



Registered Charity No 1166492
www.fromesmissinglinks.org.uk

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

14th May 2025

Frome Town Hall

Present: Chair Rich Ackroyd, trustees Grant Gellatly, Ruth Knagg, Helen Johnstone, Adrian Warren and approximately 20 supporters/members of the public.

Apologies were received from Tricia Golinsky and Geoff Pell.

Introductions were made of trustees and other key players, including the Friday Crew, Chris Green, Andrew Marchant, Chris Keynon and Malcolm Parker

Treasurer's Report 2024

Adrian gave the following report:

2024 saw FML raise, receive and be awarded a total of £49,500.

Taking us from an opening balance of £4.1k to over £50k by the end of the year.

A generous donation from Frome and District Wheelers (£5k), securing a grant from Sport England (£15k), combined with another successful Ceilidh and generous efforts of Chris selling scrap metal from various parts of the route (£2.3k).

This was topped off with a very successful Crowdfunder campaign, hitting and overachieving our original target and in year generating £21.1k.

Expenditure was minimal in 2024, with all efforts focussed on raising funds for the Great Elm to Elliotts lane surfacing initiative.

2025 has seen a strong start with additional Crowdfunder monies, a total of £78,750 grant from Sustrans, £50k from Somerset Council, a £5k donation from Save Open Spaces and £7k from the Frome Community Bike Project - all helping to fund the newly tarmacked section completed this year.

Chair's Report

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

About ten years ago, after the opening of Phase 1, it was agreed that the easiest next step would be to work from the Great Elm end of the route and try to open up the old GWR railway line that used to run between Radstock and Frome. This would be



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relatively easy as most of the line was already a cycle path and a simple extension along the same line could bring us out to Elliots Lane. It was almost a shovel ready project. Little did we know!

Ten years on, I'm so pleased to see this part of the path completed. Phase 2 is already making short work for active travellers passing safely between Radstock and Frome, but also residents in Buckland Dinham, Mells and Great Elm benefit too. If and when we get the whole route finished it can only continue to bring these communities closer together and will improve our health and wellbeing and probably local economies greatly.

Work started in 2015. We have a record of 132 supporters who turned out on 21 February to help clear the head high brambles, trees and shrubs along the railway embankment. It was that level of public support that gave us confidence that this project was worth doing and was followed by Frome's Missing Links registering as a charity.

The following year saw Sustrans (Rupert Crosbee) helped by Mark Vose, acquiring the leases for some of the land needed alongside the railway from John and George Cray both now sadly deceased, plus a licence for Network Rail Land.

We were helped by CPM group (Alan Penny) who donated the culvert pipes and inspection chamber sections to enable the building of the embankment over the former Elliots Lane cutting bed, and farmer Graham Lock who kindly transported them from Mells to our site.

Ex Sustrans founder John Grimshaw prepared the original plans. After the initial track bed vegetation was cleared the difficult job of lifting rails and sleepers began. Making ingenious use of Chris Green's tractor without which we would have been unable to lift the track, Geoff Pell and a small band of committed souls who became the Friday Crew carried out an incredible engineering operation, lasting several months.

There were delays. Drawings and surveys were carried out. People in high places were consulted. Drawings were amended. Planning Permission was sought and agreed. Network Rail issued a licence. Network Rail opposed part of the plans. Planning Permission was amended and agreed. Network rail issued a new licence. One final strip of land proved hard to acquire. But eventually Network Rail and new landowner Charlie Cox agreed and we were able at last to complete the land jigsaw.



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Mendip District Council, Frome Town Council and others provided much needed cash to get things started again. Two years ago we had a path with a rough surface, which was open to the public and of course this year we were able to complete the surfacing and add almost a mile of first-class active travel pathway for everyone to enjoy.

So, a big thank you to our tireless volunteer trustees who have each in their different ways contributed significantly to this outcome.

We should also thank again the volunteers of the Friday Crew who each week made progress in removing the original railway track bed – a truly astonishing feat achieved over many months and years and to the utter disbelief of some.

Many thanks also to the various funding agencies, contractors, local authorities and businesses who have helped us, often at cost or on a gratis basis. Too many to mention them all here, but we should thank Mendip and Somerset Council, Frome Town Council, Sustrans, Railway Paths Ltd, Active Travel England, Sports England, Frome Wheelers, Frome CTC, Frome Community Bike Project, anonymous donors, Wainwrights for the surfacing, and of course members of the public for supporting us on the Crowdfunder appeal, which raised some £27,000 in the end. Thank you all.

So, what's next? There are two main sections left to complete. Phase 4 is now a mere 1.5km, but a technically challenging section. The route south of Frome is shorter and in theory much easier to complete. The trustees have agreed that we need to work up our plans in both areas and concentrate this year on getting further permissions to allow the completion of both sections.

The overall objective is to link in with the Somerset circle idea, which will create over 70 miles of traffic free path across Somerset. Trustees have regular contact with other bodies who are trying to make this happen. We have taken part in practical workdays along the Strawberry Line and Windsor Hill paths near Shepton Mallet and fed information into Somerset's Active Travel network and other influential groups.

The Friday Crew will continue to meet every week to further our endeavours. This year alone they have cleared Vernal Lane, Feltham Lane and Hapsford Hill footpath of mud and vegetation, cut back grass along verges, planted trees, created and maintained fences, gates and signage and even raised funds by working with Frome SOS at Whatcombe Fields to remove brambles and install new fencing.



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We continue to work with the Frome Community Bike Project who go from strength to strength and who also contribute to our funds.

Trustees and volunteers have also continued with the publicity drive and getting the message out. In March, our new MP Anna Sabine visited the path and has agreed to support us however she can. We ran another successful Ceilidh and appeared at a few fetes and the Independent Market. Thanks to everyone who helps us with publicity and media – it's a never-ending job!

And finally, last but certainly not least, a massive heartfelt thank you to Mr Geoff Pell, whose vision and tenacity made all this possible. Geoff, whether you like it or not, you are the backbone of this project, and everyone today owes you a huge thank you.

Nominations and Election of Trustees

Ruth Knagg and Tricia Golinski retired from office and were re-appointed as trustees. Rich asked anyone else interested in volunteering to speak to one of the trustees.

Frome Community Bike Project (FCBP)

Emma Parker gave a talk and slide show about recent developments and future plans at FCBP. She also officially announced that the project has now contributed a total of £8,500 in donations to Frome's Missing Links. A short Q/A session followed, and Rich formally said thank you for the donations and excellent work that Emma and the FCBP team are doing.

Question and Answers Session

The room split into small groups to discuss a paper written by Geoff Pell, which outlined possible next steps for Frome's Missing Links and some of the hurdles. Main points from each table were collated using a questionnaire written by Helen, for later discussion by trustees. The aim being to start planning a work schedule for the coming year and decide how best to prioritize our resources going forward.

Rich Ackroyd
15/05/2025