

# **Sampford Courtenay Parish Council**

Report for meeting on 1st February 2022

## **Subject: Update and proposals for Sampford Courtenay Station Working Group**

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Prepared by: Cllr Wilson

### **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Cllr Wilson and the Parish Clerk were invited to a meeting with representatives of Network Rail and other organisations/groups with interest in the newly opened Dartmoor Line.
- 1.2 The meeting (one of a number) held on Wednesday 12th January 2022 took place at Sampford Courtenay Station and allowed attendees to hear the current position from the Programme Director Christian Urwin.
- 1.3 It also allowed attendees the opportunity to again look at the current state of Sampford Courtenay Station and discuss the future opportunities for the station.
- 1.4 The current situation of the project remains the same as previously presented by Network Rail, Sampford Courtenay Station is not part of the initial phases of the government contract however whilst it remains unused there is opportunity for a community rail initiative to provide maintenance of the station through a community licence.

### **2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 Network rail managers set out a clear picture of where the programme of the reopening the Dartmoor Line has reached.
- 2.2 There is a very positive and optimistic outlook for the service which has, since its initiation in December 2021, exceeded all targets for the use of the line.
- 2.3 Mr Urwin outlined clearly that at present, as has been presented previously, the first phase of the programme is now complete, and as per the contract awarded, the next phase will be to move to an hourly service, which has calculated into the timetable the introduction of a stop at the Okehampton Parkway when in place in the future. He reinforced that these were the predicated conditions of the government grant which has seen the service re-opening and upon which the success criteria will be measured.
- 2.4 Official announcement is due that the launch of the hourly service from Okehampton Station will take place on 22 May 2022.

- 2.5 Brief discussion was had regarding any consideration for adapting this timetable to allow a stop at Sampford Courtenay but this cannot be delivered within the current contract.
- 2.6 Whilst there will be little opportunity to deviate from the current weekday contract arrangements, feasibility is being explored to consider the introduction of a Sunday service from Sampford Courtenay Station. This study by Network rail would need to take into account the additional costs for the upgrade of the current facilities at the station to meet National standards. It was also noted that the cost benefit would need to be considered when the statistics from the anecdotal use of the previous Sunday service only saw an average of 8 users per day using the service.
- 2.7 Attendees were also able to hear proposals and views from other interested groups. Cllr Coleman introduced Mr James McIlwraith, as the Chief Executive Officer of the newly formed Sampford Courtenay Rail Community Partnership. This initiative sits as Specific Priority 1 within Cllr Coleman's Sampford Courtenay CIC activities.
- 2.8 It was interesting to hear the broad proposals of this Rail Community Partnership which includes looking to achieve a self sustaining business setup on the station platform, that does not rely solely on volunteers and that will ensure funding for community services and support to be delivered through a future plan to have new buildings constructed on the station platform when it is re-opened to the public.
- 2.9 It was acknowledged and applauded by Christian Urwin of Network Rail the enthusiasm and interest from the various groups for the re-opening of the station and aspirations for providing future services from the station platform, but explained that the primary purpose of their current visit and consultation was about the maintenance and upkeep of the station during the period while feasibility for re-opening was taking place.
- 2.10 Following consultation with the Customer Support Manager (Community Rail) there is a clear opportunity for the existing Sampford Courtenay Parish Council groups (including the Working Group for the Station, SCEnSus, as well as the Past Present & Future initiative) to apply to adopt the un-operational Station platform and car parking area.
- 2.11 This will include the authorisation under an annual Communities Licence issued by Western Route Community Rail Panel who are already supportive of the proposal.
- 2.12 Approval will enable appropriately trained volunteers to undertake work on the station platform and would be incorporated into the SCEnSus parish clean ups.
- 2.13 Once adopted SCPC could apply to be members of Community Rail Network which gives the group access to grant schemes of up to £1000 and other benefits too. In order to access the funding an annual membership fee of £25 would be payable.

### **3. OPTIONS AND PROPOSALS**

- 3.1 The first proposal from the Sampford Courtenay Station working Group would be for SCPC to make the formal application through the Customer support Manager to obtain an Annual Communities Licence for Sampford Courtenay Station.

- 3.2 The second Proposal would be for SCEnSus to co-ordinate the activities undertaken through this Licence
- 3.3 The third Proposal would be for funding from the Sampford Courtenay Station Working Group EMR be used to fund the annual membership of the Community Rail Network in order that further funding to support the initiative can be applied for.