



# West Somerset Railway P.L.C

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19<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Mr Frank Courtney  
Chairman  
West Somerset Railway Association  
The Railway Station  
Bishops Lydeard  
Taunton  
Somerset TA4 3BX

Dear Frank

Thank you to you and your colleagues for the opportunity of meeting with Chris Bolt, Steve Williams and myself last Friday 11<sup>th</sup> to discuss a number of issues regarding the working arrangements with the Association going forward. I thought it might be helpful if I would summarise the key points of discussion and agreement on actions to be taken in this letter, which confirms my earlier draft of 13th March 2016.

## Governance

We reiterated that the formal position of the PLC Board has been that we will not engage with the Association Trustees until the governance issues that we have identified are resolved to the satisfaction of the PLC and Association members. Following recent significant progress made since you became chairman, however, I was given delegated authority by the board as PLC Chairman, together with relevant Directors to hold discussions with yourself and new Trustees on matters of mutual interest in order to help resolve these WSRA governance issues and the implementation of the Coombes Report. You summarised the actions that the new interim Trustees were taking to resolve current governance issues and I am happy to confirm that the PLC has supported the steps being taken in that regard, and will continue to do so. You confirmed that it is your intention to try to meet the requirements specified for your AGM and EGMS

We therefore agreed to discuss resolution of immediate concerns over your activities at Williton, together with exploring views on how we develop an agreed strategy going forward to help WSRA regain its reputation and position as a key support partner within the WSR family.

## **Williton**

We reconfirmed that the PLC will not be renewing the current licence for Restorations to use the Swindon Shed when it expires in mid May 2016. However, in order to provide you with the opportunity to sustain business continuity and for the purposes of reassuring and briefing staff and informing customers, we said that you could continue to use the Shed and that we will review the position with you on a three monthly rolling basis. Steve Williams indicated that the PLC has some immediate needs for shared use of the Shed and that in order to be able to assess these against your own commercial requirements, Simon Stretton will provide Steve with your business objectives over the next 12 months and the amount of space required to deliver them. Steve will then discuss this with our Operational Executive and we can then consider how to organise things going forward and agree specific appropriate joint use during the rolling review periods.

With regard to the longer term role of Williton, Steve Williams summarised the progress with the Williton Strategic Development Group thinking and the future role of Williton as a strategic engineering centre for the railway together with that of a Brunel GWR country passing station. Simon confirmed that this was in line with Restorations views of the future use of the site. We indicated some of the potential changes that may occur, for example the Goods Shed and this might be something that the Association would be interested in supporting in due course. Steve referred to the WSRA "vision" document prepared by the previous Trustees and it was agreed that this would be sent to Simon for review and to Paul for consideration at the Trustees meeting on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup>.

Steve will now reconvene the Williton Site Development Group (SDG) established under the Partnership Development Group (PDG) and you confirmed that Simon will be the Restorations/Association representative on the working group. We will also work with you on evaluating any proposals which affect Williton and which may also arise from the consideration by yourselves and your members of the recommendations for implementation of the Coombes report.

## **Bishops Lydeard**

We agreed the necessary actions around security of station buildings and facilities and that these would be undertaken immediately both by the PLC and WSRA managers. With regard to the strategic development of the site, we agreed that:

- the Association Trustees will consider WSRA accommodation needs in terms of the replacement of Brunel House at its meeting on Tuesday and will advise Steve Williams as Chairman of PDG Bishops Lydeard SDG of the outputs. The PLC would then review whether this could be considered by any changes that might be possible to the current planning application.
- Steve will provide a copy of the Steam Trust/WSRA vision document to Paul in order for the Trustees to review this and to confirm that it is in line with Association requirements. The outcome to be notified to Steve by 7/4/16 in time for the agenda and papers for the next BL SDG (14th April). It was confirmed that Jacque Green would be the Association representative on the SDG.

## **Norton Fitzwarren**

The Association will continue to allow the PLC to run trains on the triangle and the Association Trustees will consider the triangle running agreement and give a formal response to the PLC through Chris Bolt as soon as possible, leading to a signed running agreement.

Chris Bolt indicated that the PLC was prepared to be flexible and sympathetic in relation to stone trains and other invoice settlements in light of the financial governance and cash flow problems being faced by the new Trustees.

In terms of the strategic future of the Norton site, the new Trustees were well aware of the deadlines of planning consent for return of the site to its original state and/or proposals for alternative use. Trustees will be considering this and will want to consult with the PLC and other railway organisation stakeholders around options in due course.

In a more general sense, I reiterate the previously made offer with regard to PLC Directors and managers being happy and willing (on a topic specific basis) to support and work with yourself, the new Trustees and company secretary in looking at short and medium-term organisational development issues as and when WSRA need such support. This would be within my current delegated authority as previously mentioned.

Paul Whitehouse kindly confirmed in his letter of 16<sup>th</sup> March that this was a good summary of our discussions and agreed actions, and that your trustees' meeting of 15th accepted the terms of my draft letter, which are reconfirmed herein, as a basis of our agreement. Chris informed our board today that Paul has now also confirmed that the Norton agreement has been approved for execution. The PLC board also fully endorsed this letter and our agreed approach, and that therefore that this letter defines the terms of our agreement on these matters.

I can also confirm that the board is happy for this letter to be published as a means to help develop the improved transparency for the wider WSR stakeholders that I know we are both committed to.

Yours sincerely



John Irven

Chairman, WSR PLC

cc Chris Bolt, Steve Williams, Simon Stretton, Michael Rowe and Paul Whitehouse

*Book online at [www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk](http://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk)*