

Executive

EVERGREEN 3: RESPONSE TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION BY CHILTERN RAILWAYS FOR A NEW OXFORD TO LONDON ROUTE

PROPOSED RAILWAY IMPROVEMENT SCHEME BETWEEN BICESTER AND OXFORD

15 June 2009

Report of the Strategic Director – Planning, Housing and Economy

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To present information to the Executive on:

- (i) The proposed improvements to the railway line between Bicester and Oxford as part of proposals by Chiltern Railways for a new route between Oxford and London

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to:

- (1) Agree the contents of the report as the basis of the Council's response to the public consultation and in particular to agree the representations set out in paragraphs 1.17, 1.24, 1.26 and 1.28.
- (2) Ask Planning Committee to consider and make appropriate representations on the details of the scheme as the Transport and Works Act application proceeds.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 Chiltern Railways is proposing a new Oxford to London rail route referred to as Project Evergreen 3. As part of the project railway improvements between

Bicester and Oxford will be required. A number of options for the line and stations have been considered by Chiltern Railways and form the present project to provide a rail passenger service between Oxford and London Marylebone via Bicester Town station. Further information can be viewed at the following link:

www.chiltern-evergreen3.co.uk

Summary information has also been deposited in the Members Room.

This report does not attempt to describe the proposals and various options in detail. For full information, including plans the Chiltern Railways consultation material should be consulted directly.

- 1.2 Chiltern Railways have already made major improvements to the London to Bicester Line and have been developing proposals for extending services to Oxford since 1999. The project will be funded by Chiltern Railways and will not be dependent on public funds. The proposals are currently being worked up in more detail with further work to be completed over the summer before an application for a Transport and Works Act (TWA) Order is submitted on 1 October 2009. Given the scale of the proposed development an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required.
- 1.3 The TWA process is a national Government level / parliamentary procedure to grant planning consent and compulsory purchase orders required for some infrastructure projects. It requires an application, with an objection process and potential public inquiry. An Inspector will make recommendations for a Ministerial decision. Local planning authorities are statutory consultees in the process and can make representations. This is a task that will fall to Planning Committee as the detail of the scheme develops. The County Council as Highway authority will also be responding to the TWA process as consultee and the Planning Committee will need link its responses with Highway authority considerations. The aim will be to ensure a co ordinated local response on detailed matters. This report deals mainly with the overall principles of the scheme, but it does flag some detailed matters that will need to be carefully considered by Planning Committee.
- 1.4 The proposal seeks to utilise the existing Bicester to Oxford rail corridor. Additional platforms will be provided at Bicester Town and Islip railway stations. A new section of connecting line is proposed to be constructed from the Tubbs Lane crossing to the London to Birmingham line. This new line will utilise some of the land at Gavray Drive which has planning permission for housing.
- 1.5 This report provides a proposed in principle response to the consultation by Chiltern Railways for the Executive's endorsement and any additional comment. Public consultation on the proposals ended on 30 April 2009 following exhibitions in Bicester (17 April 2009), Oxford (18 April 2009) and Kidlington (25 April 2009). Chiltern Railways has considered a number of options as part of its project and is seeking comments on its choice of options for the stations and other works proposed before developing a detailed scheme.
- 1.5 The rest of the report looks at each proposal and recommends some comments the Council may wish to give to Chiltern Railways.

Proposals

- 1.6 The railway between Oxford and Bicester will be upgraded from single track to double track and new safety and signalling systems will be installed. The new service is scheduled to commence in 2013. A major upgrade of the existing rail facilities is proposed providing an enhanced service from Oxford to London. The new service will provide two trains per hour between London Marylebone and Oxford with journey times of 66 minutes from Oxford and 58 minutes from Water Eaton. The journey time between Bicester and Oxford will be 14 minutes.
- 1.7 All trains will call at Oxford, Water Eaton, Bicester Town and High Wycombe. Existing train services from Bicester North will remain resulting in up to five trains an hour from Bicester. It is proposed to upgrade the existing railway stations at Bicester Town and Islip. In addition, a new Parkway Station is proposed at Water Eaton adjacent to the existing Park and Ride facilities. The viaduct over the Mill Stream and River Cherwell will be replaced. In summary the proposals comprise:
- Improvements to Oxford Station
 - Options for a new parkway station at Water Eaton
 - Improvements to Islip Station
 - Options for upgrading Bicester Town Station
 - A new Bicester connecting line and
 - Other work including changes to level crossings and bridges

Water Eaton Parkway

- 1.8 A new Parkway station providing an interchange between cars and public transport is proposed at Water Eaton. It will serve Kidlington, Yarnton, north Oxford and the wider area. The site is currently occupied by grain silos and the existing stone-loading sidings south of the railway line. It is located adjacent to the existing Water Eaton Park and Ride facilities and the Oxford Road (A4165).
- 1.9 The proposed scheme would include a ticket office, coffee shop and additional car parking capacity for rail users similar to the existing facilities at Warwick Parkway on the London Marylebone to Birmingham Snow Hill line. Three options are proposed for Water Eaton Parkway and are set out below.
- 1.10 In Option 1 a new station building is proposed together with additional car parking. The proposed station would be located at Oxford Road (A4165) providing road level access to buses from Kidlington. A pedestrian ramp would provide access to the Park and Ride bus station. Cycle parking, a drop-off point and disabled parking is proposed adjacent to the new station building. A two storey car park would provide additional car parking to serve the station. This would be located on the site currently proposed for a waste processing facility. This option would require the demolition of the existing grain silo structures. The existing stone loading sidings would be relocated to a greenfield site north east of the existing sidings and car parking.
- 1.11 Option 2 is similar to option 1 except the stone loading sidings would remain between the new platforms and car parking screened by planting. As a result a larger two storey car park is proposed on the site of the disused grain silos.

- 1.12 Again, Option 3 proposes a new station building located adjacent to the Oxford Road. However, in this option the existing Park and Ride car park is utilised to provide additional car parking by constructing a two storey car park on the site. A pedestrian link to the new station building would be provided. The Oxford bound platform would be located on the opposite side of Oxford Road and would be accessed from the ticket office through a subway. The stone loading sidings and grain silos would be retained as would the site of the proposed waste processing plant.
- 1.13 **COMMENT:** The proposals for a parkway station at Water Eaton should be supported and welcomed as they provide an important rail facility for Kidlington and the surrounding area. In addition, Options 1 and 2 propose the demolition of the existing disused grain silos which will have a positive visual impact on the landscape. However it should be remembered that the site is washed over by the Oxford Green Belt and while it could be argued that the demolition of the grain silos contributes to maintaining the openness of the Green Belt, all three options should be considered in the context of PPG2 – Green Belts which sets out the criteria for assessing large scale development proposals. In assessing the proposals for a parkway station at Water Eaton, we would draw Chiltern Railways attention to paragraph 3.17 of PPG2 and Annex E of PPG13 in order to ensure the criteria for assessing park and ride facilities are met. In determining any planning application the Council would need to be satisfied that:
- (a) A thorough and comprehensive assessment of potential sites has been carried out, including both non-Green Belt and, if appropriate, other Green Belt locations, having regard to sustainable development objectives, and the need to be flexible about size and layout;
 - (b) the assessment establishes that the proposed green belt site is the most sustainable option taking account of all relevant factors including travel impacts;
 - (c) The scheme will not seriously compromise the purposes of including land in Green Belts, as set out in paragraph 1.5;
 - (d) The proposal is contained within the local transport plan and based on a thorough assessment of travel impacts; and
 - (e) New or re-used buildings are included within the development proposal only for essential facilities associated with the operation of the park and ride scheme.
- 1.14 Option 3 is considered to be the least suitable option given its impact on the Green Belt. The existing car parks cover a wide area and are visible from the surrounding roads and public footpath network. It is considered that such a proposal might be visually detrimental to the openness of the Green Belt particularly as the grain silos would be retained. The Council's preference should be for the additional car parking to be accommodated on the site with the minimum amount of two storey buildings. On this basis, Option 1 is considered to be the most suitable.
- 1.15 Option 2 seeks to retain the stone sidings and provide a large two storey car park on the grain silo site. This could potentially result in a large imposing decked car park which would be visible from the adjacent A4165 and have significantly greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the other options.

- 1.16 Option 1 has advantages over the other options as the size of the decked area of car park is reduced and the stone sidings operation is kept separate from the parkway facilities. A new access road to the stone sidings is proposed which would separate the heavy goods vehicles and commercial traffic from the passenger vehicles using the parkway. The removal of the grain silos and relocation of the stone sidings will have to be considered against the impact of the relocated stone sidings on the Green Belt and the ability of the promoters to demonstrate that very special circumstances exist to justify such development. The following policies are relevant: Policy GB1, – Green Belt, Policy TR10 – Rail Transport, Policy TR11 – Parking and Policy TR28 – East West Rail proposals.
- 1.17 **RECOMMENDATION:** It is therefore recommended that the Council supports the proposals provided Chiltern Railways can satisfy the criteria in PPG2 and PPG13 set out above and Option 1 for the above reasons.

Bicester Town Station

- 1.18 It is proposed to rebuild Bicester Town station to provide two eight car platforms. The consultation seeks views on three options proposed for upgrading Bicester Town station. Option 1 proposes a new station building car parking, two new platforms and a footbridge. The proposed station building will be located on vacant land between London Road and the railway line with additional shelters and ticket machines at a secondary access on Station approach. 100 car parking spaces are proposed with access from Station Approach. A drop off point and disabled parking are proposed south of the railway line. Additional car parking for weekday rail users is provided in the proposed Bicester Village Shopping Outlet car park. Pedestrian, cycle and bus connections with Bicester Village are proposed.
- 1.19 Option 2 is similar to Option 1 except the proposed main station building is on the north side of the line (near to the present station entrance). A secondary access on the south side of the line would provide access from London Road. Some car parking would be provided on the south side of the line in addition to the proposed car parking on the north side of the line with a drop off and disabled parking on both sides of the line.
- 1.20 Option 3 is similar to Option 2 but includes proposals for a new two storey car park on land south of Talisman Business Centre with access from London Road linked to the Oxford bound platform.
- 1.21 **COMMENT:** The proposals for Bicester Town station should be welcomed and supported as they will contribute to improving the rail service to and from the town and provide an improved sustainable transport link to the town. The site is currently underused and not well connected to the town centre. The proposals will increase rail use and contribute to more sustainable travel patterns. The railway provides the focus for public transport.
- 1.22 Policy S17 of the Non Statutory Local Plan identifies the Bicester Town Rail Station land to the north of the railway line as a major mixed use development site with the triangular area of land to the south of the line identified for uses related to the railway station. The existing railway line is currently in use albeit for a very small number of passenger and goods trains. Options 1 and 2 are generally acceptable and Option 3 is considered the least favourable option as it proposes the erection of a new two storey car park on land to the

south of the existing Talisman Business Park Centre with access to the London Road. It is considered that a two storey decked car park on such a prominent gateway site into Bicester is not acceptable as it is not well related to the station and its visual impact.

1.23 The traffic impact of the proposals on Bicester's road network will need to be carefully assessed and managed. In particular the likely changes to access routes to Bicester Town Station, the increased car parking provision, plus the greater level crossing use need consideration

1.24 **RECOMMENDATION:** It is recommended that the Council welcomes the proposed improvements to the station facilities and rail service at Bicester Town in providing a recognised station to complement the existing services from Bicester North. However, the response to Chiltern Railways should include the Council's concerns about the visual impact and traffic impact of Option 3 and note the need to work with the Highway Authority to look at traffic impacts within the Town. The Council should also discuss with Chiltern Railways the links between Bicester Town station and the Bicester North station. Chiltern Railways should be encouraged to improve links to Bicester Town station from Bicester in order to support the creation of a sustainable community. This should include links with North West Bicester.

Islip Station

1.24 The consultation documents state that "*Islip will remain a station principally for local community use, rather than a facility for the wider area.*" In summary, the proposals for Islip station comprise two new eight car platforms to allow the reinstatement of a second track, ramps to provide step free platform access, new disabled parking area and a footbridge linking the platforms.

1.25 **COMMENT:** The works to Islip Station are not considered to be significant in terms of their impact on the locality. The continued use of the station to serve the local community residents is welcomed and the Council would not wish to see a major station development in this location as it would conflict with strategic objectives in terms of directing growth to the main settlements in the District. The station is accessed from the main Islip Road and is well screened from the surrounding area and as long as the station remains a local commuter station only any impacts should be minimised.

1.26 **RECOMMENDATION:** The proposals for Islip are generally welcomed and should be supported.

Bicester Connecting Line

1.27 A new short rail link, referred to as the "Chiltern Chord" is proposed connecting the Oxford to Bicester East West line and the Birmingham to London line. Land for the proposed line has been safeguarded in the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan (Policy TR29) south of Bicester at land at Gavray Drive.

1.28 **RECOMMENDATION:** The Council should support the proposed connecting line.

Level Crossings

- 1.29 At this stage a number of options are being considered although the detailed options for each crossing are not known. It is proposed that the Islip crossing will be closed but with access for emergency vehicles. Other traffic will have to find an alternative route and a footbridge is being investigated. The replacement of the Oddington level crossing with a bridge is being considered. The Langford Lane crossing is to be replaced with a bridge. Bicester London Road crossing will be upgraded to full signal controlled barrier. The replacement of the crossing with a bridge has been discounted due to difficulties with the existing road layout. In Bicester the Tubbs Lane footpath crossing is to be replaced with a bridge with disabled access.
- 1.30 The majority of the line within the District is in the open countryside. There are a number of residential properties within Bicester including a number adjacent to the level crossing at London Road which will be affected by increased use both in terms of the number of trains using the station and increased passenger numbers.
- 1.31 It will be necessary for the Environmental Impact Assessment to consider the impact of noise and vibration on these properties together with a number of more isolated farmsteads and dwellings close to the line in the countryside.
- 1.32 The scheme also proposes to reduce the number of pedestrian and farm crossings. Some however are in frequent use and will need to be replaced by bridges. The existing Tubbs Lane pedestrian crossing will be replaced by a new bridge which will need to be DDA compliant and therefore is likely to be a quite substantial structure. There are a number of residential properties adjacent to the railway line at this point and the impact of the structure on these properties will need to be carefully addressed. The level crossing at Langford Lane is also to be replaced by a bridge and the impact on the properties adjacent will need to be carefully assessed.
- 1.33 The main visual and landscape impacts will be in Bicester Town, Gosford and Water Eaton and along the route where new bridges will need to be provided in places of existing crossings. The proposed chord line will run from Tubbs Lane to the London to Birmingham line and will have a considerable visual impact on the proposed development at Gavray Drive and the existing development at south east Bicester.
- 1.34 There is a number of wildlife habitats including County Wildlife Sites and local BAP habitats present along the rail corridor. The railway passes through a SSSI at Wendlebury Meadows. The impact on nature conservation will need to be considered in the Environmental Impact Assessment.

Conclusion

- 1.35 The initial proposals should be welcomed and broadly supported as improved rail services in the District provide the opportunity to take cars off the roads. The project also increases the sustainability of Bicester and provides the opportunity for improved eco town links. The proposed project will improve public transport provision and provide new facilities for rail passengers in the District. On this basis, the Council should continue to discuss the details on the proposed scheme with Chiltern Railways.

- 1.36 The Non-Statutory Cherwell District Local Plan 2011 supports improvements to rail infrastructure, services and facilities across the District and safeguards land at Gavray Drive, Bicester for a connecting railway line. A new station at Water Eaton serving Kidlington should be welcomed although the impact of the proposals on the Green Belt should be carefully considered. Islip Station will remain as a local station and it is not proposed to develop a major station facility at this location.
- 1.37 Chiltern Railways are currently considering the responses to the public consultation before working on a detailed scheme as part of the application for a Transport and Works Order. It is clear that the information currently available on traffic impacts is limited. Further transport modelling work is being carried out by Chiltern Railways' consultants and will provide an assessment of the impact on the highway network in terms of the number of car journeys, particularly on the A34 and M40. The Council will be working closely with the County Highway Authority to consider traffic issues.
- 1.38 As new information becomes available, the Council should continue to respond to Chiltern Railways. As necessary Planning Committee will consider the position formally. Once a TWA permission is granted Cherwell District Council will determine the details of the station buildings including footbridges and car parks as the local planning authority (in a similar way to how a reserved matter application on an outline permission is dealt with).
- 1.39 It is therefore recommended that the Council makes initial, in principle, comments as set out in paragraphs 1.16, 1.23, 1.26 and 1.28.

Background Information

- 2.1 This is the first time the Council has been asked formally for its views. Consultation on the proposals took place in April 2009 with the deadline for comments from the public on 30 April 2009.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

- 3.1 The Executive is invited to consider the supporting material accompanying this report which provides further details of the proposed rail improvements. The Executive is invited to agree this report as the Council's response to Chiltern Railways on the public consultation, but may also choose to add other issues as it thinks appropriate.
- 3.11 The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward.

Option One To endorse the views expressed in this report as the Council's response to Chiltern Railways.

Option Two To add further views as the Executive considers appropriate. Any modifications to be undertaken by the Head of Planning and Affordable Housing Policy with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing.

Option Three Not to make a response to the consultation.

Consultations

Cllr. Michael Gibbard	Internal briefing.
Chiltern Railways	Public exhibitions and consultation in Bicester, Kidlington and Oxford.

Implications

Financial:	The Council's response to the Chilterns Railways proposals is accommodated within existing staff and resources at this time Comments checked by Eric Meadows, Accountant 01295 221552
Legal:	There are no significant legal issues associated with the report Comments checked by Pam Wilkinson, Principal Solicitor 01295 221688
Risk Management:	Comments checked by Rosemary Watts, Risk Manager and Insurance Officer 01295 221566

Wards Affected

Gosford and Water Eaton, Islip, Oddington, Charlton on Otmoor, Wendlebury, Ambrosden, Bicester South, Bicester Town, Launton, Blackthorn, Piddington, Kidlington South,

Corporate Plan Themes

Cherwell: A District of Opportunity, A Cleaner, Greener Cherwell

Executive Portfolio

**Councillor Michael Gibbard
Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing**

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	
Background Papers	
Consultation information from Chiltern Railways on Evergreen 3 Project	
Report Author	Andrew Bowe, Implementation Officer
Contact Information	01295 221842 andrew.bowe@Cherwell-dc.gov.uk