

Freshford Railway Station – Meeting with Severnside Community Rail Partnership

Purpose

To receive notes of a meeting held by Severnside Rail Partnership regarding support for Freshford Station and to consider Freshford Parish Council becoming a member of the Community Rail Network to support the work of Freshford Station Friends to access grants and funding.

Meeting

Cllrs Adler and Stevens attended a meeting about Freshford Station held by Severnside Rail Partnership and attended by Rowena Wood representing Freshford Station Friends, Cllr Neil Butters and representatives from GWR. The notes of this meeting are attached below.

Membership of the Community Rail Network

It is proposed that Freshford Parish Council becomes a member of the Community Rail Network to enable Freshford Station Friends to access funding and grants. If Freshford Parish Council do not feel it's appropriate to take on this role then an alternative might be to ask the Friends of Freshford if they could do this.

The structure of station maintenance is changing and the volunteers who currently maintain the Freshford station garden are in need of a body to process the funds for their activities.

Funding is by financial year, and an application for funding needs to be made annually.

The obvious candidates are either Friends of Freshford or the Parish Council. There are benefits for the Parish Council to take the lead on this as there will be access to other schemes and sources of funding for activities. Also, there is work underway looking at making stations more accessible, and Freshford Station is on the list of candidates.

The enabler is to become a member of the Community Rail Network, and this fee will be paid by Severnside. It was said at the meeting that this approach is used elsewhere.

The requirement for funding is for the hire of a professional gardener to define the planting plan for the year.

Potential overheads:

- Application to become a member of the Community Rail Network (funded by Severnside)
- 2 Applications per year for funding – this would be largely completed by Rowena Wood and/or John Ager, and Severnside are happy to support this
- Receipt of funds
- Payment of invoices using those funds
- Managing a ring-fenced small fund – just a handful of payments, at most.

Freshford Station Community Rail Introductions

Held on 17th February at 14:00 on Zoom

Notes from Meeting

1. **In attendance** Lewis Ward, Emma Morris, Nicole Black (GWR) Keith Walton, Heather Cullimore, Ro James (Sevenside Community Rail Partnership) John Adler, Nick Stevens (Freshford Parish Council) Rowena Wood (Freshford Station Friend) Cllr Neil Butters (B&NES Joint Cabinet Member for Transport Services)

2. **GWR update in relation to support for Community Rail**

Lewis Ward explained that GWR have adapted the business in light of Covid19. Services are run to a reduced timetable. The Franchise is being run under a Government Emergency Measures Agreement, in place until 26th June 2021. GWR now supports 10 Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs), including the recently established Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and South West Wales Connected CRPs. The new South Wessex CRP is being set up and likely to employ a part time Community Rail Officer. The Heart of Wessex Brand will remain. Dan Okey is arranging brand meetings.

Emma Morris said that funding for community rail projects and station adoption groups is available on financial year basis and GWR are waiting to receive confirmation from the DfT around the availability for funding for 2021/22. Funding still available to station adoption groups for the 2020/21 financial year in the new GWR Community Cohesion Fund.

Nicole Black introduced her new role of Community Rail Partnership Relationship Manager.

3. **Sevenside Community Rail Partnership overview**

Keith Walton explained the Sevenside CRP is a Community Interest Company and has continued to deliver activity albeit in an adapted fashion during the pandemic. The Partnership Annual Progress Report, including a full set of accounts will be published shortly and will be forwarded to those attending the meeting. Sevenside CRP is represented on WECA's Strategic Rail Group (**Post meeting note** – this group is currently progressing a feasibility study for step free access to stations, and the delivery of enhancements under DfT Access for All mid-tier funding WECA to provide improved wayfinding, seating and shelters for seven station including Freshford). The Partnership encourages station adoption groups to become members of the national Community Rail Network, and sponsors annual membership fees.

Heather Cullimore informed the meeting of the recently introduced annual DfT accreditation process for Community Rail Partnership. The varied programme of activity delivered by the Sevenside CRP is designed under the key pillars of the DfT Strategy for Community Rail – providing a voice for the community, promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel, bringing communities together and supporting diversity and inclusion and supporting social and economic development. Heather explained the benefits to station groups of becoming members of the Community Rail Network which includes access to the Small Grant Fund and training and networking events.

Ro James said that as Volunteer Coordinator she is the first point of contact for station adoption groups, delivers 'On-Boarding' sessions for new volunteers, provides general

support and advice - including with grant applications, and creates and circulates a monthly newsletter for volunteers.

4. **Update from Freshford community**

John Adler and Nick Stevens praised the excellent work of the community gardeners at the station over the past 15 years. A professional gardener has developed the garden and supported volunteers over the years, under a £750.00 annual grant from the Heart of Wessex CRP. Nick and Rowena hoped this grant could continue without the need for submitting application forms.

Rowena Wood explained the garden has been planted in such a way that it is fully sustainable and does not require watering, other than for planting in and the water butt attached to the shelter is sufficient for this purpose. The gardening group is not a constituted group and does not have a bank account.

5. **The next steps**

Both GWR and Severnside CRP explained that any project funding from their organisations (and the Community Rail Network) is allocated on a financial year basis and it is not possible to offer a longer -term funding commitment.

Funding for 2020/21 is available via the GWR Community Cohesion Fund.

It was recommended Freshford Parish Council become members of the Community Rail Network and will therefore be eligible for funding for the station group. John and Nick offered to explore this option.

The Severnside Community Rail Partnership offered to support the group to complete any funding applications.

All present at the meeting acknowledge the tremendous efforts of the gardening group for developing and maintaining an outstanding station garden.

6. **Any other business**

Cllr Butters said the running-in board at Freshford station has Rail Heritage Designation.

Ro James said the Severnside Community Rail Partnership is hosting some virtual events for volunteers, including an upcoming talk from West Country CrimeStoppers. She has arranged some virtual social events for station groups and would be pleased to do this for Freshford.