

Dean Forest Greenway

Steering Group Meeting 11th July 2022, 14:00 Via Google Meet

Present:

West Dean Parish Council

P Dunford (PD) (Chair), A Moore (AM), J Richmond (Observing), K Carpenter (KC) (Notes)

Cycleroutes & Greenways

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

Lydney Town Council

James Greenwood (JG)

West Dean Community

P Andrews (PA), E Highfield (EH)

Gloucestershire County Council

B Hoyland (BH)

1. Apologies

T Sagar, S Freeman, C McFarling, P Hiett, Cllr A Grant.

PD welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the work, knowledge, and expertise that Greenways & Cycleroutes had brought to the project to get it to the planning stage of the process.

2. Ecological Reports Update

JGri advised the meeting that a productive meeting had been held with Alistair Chapman and Tony Pope to discuss the additional information required for the application following its submission in November 2021, he felt that the project was now moving more closely to where it needs to be for the FODDC planning committee to decide. There is a modest check list of items which need to be addressed prior to September/October with the ancient woodland still causing some concerns but as much of the intended route is on Forestry England (FE) tracks this is a manageable aspect and there will be a manageable set of conditions on the project added following the decision. One aspect is related to the maternity bat roost at the old pin factory site, and this will require some trees to be planted in the hedge adjoining the site, which could be programmed in for autumn planting.

There are also concerns over any potential appeals on the decision following the planning committee. The footbridge at Norchard has been replaced and efforts were made to avoid the use of the public footpath, but the identified land was sold, this usage by the route may give rise to some objections from the householders.

There are six sections to the list of items that need to be addressed and evidenced, this covers:

Ancient Woodland – there is a need to clarify which sections is affected by the route and which trees are programmed to be felled by FE and this to be evidenced in the planning application. There will be some scrub removal undertaken during the construction of the route. CL added that the loss of ground flora which indicates ancient woodland is a concern and work needs to be done with FE to bring forward areas where this ground flora can be re-established and will not be within any work programme for the next decade. There is also the hold objection from the Woodland Trust, this relates to the ancient woodland, and the mitigation measures need to be discussed with them with the aim of lifting this objection.

Bats – a separate construction statement report is being prepared by PA. There is a condition that prior to any tree felling an inspection is undertaken for bats roosts etc.

Dormice – the Greenways ecologist is working with an expert in this field on a statement about Dormice, even though the survey undertaken did not show the presence of Dormice it's an ideal habitat. A licence from Natural England will be required.

Greater Crested Newts – A licence will be required for this species.

Arboriculture – there are concerns around the area of Light Fantastic and the cutting but there is a commitment that this part of the route, from the end of the railway tunnel to Light Fantastic, will be constructed by hand.

Highway Crossings – these are still an issue and although some were designed for the planning application by Greenways these need to be confirmed by GCC Highways. BH asked why the route did not utilise the pavement between Parkend & Whitecroft? JGri added that the path could have been widened to accommodate the cycle route, but they want to achieve more than sitting beside a road for the route and wanted a quiet, tranquil route through the forest. BH also asked if Highways had been asked to design the crossings? Adding that she was happy to be involved with Highways to pursue the road crossings.

3. Management plans post planning approval

PD stated that the real work begins once planning approval has been awarded and wondered if the project was too big for a parish council to lead on and required a multi-disciplinary approach was required along with a project management plan, new terms of reference and funding identified. JGri said this was a standard size project for Greenways and their input was the planning and engineering of the project as well as land assembly, which were in hand and would be concluded after the planning was approved. It is likely to take a couple of years to deliver the project and it could be managed in smaller sections. KC added that procurement rules meant that it could not be split into smaller sections as it would be viewed as cumulative under the procurement regulations.

CL added that the decision was not the end of the planning process, there would be licences for specific species, conditions to discharge and funding would be required but they could spend on behalf of either district or county. BH reminded the group that county had committed a large sum of money to a route between Cheltenham and Bishops Cleeve, which had absorbed the Active Travel funding but was happy to ask about funding for this project.

There followed a discussion about funding raising and where identified funding was available, both BH and AM would find information about grants at county and district. CL added that they were able to spend money as economically as possible. KC advised the group that internal audit had identified the following of procurement regulations as an issue, and that due to the size of this project there is a need to ensure that public money is spent following these rules and that proposed expenditure and costs are monitored against WDPC budgets and that the minutes reflect the reasons, quotations reviewed and approval process for any spend. KC added that her role is to ensure that the parish operate within the law and complies with due process for any spend on any matter, otherwise the parish could be exposed to undue risks.

There was further discussion about the grant awarded from FODDC, about where this could be spent and the split of the monies awarded to the parish, the information contained within Schedule 3- Breakdown of Grant is detailed in the following extract from the grant agreement:

Items of expenditure	Budget (in UK sterling)
Planning, ecology, legal, technical survey, and other professional fees	£25,000
Construction works and bridge installation	£30,000
TOTAL	£55,000

There was discussion about the need to either increase this grant funding or reallocate the items of expenditure, PD asked if FODDC could be contacted regarding this concern. JGri added that a further £5,000 of ecological works had been undertaken since the planning application had been submitted.

The group then discussed the potential timetable for the works when the planning application has been approved. It was proposed that a schedule of works be developed that detailed each phase of the construction and the budgetary requirements with the first works likely to begin in Spring 2023. The urgent action was to finalise the land agreements once the planning had been approved. EH asked about public consultation and getting people on board with the project, JGri added that until approval it was better to be low key and then once approved monthly work parties could be scheduled to encourage public involvement. PD asked if the planned roadshows at Parkend, Whitecroft and Lydney were still part of the consultation process, EH added this needed to wait until the planning had been given approval.

The discussion then moved onto the need for a small delivery group, as a sub-group of the steering group, to ensure that the project is delivered. PD felt that the steering group had enough momentum to get through to the new year and then a consortium could be established with all parties to continue the project.

PD one again thanked JGri and CL for their work in steering this project.

4. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held after the FODDC planning committee with an agreed date of Thursday 1st December 2022 at 2pm via Google Meet being set – this has been emailed to the steering group.