

Melksham Railway Development Group

Melksham Rail User Group

Melksham

rail user group

Minutes

24th June 2016 at 19:30

Melksham Town Hall

Present

Alan Baines	<i>MWPC</i>	John Hamley	<i>Secretary</i>
Peter Blackburn	<i>Chairman</i>	Kevin Hayes	
Rolf Brindle	<i>MWPC</i>	Helen Matthews	
Graham Ellis	<i>Vice-Chair</i>	Micheal Matthews	
Lisa Ellis		Paul McQuillan	
Lee Fletcher	<i>TW CIC</i>	John Money	<i>Treasurer</i>
Judith Gradwell		Paul Johnson	<i>Chair TWCIC</i>
		Tom Steward	

Apologies

John Glover *MWPC*
Eddy Watts

Actions in bold.

1. Minutes of meeting 23rd April 2016

- Minutes of previous meeting approved (proposed John Money, seconded Peter Blackburn).
- Matters Arising covered in body of meeting.

2. Refocus MRDG to become a User Group

- PB referred to the meeting of 24th April 2016, at which it had been proposed the MRDG role evolved from 'Development' to become a User Group:
 - The group would be renamed 'Melksham Rail User Group' (abbreviated to MRUG)
 - It would concentrate of improving the station, and especially to act as a representative of the station users to the TW CIC and also provide a prime conduit for issues/comments from users to the relevant organisations.
 - Lobbying for service improvements on the line as a whole would become vested in the TWCIC.
 - MRUG would act as 'Friend' of the station carrying such activities as plant maintenance etc.
- In this role, MRDG/MRUG had been praised by Mark Hopwood, Managing Director of GWR, and continued support from GWR has been offered.
- A new constitution had been drafted, which would be refined over the next few months, but was offered as a basis for ongoing activities. (*Attached to minutes*)
- **It was agreed that MRDG would be refocussed to MRUG and the draft constitution adopted (proposed Peter Blackburn, (seconded Rolf Brindle. Unanimous agreement from all present was given.**
 - At a suitable time bank accounts and other relevant documentary changes would be implemented
- To reflect the achievements of MRDG over its twenty-year lifetime which has had a significant impact on the decision to run the current service, the chairman of TWCIC, Paul Johnson, presented MRDG with a glass commemorative container, which will be displayed in the Melksham History Museum. The Chairman of MRDG, on behalf of all present, thanked Paul for this very welcome gift.
 - It was most appropriate that original Chairman, Alan Baines, had joined us for this meeting. Alan had initiated the process that led to MRDG and the subsequent service success.

3. Review of Station and Interface to TransWilts CIC

- The chairman of TWCIC discussed the current plans for major works at the station as part of the service enhancements.
 - The TW service is expected to have 'designated' status in the next few months. This opens a route to funding that may be required for these works.
 - With this status, a methodology for communication on station issues is required, which is a role that MRUG will fulfil.
- As passenger numbers had increased to a level where standing was necessary on peak services, additional capacity was needed. Current extrapolations forecast 300,000 journeys to/from Melksham in the next five years.
 - To accommodate this, GWR propose the use cascaded 2 car trains from 2018. This will necessitate platform extensions at Melksham in 2017. Planning for this extension is complex, as numerous areas of the station have different ownership.
- Whilst extending the platform, other enhancements should be actively pursued (at least passive provision made for them), including
 - Northern access to Foundry Close (which will also provide a better interchange route with the Chippenham / Melksham buses)
 - Improved access via Murray Walk
 - Bus route through station to Foundry Close
 - Reopened footbridge from Bath Rd (southern access)
 - Passing loop at station sufficient for passenger trains, later extended to longer loop for freight trains (probably mid/late 2020s).
 - Additional signal midway between Thingly and Trowbridge to allow two trains in the same direction
 - Improved subway access, and making the underpass more inviting
 - Expanded waiting facilities (in response to questions from users)

4. Station Issues

- Information presentation
 - Station display not often working, thought to be a result of the GSM connection.
 - Banner displays typically found at other stations would be ideal.
 - Ideally a remotely driven public address system should be provided.
- The sign pointing to the town centre has been relocated to the cycle racks, making it more effective.
- The (unused) 'bicycle houses' should be removed, to make space for another station bench.
- **Rolf Brindle** and **Eddy Watts** continue to maintain parts of the station in their role as 'friends'.
- The TVM is invaluable but
 - needs a facility to expand the text for those with visual problems (raised at the meeting by a user in the new role of MRUG)
 - is still unusable in bright weather (in which case, users should purchase tickets from the train supervisor)
 - offers full fare tickets when the next train is the first off-peak train
- The platform shelter needs to be larger (raised at the meeting by a user in the new role of MRUG)
- The car park has a very untidy appearance due to lack of litter collection.
 - The Upsite area (opposite platform also has a disreputable appearance but we do not have authority to access that area to clear it.

5. Trans Wilts Rail Partnership (TWCRP) and Community Interest Company (TWCIC)

TW issues consider the services and general issues for the entire TW corridor. The following summary lists the key issues that relate directly to the Melksham service.

- Members of MRUG were encouraged to become members of the TWCIC (registration is possible via the TWCIC website), individual subscription is £5 and there is also a corporate subscription.
- TWCIC is now including 'connected' public transport issues in the area, and bus services form a key element. A relatively cost effective proposal has been presented by TW to senior WC councillors in response to the proposed cutbacks. The TWCIC are pressing for retention of many of the bus services particularly late night services which complement the train service.
- Overcrowding on the rail service at times has led to criticism of the service, although this can be seen as a reflection of the high demand from passengers.
- Numerous anomalies on ticket pricing from Melksham have been noted (raised at the meeting by a user in the new role of MRUG)
- Progress on the case for platform enhancement, especially the new platform at Chippenham for local services was discussed (in response to questions from the users). It was emphasised that TWCIC (and MRUG) should concentrate on the objective (e.g. hourly train service), as the how (e.g. junction mods at Thingy and platform capacity) could be better addressed by Network rail as part of overall upgrade plan.
 - A 'strapline for station enhancements has emerged, '1 2 3 4 5', referring to platform 1 at Melksham, 2 new platforms at Corsham, new platform 3 for TW trains at Chippenham, reopened platform 4 at Westbury and reopened additional platform at Salisbury (to facilitate Waterloo-Wilton trains)
- A survey, probably 16/17/18 July, is being planned to analyse passenger routings and aspirations. This could be similar to that carried out in 2014. **Members of MRUG should contact Graham Ellis if they can help.**
- Go-Coop, an open access rail company, are considering implementing a new service from Taunton to Nuneaton via the TW corridor. This company were looking at a similar service some years ago. It would provide many more no-change opportunities from Melksham.
- Other key targets that improve the benefits of the Melksham station that are being addressed include:
 - Station opening/enhancement at Wilton Parkway and Corsham.
 - Through trains from Swindon to Salisbury/Southampton airport/Southampton.
- Further disruptions to services is foreseen in Easter 2017 with services not running between Bath and Bristol. This will result in the Cardiff – Portsmouth service again being diverted as a Swindon-Portsmouth service, with a two hourly stop frequency at Melksham. There is a possibility that 'via Melksham' tickets will only be valid for trains that stop at Melksham. This is under review.

6. Banking

- **Rolf Brindle is proceeding with opening a regular cheque based account at HSBC.** Ideally all cheques would require two signatures, although a low limit value for single signed cheques might be possible.
- Current banking regulations require considerable paperwork to ensure the account is being used for legitimate purposes, and this is taking some time.
- **Both HSBC and the Coventry BS will be advised of our new name in due course (John Money – Coventry and Rolf Brindle HSBC).**

7. Finance

- A grant application has been made to MTC, applications close on 31st July. MRUG appreciate the financial and other support from this council.
- Payment of £268 from Westbury TIC for the Santa trip 2014 has yet to be received.

8. AOB

- It was noted that 2016 is a significant milestone for MRDG, which was first active in 1996, and has been pressing in this time for the rail services we are now seeing. It is hoped that this milestone can be marked by another step forward, namely designation of the service.
- To mark the Queen's 90th birthday, a display of station photos coupled with those of the Queen, was held at the station recently. This was very successful and the team which built the display was commended.

9. Next meeting dates

- Friday 30 September 2016
- Friday 25 November 2016

Note also

- 20 June 2016 *TransWilts will be represented at Canberra promoting activities for older people in the community area including trips by train (13:00 to 16:00)*
- 9 July 2016 *West Wilts Rail User Group trip to Swindon*
- 16/17/18 July 2016 *Passenger surveys (see above) of all TransWilts users*
- 23 July 2016 *Conducted ramble from Melksham Station (at 10 a.m.) to Trowbridge lead by WessexWanderers.*
- 23 July 2016 *Melksham Carnival, MRUG has a walking group in the parade*
- 1 October 2016 *Travelwatch South West, Taunton*
- 4 December 2016 *Santa special from Melksham*