish population in The Cut as the project is not affecting this water way although the overgrown vegetation needs to be addressed by the factory using The Cut. TS added that there was no monitoring being done by FE due to an outbreak of crayfish plague as they were restricted from entering the water, a further update will be requested from KT.

CL joined the meeting following a discussion with FODDC officers regarding the ancient woodland and the draft paper she had written in March. The usual process for any works within an ancient woodland is for it to be refused unless there is an overwhelming need identified with the strategic policy documents and support for the project. CL asked for an appendix of letters, minutes and other supporting documentation to be compiled which can be included within the planning application. EH & SF added there were documented responses from individuals, businesses and the volunteer and community sectors within the NDP works that support the project, EH offered to assist in pulling this information together.

CMcF added that evidence is critical to show that the public interest is greater than the potential harm and will help balance the application, there may also be some biodiversity net gain which can be drawn out in the documentation. PH also offered a letter of support from his position of Chair of the Community Safety Partnership. CL responded that all letters of support would be helpful, and she would send some guidance about content.

4) Working Parties

These are being organised by John Linden and Dan Lewis, they are currently removing the thick undergrowth from DFR and other landowners' properties and further work parties are organised for 13th & 14th November. The working parties are working in compliance with DFR rules and the works being done currently would be management of their land to access culverts etc.

EH asked for greater access to the website so that blog information could be added directly rather than having to wait for it to be uploaded. AG thought that this had been agreed previously and would chase up this on her behalf.

JG added that the land being cleared fell outside of the dormouse survey area and no work in these areas would commence until surveys have been completed. JL added that works were progressing well but due to the heavy and thick undergrowth being cleared with power tools large numbers of volunteers couldn't be used due to the safety aspects.

5) Questions and Concerns

SF added that quite a lot has been happening with regards to concerns and questions being raised so EH and herself had developed a response to all the questions posed, these were attached to the meeting invite and will be presented to WDPC at full council as an attachment to this meeting report.

JG added that there has been several revisions to the plans for the track and that the revised document which details the route and the revisions made will be released within the next two to three weeks. This will include the use of the island belong to Light Fantastic and the new bridges across The Cut, the works access from SWM land and the identification of the highway's crossings.

6) Land Deals

JG advised that there have been a series of amicable meetings with R Aldridge about his land and that if he is able to get his planning brief for the rebuild of his building this will be identified within the Greenway planning application.

Other landowner discussions are progressing well and there is commitment from Light Fantastic and SWM to use their land as part of the route or to access for works to be done when planning approved. DFR have the proposal for the use of their land and this is currently with them.

To date there has been no progress with the road crossings, although BW has now advised of his replacement and there is a need to add Stuart Budd to the steering group and bring him up to speed on the project.

It was also requested that a member of the steering group be invited to the Highways & Footpaths Committee Meeting – SF & EH to be invited.

7) Funding & Grant Awards

SF added that there needs to be an update on the funding situation for WDPC full council, which details the post planning funding from Lydney TC (£10k), the money allocated by WDPC (£10k) and the grant funding from FODDC (£55k).

There was discussion about Active Travel Strategy and that the design of the greenway surface would not meet the urban design standards, so they may be some issues with GCC accepting the surface! CMcF added that a business/economic case needs to be made as these tick boxes with central and local government.

This led to further discussion about letters of support from the County Councillor, Social Prescribing, GPS and the Community Engagement teams at FODDC to support the health and well being benefits of the project.

ACTION - WDPC would compile the letters of support into an appendix document, this needs to be completed by 20th November 2021.

PH added that there are community Safety partnership grants available, JG added these may be of some use with the road crossings which are also needed by the local communities to improve safety.

8) Road Crossings

JG stated that they had initially hoped that Gloucestershire Highways would be an active partner in the project, but they would detail the specific crossing required at the identified locations within the planning documentation.

9) Other Matters

No other matters were raised.

The meeting closed at 11:59