

# Bedford Enhanced LRG - Meeting note

## Meeting #1

Date: 08/05/2025

Time: 6:00pm

Type of meeting: In person

## Key discussion points and outcomes

### 1. Introduction, overview, and housekeeping

- 1.1 Sarah Jacobs (SJ) welcomed attendees to the meeting and ran through the housekeeping and agenda. SJ explained that the notes from the meeting would be made available on the community hub.
- 1.2 SJ highlighted that although only the parishes in the Enhanced LRGs are statutory consultees, with regards to these meetings EWR Co have taken the view to also regard ward councillors as statutory consultees as this will allow EWR Co to have more meaningful discussions and provide more information. She added that it will be up to the group's discretion whether to share the information discussed during the meeting, although it should be noted that some information will be confidential.
- 1.3 All attendees, including EWR Co staff, introduced themselves and their respective parishes, wards or job title.

### 2. Review of actions from the last meeting

- 2.1 SJ confirmed that all eight actions from the previous meeting have been completed or are in progress. Key updates included forthcoming engagement on noise mitigation, traffic capacity discussions planned for the next meeting, and further exploration of parking design alternatives and housing impacts. Work on the social value and legacies programme is also underway.

### 3. Project updates

#### Universal theme park

- 3.1 SJ discussed the newly announced Universal theme park set to be built to the south of Bedford.

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- 3.2 SJ explained that EWR Co are engaging with Universal to determine the potential implications of the park for Bedford and for the wider network, including service levels on the Marston Vale Line (MVL) and individual stations. SJ noted EWR Co had not received any further information from the Department for Transport (DfT) since the announcement and are operating as 'business as usual'. Even though it has not yet been confirmed what the park may mean for the railway, EWR Co are committed to maintaining close contact with all relevant parties such as Universal, Network Rail and the Department for Transport (DfT) to ensure accessibility and connectivity are core elements of the planning process.
- 3.3 Cllr Colleen Atkins (CA) asked if the Universal proposal might affect the proposed route for the line. MA responded that EWR Co were waiting to see what Universal's plans were to determine this, but for now, EWR Co's alignment proposals remain as they are.
- 3.4 SJ confirmed that once EWR Co receive more information, groups would be notified in the following meeting.

#### Chiltern Railways

- 3.5 SJ explained that Chiltern Railways has been announced as the operator for the first stage of EWR and is expecting to run services later this year.

#### Ground Investigation (GI) Works

- 3.6 SJ shared that the Phase 1 ground investigation (GI) works for EWR Co started in February this year and that EWR Co have been or would be in contact with the parishes to notify them of such works.
- 3.7 The GI works were estimated to take four to five months, but it is likely that EWR Co will need more time to complete them. EWR Co still needs to complete site visits and look for ways to reduce costs and risks associated with the GI works, as well as acquire permission through licences to access land. SJ acknowledged that EWR Co are aware of the sensitive nature of the area and reiterated that the GI works are often self-contained to limit impact on the surrounding area.
- 3.8 CA requested that councillors and residents be alerted to GI works sooner. This request was made in light of recent GI works near the Alexander Sports Centre, of which they had not been notified ahead of time. SJ responded that EWR Co were focussed on improving the flow of communication in this area and will be reaching out to those affected by GI works sooner.

#### Non-statutory consultation (NSC) next steps

- 3.9 SJ provided an update on the non-statutory consultation (NSC).
- 3.10 SJ explained EWR Co are working through the consultation feedback and would provide an NSC Summary Report at the end of May, which would outline emerging themes. SJ noted that this is currently under review by DfT and that local authorities, elected members, parishes and wards will be notified once it is published.



- 3.11 SJ explained that the outcome of the consultation feedback would be included in a 'You Said, We Did' report published during the statutory consultation.
- 3.12 CA asked on behalf of Protect Poets why the EWR Co team thought the most recent non-statutory consultation had received fewer responses than the previous non-statutory consultation in 2021. MA responded that they thought it might be because the non-statutory consultation in 2021 was focused across a broader area, while the 2024 non-statutory consultation had a narrower focus on a specific part of the route.
- 3.13 Cllr Zara Layne (ZL) and Cllr Dylan Simmons (DS) asked when the 'You said, We Did' report would be ready and when the statutory consultation would begin. Natalie Wheble (NW) acknowledged that people would be keen to read the report and receive updates on project developments. The report would inform the design decisions presented at the statutory consultation and would therefore be made available at the beginning of the consultation, which is due to commence in early 2026, although the exact timings are still being determined.
- 3.14 Cllr Ben Foley (BF) asked what the difference is between emerging themes and outcomes in relation to the 'You said, We Did' report. NW responded that emerging themes are the issues identified that have generated feedback and responses captured during the non-statutory consultation period. The outcomes are then derived from the analysis of the feedback and responses and are incorporated into the design where possible.

Post-meeting clarification – the NSC Summary Report was published on 16 May. The report and further information can be found on the EWR website [here](#).

### Development Consent Order (DCO) Process

- 3.15 SJ shared the Development Consent Order (DCO) process timeline and confirmed that EWR Co is still at the pre-application stage. The key principles of the DCO process were outlined, including that it is an inclusive process and EWR Co wants communities to have a say at every stage.
- 3.16 CA asked SJ to expand on how residents' groups are going to be part of the process. SJ responded that residents across the route are encouraged to speak to their local representatives to communicate their feedback. SJ added that EWR Co published the recent LRG schedule on the website and shared additional information through social media channels. EWR Co aims to share this information earlier moving forward for future LRG rounds. SJ also explained that EWR Co is proposing to engage with communities through in-person events and webinars, giving members of the residents' groups opportunities to speak directly with them.
- 3.17 SJ went on to explain that EWR Co are also holding meetings with officers from local authorities.
- 3.18 ZL asked if the officers that EWR Co are speaking with were from Bedford Borough. MA responded that they had an introductory meeting with the planning officers from Bedford Borough. EWR Co expects to meet them monthly as there is a need to work closely with the local authority on a variety of different aspects such as traffic and transport.

## 4. Revised Local Representative Groups (LRGs)

- 4.1 SJ discussed the revised group structure for the LRGs and explained that all parishes and wards within the red line boundary have been placed into the 'Enhanced' LRGs, whereas those outside this boundary are part of the 'Community LRGs'.
- 4.2 SJ requested that LRG members inform EWR Co if they are happy for other members of neighbouring wards and parishes to attend future LRG meetings.
- 4.3 Fouzia Zamir Atiq (FA) enquired about the definition of the red line boundary and whether it had been changed. MA responded that the red line boundary gives an idea of the extent of the work (both permanent and temporary), but it doesn't necessarily mean that EWR Co would undertake work there or make permanent changes in those areas. The orders surrounding the red line boundaries have not changed alongside the changes to the representative groups.

## 5. Terms of Reference

- 5.1 SJ stated that the Terms of Reference (ToR) had received some changes and that they would share these with the group after the meeting. SJ stated that feedback was required from the attendees on the ToRs.

## 6. Bedford route section detailed discussion

- 6.1 MA provided an overview of the EWR route through Bedford, including proposals regarding the provision of temporary car parking for Bedford Hospital, the adjustment of carriage sidings for Bedford station, the addition of two more tracks for Bedford station, and additional parking provision on Ashburnham Road. MA also provided further information on topics such as electrification and construction impacts when addressing questions.

### Bedford St Johns and Bedford Hospital

- 6.2 MA provided a brief summary of EWR Co's current plans on the provision of temporary parking and the construction of the multi-storey car park for Bedford Hospital.
- 6.3 Nicola Gribble (NG) mentioned that the hospital CEO suggested to them that no solution had been found. The hospital has its own plans to expand within the red line boundary, so could EWR Co provide any insight on this?
- 6.4 MA replied EWR Co has looked at land available within the footprint of the red line boundary in a number of stages. The planned car park and temporary parking arrangements ensure that there would be no net loss in the amount of car parking available. The non-statutory consultation has prompted numerous detailed conversations about how EWR Co would engage further with the hospital and reach a suitable resolution for all stakeholders and hospital users.

6.5 MA discussed the plans for St Johns and the adjustments that would need to be made to the area near the hospital, including the relocation of several siding areas that are close to local businesses. EWR Co have been in discussions with several businesses and properties that are affected.

### Bedford Station

6.6 MA provided a general overview of the remodel of Bedford station, as well as the two additional tracks that would be placed north of Bedford station.

6.7 CA asked if an UPFAST platform would be reconsidered as a viable alternative for the station, which would avoid the need for two additional tracks and, consequently, demolition of houses in the Poets area. MA replied that previous modelling did not show any significant benefit to having an UPFAST platform.

6.8 MA elaborated that EWR Co definitively tested various scenarios and found that the inclusion of the UPFAST platform does not yield any significant benefit to EWRs services or operations; therefore, it is not currently being pursued. CA and ZL added that they would continue to oppose proposals involving the acquisition and demolition of houses in subsequent meetings and suggest alternatives.

6.9 BF added that they agreed. BF expressed that in the light of the Network Rail analysis of the needs at Bedford and the formation of Great British Railways, EWR Co should take a more holistic view of the situation regarding what is best for Bedford station. MA responded that EWR Co would need to consider how they can create a more integrated design for the station.

6.10 ZL asked if there was any potential to collaborate with Midlands Main Line (MML) or East Midlands Railway (EMR). MA explained that EWR Co would not be considering the UPFAST platform as it would only be usable by EMR, and therefore EWR would not gain any benefits. MA noted that UPFAST platforms would not support services from Oxford to Cambridge, as evidenced by previous modelling.

### Electrification

6.11 NG asked for an update on where EWR Co stands with electrification and how this would impact the demolition or lowering of bridges.

6.12 MA explained that the route would use discontinuous electrification, but as part of this EWR Co needs to provide the contingency for continuous electrification.

6.13 EWR Co has undertaken surveys to determine if the vertical clearances would allow the railway to pass below Cauldwell Street by maximising the vertical clearance allowance and minimising the impact on the surrounding area. MA stated they hope to have an answer for NG soon regarding its viability, but it could take a few months for the topographical data to be processed.

6.14 MA mentioned that they had been in contact with a local business owner located on Cauldwell Street about this issue and had discussed similar details with them. NG thanked them for taking the time to communicate with the business owner.

## The Poets Area

6.15 MA advised that surveys are taking place to understand the extent of works required in the Poets area. EWR Co have spoken to the residents of properties that would need to be acquired and demolished. He advised that further surveys have been commissioned to increase certainty regarding which properties in the Poets area need to be demolished. EWR Co would consider the outcome of those surveys and solidify its position moving forward for the Poets area.

## **7.Discussion, Questions & Answers (Q&A)**

7.1 MA summarised the topics raised in the earlier discussion, touching on how EWR Co have continued to shape designs based on feedback received so far, including mitigations and interventions that can be prescribed alongside the proposal to reduce impacts.

### Parking and Travel

7.2 BF asked if there were more constraints for car parking around Bedford station compared to Bedford St Johns station. MA responded that the proposed multi-storey car park at Bedford St Johns station is replacement parking and driven by EWR Co. The expectation for Bedford station is that people would not park for extended periods of time.

7.3 MA added that there would be a proposal for what active travel might look like between the two sites. There is a drive within the project team to prioritise active travel measures over parking.

7.4 MA suggested that there may be a possibility of an additional multi-storey car park for Bedford station; however, it is not confirmed as a definite option at this time. CA asked if the car park on Ashburnham Road could be moved further away from the road. MA mentioned that this was being considered, but the area is also very constrained. MA explained that they were unable to provide an answer at this time since the design won't be determined until the detailed design stage. BF noted they had previously raised concerns about the location of the Ashburnham Road car park and felt they had been listened to. They understood and appreciated the challenges posed by the various factors influencing the car parks placement. From their perspective, they would prefer the car park to be as low and as far from the road as possible. MA acknowledged this and added that there are many aspects to consider in this area.

### Bedford Station

7.5 MA stated that EWR Co would not be promoting a western entrance for Bedford station as part of an EWR scheme, but they are trying to protect it as a future option for a different developer.



MA asked if attendees had any questions about Cauldwell sidings. FZ voiced concerns about maintaining the sidings at Cauldwell, as the existing EMR storage/sidings in this location are not well maintained, and residents are unhappy with their current state. MA replied that the existing EWR Co policy is to maintain and take care of them.

#### Electrification and Road Infrastructure

- 7.6 NG asked if EWR Co had changed their plans for the Ford End Road bridge. MA responded that the current design proposes a single track to run under each arch, therefore the impact of reconstruction of the bridge is less than originally expected. It is now anticipated that work on the arches may only take a few weeks to complete.
- 7.7 NG asked if the height for this bridge had been determined for electrification, given that it had not been established for other bridges. MA mentioned that it had been determined due to differences in the data available for each location and more information on this would be available at consultation.

#### Northern and Poets Area

- 7.8 MA advised that there have been several suggestions on how EWR Co could manage the road network in the Poets area, and further refinement of proposals is still ongoing.
- 7.9 During construction, there is the possibility of adjusting the temporary road layout and design to mitigate the impact on residents' gardens and land take.
- 7.10 CA mentioned that they liked the idea of a lower impact temporary design but also raised the importance of obtaining residents' views on proposed solutions for this area, noting that councillor opinions may not necessarily align with those of the residents who live there.
- 7.11 DS asked how plans for Lower Farm Road and Bromham Farm Nature Reserve have developed recently. MA advised that EWR Co are currently looking at Lower Farm Road closely and is aware of the issues that were present there.

#### Reducing Conflicts with Developments in the Area

- 7.12 MA noted that work has been done to reduce conflicts with other development projects in the north Bedford area.
- 7.13 EWR Co has undertaken a review of the compounds required, and some compounds near the A6 in Bedford have either been removed or reduced in size to lessen impacts on the surrounding areas. For example, EWR Co is attempting to relocate a proposed EWR communications site on the east side of the line to avoid conflict with a proposed Costa Coffee shop development.
- 7.14 MA added that EWR Co is proposing to replace the A6 on a like-for-like basis while also providing provisions for dualling should another developer wish to undertake this.



7.15 MA stated that flood compensation areas will be refined and updated in accordance with the revised modelling that is currently taking place. MA also mentioned that EWR Co is aware of a proposed solar farm in the viaduct area and is in communication with them to mitigate the conflicts between the two projects.

## 8.Creating meeting summary notes

10.1 SJ described the process for creating the meeting summary notes for this meeting. It was outlined that there was nothing confidential discussed in the meeting. However, sensitive information may be shared in future meetings, which may impact the decision to publish the notes. SW emphasised the need to manage expectations relating to what parishes can keep confidential.

## 9.Closing remarks

9.1 SJ thanked the attendees for their contributions during the session and advised that further information is available on the [EWR website](#).

9.2 SJ mentioned that if any attendees have further questions, these can be sent to [localrepresentativegroups@eastwestrail.co.uk](mailto:localrepresentativegroups@eastwestrail.co.uk).

## Summary of Actions

**ACTION 1:** MA to ask the design team for a more definitive answer regarding the extent to which councillors can influence the design of Ashburnham Road Car Park on behalf of CA and BF.

**ACTION 2:** MA to speak with contacts at EMR regarding the upkeep of EMR storage facilities near Cauldwell sidings.

## Attendees

### EWR Co attendees

- Sarah Jacobs (SJ) - Senior Engagement Manager
- Mo Alserdare (MA) - Development Programme Manager – West
- Natalie Wheble (NW) – External Affairs Director
- Veronika Mora - Project Manager - Bedford

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## **Local authority councillors**

- Cllr Ben Foley (BF) – Greyfriars Ward, Bedford Borough Council
- Cllr Colleen Atkins (CA) - Harpur Ward, Bedford Borough Council
- Cllr Dylan Simmons (DS) – Bromham Ward, Bedford Borough Council
- Cllr Fouzia Zamir Atiq (FA) – Cauldwell Ward, Bedford Borough Council
- Cllr Nicola Gribble (NG) - Renhold and Ravensden Ward, Bedford Borough Council
- Cllr Zara Laye (ZL) - Harpur Ward, Bedford Borough Council

## **Parish Councils**

- Cllr Jon Miles (JM) – Elstow Parish
- Cllr Sian Woodfine (SW) – Bromham Parish

## **Other**

- Tom Wootton - Elected Mayor and leader of Bedford Borough Council

## **Apologies**

- Biddenham Parish Council
- Kempston Town Council
- Biddenham Ward, Bedford Borough Council
- Kempston Central & East Ward, Bedford Borough Council
- Queen's Park Ward, Bedford Borough Council