

**Dean Forest Greenway Steering Group Meeting 20th April 2023 –
Called to apprise the steering group of WDPC discussion and decision.**

Meeting held via Google Meet

Present –

Cllrs B Hoyland (GCC), Cllr J Richmond (WDPC), Cllr J Greenwood (LTC), W Barnet (DFR), P Andrews, Cllr A Moore (WDPC), J Grimshaw, R Sanderson, Cllr P Hiett (FODDC), S Freeman, E Highfield, T Sagar, Cllr P Dunford (WDPC) & Cllr S Dunford (WDPC)

Clerk – K Carpenter

Cllr P Dunford opened the meeting stating it was a short agenda to update the steering group of the decision taken by West Dean Parish Council at its meeting held on 29th March 2023. A short paper was prepared by the clerk detailing the options for the DFG planning application which was presented by Cllr P Dunford to enable Council to consider the four options proposed.

The option presented for Council's consideration are detailed below:

1. We could seek to provide an adequate justification of the "wholly exceptional circumstances" that demonstrates this route is in the national interest.
2. We could amend the application to avoid the disturbance of any 'Ancient Woodland' that is along the route/valley.
3. We could leave the application in its current form and allow it to be presented to the FODDC Planning Committee for consideration, with an officer's recommendation of refusal.
4. Or we could withdraw the application.

The Council meeting voted 5:4 to select option 2 with some abstentions.

There was much discussion about the decision to pursue option 2 and how this could be achieved fairly easily between Parkend and Whitecroft, but the Norchard Woodland avoidance would provide a more challenging and difficult solution. JG talked about the route using the flood plain but there would be a requirement for land from some of the property owners which would present a significant challenge.

There was some discussion about utilising some of the current Forestry England access roads and paths and the potential to dig out the silt filled mill ponds to assist in flood alleviation, but this would still require a major revision of the route down to The Cut. JG added that he would be happy to pull some notes together on this aspect, but Greenways & Cycleroutes were not able to undertake a major revision of the route without support from district and county council policy.

Cllr Hoyland asked if there was some value in breaking the route into two sections and working on them as discreet but connected projects to instal the route? There was some discussion about the potential for this to happen and Cllr Hoyland offered to gain support from GCC.

S Freeman questioned the next stage of the project and whether a steering group consisting of GCC, FODDC, WDPC, LTC and others should not be formed to continue this project? There was some general agreement that it was time to move forward and perhaps a community interest company could be established to facilitate the project. This was seen as a positive step by the steering group.

FOI – Doonaree, about Norchard Wood.

WDPC had received further correspondence from Doonaree about the flags and dormouse monitoring tubes in Norchard Woodland, it was agreed by the steering group that an action plan would be developed to remove these items. Subsequently J Linden contacted the Clerk to advise that the flags and dormouse boxes would be removed from the woodland within the next month. This information was shared with Doonaree.

The meeting then moved to discuss the more procedural matters of advising FODDC planning of the decision taken by WDPC to amend the route, JG offered to undertake this task. There was also a discussion about advising the landowners of the decision taken and what would happen, JG offered to write the required letter and liaise with S Freeman about their delivery.

S Freeman asked if the proposal to extend the steering group could be formalised as a recommendation to WDPC? Cllr P Hiett agreed that the steering group be reset and moved away from WDPC.

There was a question about budget allocations, currently £9.5k remaining with WDPC, the grant of £30k from FODDC for engineering and bridge works is in an earmarked budget (this via a signed grant agreement between FODDC & WDPC) and any commitment from Lydney Town Council would need to be clarified.

The formal recommendation from the steering group is that the current group be reformed with representatives from Gloucestershire CC, Forest of Dean District, West Dean, Lydney Town and other community members.

There was much thanks to Cllr P Dunford for his time as Chair of the steering group and he in turn thanked Greenways & Cycleroutes for their knowledge and expertise that helped get a route identified and a planning application submitted for consideration.

The meeting closed at 14:14