

Freshford Parish Council

Meeting on Monday, 14th October, Memorial Hall, Freshford .

Report to Councillors

The Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership

I attended the meeting at Trowbridge held on the 27th September. It had been organised by GWR under the chairmanship of Dan Okey and brought together the usual representatives of the volunteer force from nearly all the stations on the HOW line.

While the draft Minutes have yet to be circulated here are the main points which emerged.

1. The HOW Community Rail Partnership is to be disbanded. New arrangements are to be put in place for Somerset and Dorset, the Wiltshire stations are likely to become part of the TransWilts Rail Partnership and Freshford is to come under the umbrella of the Severnside Community Rail Trust.

2. GWR are committed to ensuring that the voice of the volunteers will be heard. To that end they propose that the meetings of volunteers will continue to be held as now. GWR will make the arrangements for the meetings and will fund the lunch, the hire of rooms and provide travel vouchers for volunteers wishing to attend. The HOW Rail Partnership may be at an end but GWR still wish to promote the Heart of Wessex brand and see the work of the volunteers as vital and invaluable.

3. GWR have put funds into the HOW CRP for this financial year and any requests for funding should be directed to Andrew Wiles of Somerset Council who is at least for the time being the HOW co-ordinator. It may be that we can secure some final funding for the Station gardens for next year, After that we should probably look to Severnside for continued funding but first we will need to establish contacts and get a clear picture of just how things stand.

4. New High Viz jackets are on their way but unfortunately were not ready in time to be distributed last Friday. Over 1000 jackets have been ordered for the volunteer force up and down the Line and it is indicative of the scale of volunteer activity. The jackets should be distributed within the next week or so and I have advised local co-ordinator Rowena Wood accordingly. The Station volunteers here at Freshford have shown considerable commitment in their efforts throughout the Spring and Summer - on the last occasion a record number of 15 came to lend a hand.

The arrangements for the future are not yet fully settled but my view is that the Parish Council should support the thrust of the proposals and seek to establish a good and effective working relationship with the Severnside Rail Trust. The separate but continuing commitment offered by GWR to host and maintain regular meetings with the volunteers on the HOW line is a welcome and positive adjunct and provides the certainty that we were all looking for to ensure that the voice of volunteers will continue to be voiced and valued.

NJS.
7th October 2019.