

Report on the Purbeck Transport Action Group Meeting

10th May 2022

1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

Nick Ward (Chair, PCRCP), Debbie Weller (Treasurer), Tony Smale (Wool), Alex Brocklesby (NT), Richard Wade (More Bus), Helen Reed (Community Transport, Nordcat) (part), Mike Whitwam (Swanage Town Councillor, PCRCP, Swanage Railway), John Williamson (Wareham), Beryl Ezzard (Vice Chair, Dorset Councillor, PCRCP) (part)

2. Purbeck Transport Plan

Nick briefed the Purbeck Transport Plan in outline. Debbie congratulated the authors on the production of this plan. Nick advised that despite the lack of funding for Dorset's Bus Service Improvement Plan from the Government's Bus Back Better fund, the Enhanced Partnerships would still go ahead. Nick confirmed issue 10 of the Purbeck Transport Plan will include the latest updates including to bus routes. He requested agreement to the plan once these updates are reviewed.

Helen S raised that a hub in The Square in Corfe Castle Square would need to be carefully considered as this is both busy and congested, and so inclusion of this should be in very tentative terms at present. Use of Station Road and the station car park instead was suggested; Mike advised this is all Dorset Council land. There is not much space as there are car parking spaces leased to Swanage Railway and local residents, and the road is relatively busy due to these vehicles as well as to / from the coal yard and the rear entrance to the hotel. Either site in Corfe would present problems.

Apart from these adjustments the plan was agreed for further circulation once updated.

3. Purbeck Heaths Sustainable Tourism Plan

Alex briefed the origins of the Purbecks Heaths project in terms of funding of the single grazing unit, plus the Sustainable Tourism Plan, the map leaflet and the website. The map includes bus routes, National Cycle Routes, train services and walking routes, and includes 6 visitor hubs – Knoll Beach, Arne, Purbeck Park / Norden, Blue Pool, Brownsea Island and Burnbake. Interpretation panels have also been provided at key locations. Pages 19 and 20 of the Sustainable Tourism Plan cover the Low Carbon and Travel Plan. National Trust are following up on the active and sustainable travel outcomes from the plan.

The RSPB tourist bus was raised, and Alex advised she thought the RSPB would be providing a leaflet in due course.

The plan includes reconsidering a congestion charge on the A351, and Helen questioned whether this had been positively received. Alex has raised this with Dorset Highways and they advised this has been raised before. Beryl confirmed this was discussed, possibly as long ago as 10 years ago, and if it is still being proposed now perhaps this or a tourist charge could be followed up to reduce congestion.

4. Bus Service Improvement Plan

Beryl advised Dorset Council have queried why Dorset were not awarded any funding when authorities neighbouring Dorset received some, and this was due to lack of ambition, cutting fares by 50% and a monorail through a town were featured in other BSIPs. However, there is likely to be a chance for more funding in 6 months' time.

5. Rail services

Mike, speaking for himself, briefed that he was very disappointed that trains would not be running to Wareham this year. One of the reasons was the hourly mainline service, but this is reverting to a half hourly service shortly. Also Swanage Town Council are predicting a bumper staycation year due to busiest ever year for beach hut rentals. Apparently Dorset Council are starting to express concern about the lack of this service that they have investing millions in.

Beryl also expressed disappointment. It seems that steam heritage services are being prioritised over the Wareham service. The ORR Safety Certificate has not yet been issued, but the trains are ready.

Helen S advised that Corfe Castle Parish Council are not happy that the service to Wareham is once again not running this year, and are going to invite a Swanage Railway representative to come to explain to the Council why.

Helen S asked what work was being contracted, was it drivers, guards, signalmen, but Beryl advised all those staff are volunteers. Mike advised drivers and guards need main line training, but thought this could be completed relatively quickly. It is the Safety Case that is being completed by contractors.

Helen S suggested that a fundraising campaign could be started for this service, as there is mentioned of such a fundraising initiative on the Swanage Railway website, but was advised that this was now closed. Beryl suggested this was the Project Wareham fund. It was suggested that this could be reopened, or another fund could be created to try to expedite getting the service operating.

The general consensus was to try to influence Swanage Railway to reconsider the service this year.

6. Active Travel

Nick reported some progress on cycle routes such as Norden to Corfe and to Rempstone / Studland. Safe routes to schools are being looked at, including Northbrook Road, but not the High Street to St Marks / Swanage School, which is disappointing.

The status of the Norden – Corfe cycle route was discussed, and Helen S suggested it might be worth looking into an alternative route via the existing path alongside the railway, which could then continue and drop down on the same side of the railway before looping round under the railway bridge to then access the National Trust Car Park. Mike confirmed that the undergrowth there was cut back by Swanage Railway.

Beryl suggested inviting the Dorset Council officer to come to a PTAG meeting to give an update. Beryl and Nick are to discuss Norden – Corfe cycle route outside the meeting, including the possible alternative route.

7. Speed limits

Nick briefed the outcome of the Place and Resources Committee discussion of the new 20mph speed limit report, which following pressure from groups and the public was sent back for further work.

The proposed change from 40mph to 30mph between Swanage and just beyond the junction with the Langton Road was also discussed, this is something Swanage Town Council have wanted for some time.

There is a consultation about this on Dorset Council's Traffic Regulation Order web page, and people can comment to support this speed change, which is reported to be likely to happen.

8. Other matters

Richard Wade advised that there will be a More Bus Service 35 this year running between Wareham caravan parks, including into Swanage via Harman's Cross. This means there will be a half hourly bus service between Swanage and Corfe Castle. This will run from 28th May, leaflets will be available soon.

Due to funding, the Durlston shuttle will only run during the school holidays, but this is better than the service not running at all.

Nick suggested that the next meeting be arranged in September, which might be a 4pm meeting to incorporate part of the working day. The date is to be finalised outside of the Planet Purbeck Festival.

Report by Cllr Helen Sumbler, 10/5/22.