

Registered charity No. 1166492

[www.fromesmissinglinks.org.uk](http://www.fromesmissinglinks.org.uk)

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**9th June 2020 at 7.30 pm**

**on Zoom**

**Zoom Host:** Sam Robinson

**Present:** Trustees Rich Ackroyd, Tricia Golinski, Ruth Knagg, Grant Gellatly, Chris Green, Adrian Warren and 12 supporters/members of the public

**No apologies**

**Introductions** were made of trustees and other key players.

**Chairman’s report**

Rich gave the following report of the past year’s activities:

Thank you to all of our supporters for their continued efforts on our behalf. Frome’s Missing Links would be nothing without the resilience and involvement of our local people and that special Frome togetherness that we all love so much.

It’s worth reminding people that Frome’s Missing Links registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in January 2016 and campaigns for better and safer walking and cycling routes in Frome and better connections to neighbouring towns and villages. The goal is to develop traffic-free routes with gentle gradients suitable for all ages and abilities – including specifically to fill in the sections of national cycle routes that are currently still dangerous, but not to exclude any other users such as horse riders and mobility scooters.

Like all organisations, Frome’s Missing Links has had to adapt quickly this year to changes brought about by the Covid-19 crisis. Despite setbacks, we remain optimistic. Our cash reserves have held steady and ever more preparation and development work has again gone on behind the scenes. Once again, volunteers have continued to build community support through a variety of fundraising efforts such as the School Travel Challenge (working with Frome Town Council), another Ceilidh, a successful Independent Market and attendance at events such as Mendip’s Climate Emergency strategy launch evening. We have also made an application to the Places to Ride fund, which we hope will help us to finance the completion of Phase 3 below.

Again, the wonderful Friday Crew have continued their efforts, which this year included helping FTC staff to install lighting at the Dippy, creating important wildlife meadows at Buckland Bridge and the creation of new fencing and hedgerows in Whatcombe. We are indebted to all of our volunteers, from those who help to publicise our efforts to those who rattle tins and fundraise – nothing would be possible without this tremendous level of public support.

With a wider community view, the trustees have been working with Connect Chapmanslade and helping them to develop their plans for a link to Frome, Warminster and Westbury. Trustees have also offered advice to a group in Wincanton looking to develop the old railway line to Bruton. Both are very promising developments and show how far the idea of creating safe routes has become embedded in the public’s thinking.

The ongoing saga that is Phase 2 rolls on. Having gained Network Rail ‘engineering clearance’ to proceed we then lost the possibility of leasing a vital strip of farmland. Happily neighbouring landowners have offered an alternative route and we have engaged Sustrans to do the planning needed to complete this section. So, three steps forward and two back, but that is one step in the right direction – the new route will be extremely pretty and we think very popular.

Because of the hold up on Phase 2, our next immediate target is to take the path that currently ends at the sewage works at Low Water (Phase 1) through to Jack’s Lane (Phase 3). We have been liaising with the landowners and have successfully arranged for a footpath diversion with Somerset County Council. Surveyors, engineers, hydrologists and ecologists, have written the necessary reports. We carried out a wide consultation of interested parties, all positive, but we still have no news on planning permission. Mendip have been extremely slow to respond to our requests to date. This is frustrating and unacceptable in our opinion.

Meanwhile, volunteers have undertaken preparatory work by marking the Phase 3 route with gates, fencing and tree planting along the boundary of the path to be. Volunteers planted hundreds of young trees that will eventually form a 6m wide shelterbelt. Our thanks to the Woodland Trust for providing us with about 470 trees from their 'Wild Wood' pack. This was a mix of hazel, crab apple, downy birch, hawthorn, holly and goat willow, plus a few home grown oak trees. In addition to the shelterbelt, the volunteers have also planted over 200 tall willow whips, which will act as an immediate screen when work starts on the path later this year. The new plants will complement the 450 saplings planted earlier with the help of Duke of Edinburgh students.

Until planning permission for Phase 3 is granted, volunteers will carry on with a culvert, a cattle grid and further allowable preparatory ground works.

To summarise, Frome’s Missing Links remains well organised and is in a strong position to push forward in the coming months. We have the continued support of a majority of local people and landowners. Despite the bureaucratic hurdles there is much to be positive about and much still to be done. So my message is “we pedal on into 2021” – let’s complete those blessed missing links once and for all!

**Mendip District Councillor Matt Martin** said that he and fellow **councillor Edric Hobbs** are auditing pathways across Mendip to help local groups get traffic-free routes in place. Both are on Mendip’s Planning Board and would like to know how they can help Frome’s Missing Links.

**Treasurer’s report:**

Adrian gave the following report:

The charity’s year-end was 31st December 2019 and our management accounts show a total income for the year of £8,098.47, with costs of £10,278.22, leaving cash at bank at £19,904.75. The accounts will be independently verified, ready for submission to The Charity Commissioners.

There is a lot of buzz around cycling at the moment with the government pledging £250m for temporary cycling infrastructure in view of the need for social distancing during the pandemic.

Rich added that Frome’s Missing Links has put in a stage 1 bid to Places to Ride for £80,000 for a cycling hub and path, is planning to bid for £10,000 from Awards for All for materials for Phase 3, and is hoping to join a partnership project with Edventure and Frome Town Council. We are also keeping in close contact with Sustrans about how to get some of that government money as we do have a cycle path ‘ready to go’.

The **annual accounts 2019** were approved by the trustees prior to submission to the Charity Commission.

**Nominations and elections** of trustees:

There were no other nominations and all six trustees were re-elected to their posts for the year. Rich is happy to continue as Chair for one more year.

Chris gave a presentation on the activities of the ‘**Friday Group**’ on Phase 3 including:

* Thanks to landowners Katherine, Caroline, Ian and Hugh who let us use their land and offer much other help
* Thanks to volunteers Geoff, Andrew, Colin, Chris, Tom, Tony, Bill, Rich, Ian and Henry who do all the work
* We had to apply to Somerset County Council for a footpath diversion at Whatcombe, for which there were hundreds of supports and one objection (later withdrawn). The path can be moved to its new route as soon planning permission is granted.
* The planning application should have been determined by early February but we are still waiting
* At the stream crossing a new temporary gate, a culvert and a cattle grid were installed (the cattle grid was donated by Orchardleigh estate), a kissing gate was moved, a headwall was built to support the path at the end of the culvert, and tonnes of soil were moved to backfill the stream crossing
* A screen of 200 willow trees and a shelter belt of up to 400 woodland trees were planted
* A cattle crossing was installed (two-way gate arrangement to allow cattle to cross the path)
* There has been constant vandalism (fences cut) and constant repairs needed

The presentation will be available on our website [www.fromesmissinglinks.org.uk](http://www.fromesmissinglinks.org.uk)

Councillor Matt Martin asked for the planning reference (**2019/2909/FUL**) so he can chase up the planning application.

**Questions & Answers**

Before the meeting:

* Nick Ray asked why the whole path can’t be done at once. Rich explained the complexities involved and that we have to start somewhere
* Someone asked where the kissing gate had gone. It has been moved, as mentioned above
* Horse riders have been asking about access. Frome’s Missing Links will try to ensure access for all, including equestrian use. In principle we support equestrian access on completion of the path, but this will be dependent on landowner consent

At the meeting:

* Keith Reynolds of the Trails Trust and a local cyclist said he was pleased with the response on horse access and can offer advice on horse access. He recommended using the term ‘multi-user’ more
* Matt Martin added that inclusiveness is important, being accessible to all including disabled people and children, creating more public buy-in
* Rich said that we hope to work with Wiltshire councillors too over the Chapmanslade link
* Adrian Warren asked about the barriers at the gate at the entrance to Whatcombe fields, is there any need for it? Rich said that it prevents motorbikes and it was requested by landowners. Edric Hobbs suggested the use of RADAR keys which people can easily buy could be an alternative to the barrier. Adrian said this is something to consider for future access points