Dean Forest Greenway

Steering Group Meeting 8th December 2021, 14:00 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)
Lydney Town Council
James Greenwood (JG)
West Dean Community
S Freeman (SF), E Highfield (EH)

1. Apologises

Cllr Alan Preest – Steering Group noted with disappointment the lack of apologies for this meeting.

2. Planning Application.

The Chair began the meeting with a statement of gratitude and appreciation for all the work that had been done by the Greenways & Cycleroutes team to get the project to this stage. He especially thanked Caroline and John for their dedication and hard work.

JGri advised the group that there was not much to say currently with the planning application having been submitted before the 20th November, which meant an additional fee was not incurred. They were confident that all the required items from all parties had been completed. The issue of the mine shafts and the masonry for a bridge were discussed briefly and JG added that from the mining consultants report that the entrances of concern were only small shafts and their capping would be straightforward and that the masonry was finished and able to be utilised as detailed. JL affirmed all that had been said regarding the required reports.

PH expressed his thanks to the steering group and made an offer to have the application called in for discussion at FODDC planning committee if it was necessary. There followed some debate about the advantages and disadvantages of the calling in of an application and this decision was dependent upon the indicative feedback from officers about the application. It was agreed to hold this currently until feedback had been received.

AG briefly discussed the questions raised by a member of the public about the approval process and it not being agreed by council prior to submission, SF responded that they were disappointed by these questions and these should have been able to be answered easily. JGri added that they were acting as the agents for WDPC and had been doing so for over a year and if they had moved outside of their remit they apologise for this. AG agreed to formulate a response and liaise with PD on this before sending the reply.

PH advised the group, from his past involvement, of the steering group having delegated authority to undertake the submission of the application and that he had not seen any motions tabled to remove this authority or require the application to be presented to full council for approval although he understood the concerns that had been raised he believed neither the PC nor the steering group had done anything wrong. PD agreed that this issue needed to be addressed but felt that this was not the time to continue these discussions.

3. Public Consultation/Awareness

There is now a need to inform residents and other interested parties of the project and its benefits. EH informed the group that the intention is to hold three events, Parkend, Whitecroft and Lydney Town Hall to undertake this information exchange with the public whilst also utilising the social media sites to engage with residents. SF echoed these ideas and suggested that these should be about two hours long and that she and EH would be happy to organise these events and attend to talk with residents.

JG added that due to the size of the document printing may not be the best option but presenting onto a screen would allow for specific areas to be investigated in more depth as residents requested. CL, JL and JGri all offered to assist with these events and that a brief presentation with accompanying slides could be part of a focussed session. There was some further discussion about when these events should be held, with SF suggesting they be scheduled for early/mid-January to allow time for people to add comments to the planning application following the event.

This then raised the issue of extending the timeframe for the consultation on the application and whether this would be helpful in allow additional time for comments of support or objection to be submitted. JG advised that he raise this from Lydney Town Council and it was agreed by the steering committee that a date of 31st January be requested for the time extension. PH reiterated that if there were any issues he would `call in' this application in to go before FODDC planning committee.

CL also added that the ecology will be the issue with the ancient woodland sections and not to take the application to FOD planning committee without there being a need, the decision will rest on the input from two district officer, planning and sustainability. PH added that this project was one of the flagship projects identified within the Active Travel Strategy being developed by the district council, PD requested that he update the group on this at the next meeting for more discussion.

CL advised all group members to read Annex 2 especially as this gave the full justification for the route and the reasons that alternatives were discounted, EH added that this annex would be attached to follow up emails to those who had written letters of support and would be included as an attachment to any emails for information.

There was also some discussion about the inclusion of these letters of support onto the comments of the application on the planning portal even though they had been submitted as part of the application. PH raised the issue of GDPR and being mindful of these regulations if these letters were being added.

4. Next Steps:

a) Terms of Reference

PD opened the discussion on the need for a terms of reference and whether these are needed, he also wanted to discuss how the project will be managed during its next phase and the scrutiny that would be needed. PH added that it would be a good move to develop terms of reference as this would help answer any questions.

JGri added that there would be some value in providing a framework under which the project would then move forward. Their focus as the agent is currently on responding to any queries from planners and drawing up the detailed works plans for the landowners; the Forest of Dean Railway workbook has already been developed.

JGri requested approval to continue these elements of the project and would value a framework agreement for this. CL/JGri would look to develop a note for consideration as part of the TOR's/framework within the next week or so.

The element which did not sit with Greenways & Cycleroutes was the seeking of funding for the project. CL advised that Active Travel would be the potential route for funding but did not know if a business case would be needed as it was not something that had been requested with other projects that applied to Active Travel for funding. PH offered to discuss with district officers who were well versed in funding applications but this might also be a County Council funding stream.

b) Project Management

There was some brief discussion about the management of the project and its requirements but the group agreed to hold this over for a future meeting as the planning application needs to be granted before any other phases of the project could be scheduled.

c) Funding & Finance

CL advised that there were some invoices due for the ecology works and would be forwarded to the PC for payment.

The discussion about funding for the project was also held over until the next meeting.

5. Steering Group – Roles & Responsibilities

There was a discussion about the changing roles and responsibilities of the steering group as the project progresses, it was felt that the flexibility to invite others on the group was an asset but it would be worthwhile formalising the roles and responsibilities and ensuring these dovetails with the terms of reference for the group. JGri was somewhat alarmed by the email received which had some points about the management of the steering group and were pertinent to this discussion.

PD added that there was some ambiguity around the steering group and it being perceived as a WDPC committee, which it is not as it as specific steering group for this project with two additional members being co-opted onto the group from the PC.

SF added that reporting mechanisms were in place and all the information was in the public domain.

6. Any Other Business

JGri had on query about public reaction to any of the work that had been done to clear culvers and undergrowth? SF responded that none had been received. JGri thanks JL for all the work that been organised and added that DFR had been a huge help in clearing trees.

CL added that there is no requirement to fell any additional trees than had already been identified by the landowners.

EH advised that the only details of working parties being shared is the time and that there had been no negative feedback. EH also pointed out that the planning portal when viewing applications has an application of interest clickable box which is taking you to the hospital planning application. PH advised that he'd try to find out why this was!

There was some brief discussion about the 20mph motion at FODDC for all villages. PH added that this motion had been well intentioned but there were some questions about who would be policing this and what will transpire. AM added that no one voted against this motion which was well presented by the councillor proposing it.

7. Date of Next Meeting

PD wished all members of the steering group a happy, health and constructive 2022.

A doodle poll will be circulated by the clerk for setting the next meeting in January 2022.