

Bedford Town Group - Meeting notes

Meeting #5 - Details

Date: Tuesday 6 June 2023

Time: 7:00PM

Type of meeting: Virtual meeting (Zoom)

Documents discussed in this meeting

The following documents were discussed during the meeting and are available on the Group's dedicated Community Hub site - [here](#):

- Action Tracker;
- Agenda;
- Slides.

Key discussion points and outcomes

1. Welcome, today's agenda and housekeeping

- 1.1 Hannah Staunton (HS) welcomed newly elected members to the group and invited attendees to introduce themselves.
- 1.2 Cllr Colleen Atkins (CA) sent apologies on behalf of Cllr Nesreen Akhtar and Cllr Zara Layne (ZL) sent apologies on behalf of Mohammad Yasin MP.

2. General updates

- 2.1. HS noted that the changes to Bedford Borough Council's ward boundaries had been accounted for and updated within the Group's membership list.
- 2.2. HS noted that the Accessibility Advisory Panel (AAP) met for their first session in April. She noted the importance of this group and highlighted EWR Co had been one of the first rail providers to set up this sort of group up so early on in the Development Consent Order (DCO) Process.

2.3. HS outlined that the Department for Transport (DfT) had approved the early acquisition of two properties in the Poets area in advance of the Route Update Announcement and the Need to Sell Property Scheme (NtS Scheme) going live.

3. Topic – Route Update Announcement

Introduction

3.1. HS noted that changes have been made to the proposals, which take account of the feedback received during and since the 2021 non-statutory consultation, further technical and environment work, and the analysis undertaken as part of the Affordable Connections Project (ACP). EWR Co is now sharing the updates made to the developing plans to design a railway that meets the needs of communities between Oxford and Cambridge.

What have we announced?

3.2. Four key reports have been published, including the [Route Update Report](#) (RUR). The RUR describes how the proposals for EWR have developed since the 2021 non-statutory consultation and what our preferred plans for certain sections of the railway are, including: route preferences, route-wide matters, and what happens next.

3.3. HS added that alongside the RUR, EWR Co published the [Consultation Feedback Report](#) (CFR), [Economic and Technical Report](#) (ETR) and the [Need to Sell Property Scheme Guide](#) (NtS Scheme). HS explained that the CFR contains a summary of all feedback received during and after the non-statutory consultation and how EWR Co have taken account of it.

3.4. HS explained that accessible (Word) versions of all these reports were currently being produced and would soon become available online. HTML versions of the key documents can now be found [here](#).

A little more on the Need to Sell Scheme

3.5. HS introduced Jonathan Nesbitt (JN) from the Land and Property Team who explained that the NtS Scheme has been published to support home and property owners who have a compelling need to sell. The NtS Scheme will support people to sell their home or small business to EWR Co where they are unable to do so, other than at a substantially reduced value as a result of the development or delivery of EWR.

- 3.6. JN clarified that this scheme would look to buy properties at the full market value, rather than at a reduced rate. He encouraged any concerned parties to contact EWR Co's Land Team to discuss further.
- 3.7. Cllr Abu Sultan (AB) asked if JN could reiterate the advice for individuals who were not directly impacted by the scheme. JN responded that the NtS Scheme has five qualifying criteria in total, one of which is location. He explained that there is not a fixed distance from the railway that an individual has to live to be considered for the NtS Scheme. As long as an individual can demonstrate that the proposals impact their property in line with the qualifying criteria then they could be eligible.

Bedford St Johns

- 3.8. MA introduced himself as the Programme Manager for Bedford and noted that the aim of the session was to explain and present the development of the designs since the 2021 non-statutory consultation.
- 3.9. MA outlined the two options to relocate Bedford St Johns station that were presented during the 2021 non-statutory consultation.
- 3.10. MA advised that EWR Co has confirmed Option 1 presented at the 2021 non-statutory consultation remains the emerging preference due to its proximity to the town centre and Bedford hospital, making life easier for NHS staff, patients and visitors.

Bedford – Considering alternatives to serve central Bedford

- 3.11. MA stated that following non-statutory consultation feedback in 2021, EWR Co has carefully considered whether an alignment passing to the south of Bedford might be a better option than an alignment going through Bedford station.
- 3.12. EWR Co looked in detail at two alignments: i) The Varsity Hybrid Alignment: this alignment option would pass to the south of the town. It would relocate Bedford St Johns station further east and would make use of part of the route of the former Varsity Line; ii) The Varsity Hybrid via A421 Alignment: this option would be similar to the Varsity Hybrid Alignment above, however, when travelling east it would more closely follow the A421, aiming to limit impacts on the environment.
- 3.13. MA presented two other options EWR Co had reconsidered for approaching Bedford from the south which has been put forward by EWR Co as part of the 2019 non-statutory consultation and subsequently modified by a local group to serve Bedford station. Some of the trains would bypass Bedford to the south but others would allow access to Bedford Midland station using a triangular track junction.
- 3.14. He explained that these routes, as well as the two variants of the Varsity, would only allow two trains per hour to reach Bedford Midland station, using the triangular junction,

and two faster through services which would take passengers from Oxford to Cambridge. This is compared to the four trains per hour serving Bedford Midland station that EWR Co is proposing.

- 3.15. MA outlined that the service to and from Bedford Midland station would be limited to only 2 trains per hour in each direction given the time required to turn trains round, which normally takes between 15-20 minutes and presents operational challenges.
- 3.16. MA explained that this factor, alongside the area to the north of Bedford presenting significantly fewer environmental constraints than the south and east of Bedford, meant the preference remained the northern approach. In addition to this, geotechnical analysis has indicated that the soils to the north of Bedford are also more favourable for the construction of a railway. This is largely due to floodplain soils (as found to the south) not having the required engineering qualities to easily support large infrastructure.

Bedford

- 3.17. MA outlined that following non-statutory consultation feedback EWR Co had looked extensively at ways to deliver the railway on the existing four tracks, however, modelling indicated this was not viable due to current levels of congestion on the four tracks.
- 3.18. HS and MA emphasised that they were very aware of the challenges the requirement for six-tracks presented and the impact this would have on a number of properties and for people living in Poets, Ashburnham Road, Bromham Road and the surrounding areas.
- 3.19. MA outlined that whilst the number of properties at risk from demolition has decreased from the figure stated at the 2021 non-statutory consultation, EWR Co still very much appreciated the concerns from residents in this area and would continue to work with them to minimise the impact wherever possible.
- 3.20. MA explained the emerging designs for Bedford Midland station meant that the impact on the residents of Ashburnham Road was not yet fully understood and that further detailed design work would be required so that this could be presented at statutory consultation.
- 3.21. HS added that EWR Co were very aware of the impact this alignment had on properties and thorough work had been done to verify if six tracking was needed or not. She confirmed that this work had shown that six tracks are required, but that further work had been done to minimise the number of properties affected wherever possible. She noted that EWR Co had placed huge importance on minimising the number of properties required.

Bedford to Cambourne

- 3.22. MA outlined the alignments that were considered by EWR Co at the 2021 non-statutory consultation. He explained that from further analysis, EWR Co had found that Alignment 1 performs better than all other alignments considered for this section of the route.
- 3.23. MA added that work had been done to consider a variant to Alignment 1 that would serve Tempsford station. This work found that a station at Tempsford should be preferred to one at St Neots South, even though it is not served by existing designs for Alignment 1. EWR Co therefore developed a local variation of the alignment – known as Alignment 1 (Tempsford variant) – which will be taken forward for further development.
- 3.24. MA explained that Alignment 1 (Tempsford variant) is EWR Co's preferred option, and they will take this forward to statutory consultation.

What happens next?

- 3.25. MA outlined what further work would be undertaken to help EWR Co build the design alongside the feedback from the non-statutory consultation.
- 3.26. MA highlighted that there is future opportunity to comment at statutory consultation.

Questions

Four vs six tracks at Bedford

- 3.27. Cllr Michael Headley (MH) stated that the Liberal Democrats oppose the six-track proposal for Bedford. He asked if the Arup report (North of Bedford 4-track Operational Impact Assessment, Appendix 12 of the ETR) from February 2023 represented the latest documentation to support the information in the RUR that claims that EWR Co had no choice but to select the option for six-tracks. He added that he felt that the RUR was an oversimplification and did not provide substantive evidence to support this decision.
- 3.28. MA explained that the Arup report was the latest source of information and modelled the latest train service specification. The modelling described in that report had been developed and agreed upon jointly with Network Rail. The Arup report had considered a wide range of scenarios and undergone a number of iterations.
- 3.29. MA outlined that the report provided evidence that it would be extremely difficult to implement EWR services on the existing four-tracks and within the existing timetable of services. Thameslink and freight operators already operate on these tracks and their services would need to be preserved, meaning EWR trains would likely not be able to meet the aim of four trains an hour. In addition, these existing train services would likely

be prioritised in times of disruption meaning frequent delays to EWR services would be likely.

- 3.30. MA explained that EWR Co looked into creating an 'Up Fast platform' but that this was expensive, did not fully solve the congestion issue and would cause a large deal of disruption to services during construction. MA added that limiting the tracks to four would mean that the aim to increase the capacity on the Midland Mainline could not be achieved and would also constrain potential future growth of the railway, freight services and the investment in the area.
- 3.31. MH highlighted the text in the RUR/ETR that noted that further operational assessments are likely to be required to reflect the changes outlined and inform detailed design development and asked if this meant that the model in the Arup report had not taken account of trains turning around in Bedford under the option for four-tracks. MA responded that he was confident this had been accounted for within the model but that he would revisit the report to ensure the wording accurately reflected this and would issue a correction statement, if required.

Post meeting clarification: The previous operational assessment has been completed in the context of the EWR Programme Wide Output Specifications (PWOS). During the ACP EWR Co moved away from the PWOS requirements and the 2023 report provides the modelling undertaken as part of the ACP and represented EWR Co's latest position. *We reduced our train service specification to model and test integration of timetables and yes we could provide a service but these compromises meant we weren't able to unlock the programme benefits and transform with growth. We firmly believe we need 4 trains per hour to do this and even with relaxing a firm 15 minute spacing to more even intervals between 10 and 20 minutes, we cannot integrate or not preclude growth or performance aims for us or other operators with sharing the slow lines of the MML.*

- 3.32. CA stated she also could not support the option for six-tracks and associated demolition of homes.
- 3.33. CA asked MA if he could provide the reasoning he outlined as to why the option for four-track was not viable in a written statement to the Group's members so they could share with residents. She also asked if he could include a similar explanation as to why the route shown in the maps provided to residents in the Poets area could not be pushed further west where there looks to be more green space and no properties. MA agreed he could provide both statements.

3.34. Cllr Ben Foley (BF) stated the Green party also did not support the option for six-tracks and asked if the possibility of fitting the additional two tracks into the existing corridor had been considered. MA confirmed that EWR Co had considered different cross-sectional arrangements for the railway corridor in depth to minimise land take in the area, however the various cross sections developed did not reduce the land requirements and impact on properties. In addition, the construction logistics would be far more complex and disruptive so it would not be as viable as the preferred option.

ACTION 1: EWR Co to provide the group with a written explanation as to why four-tracking would not be possible and why the route north of Bedford could not be pushed west of the properties.

Impact on land and property and the approach communicating with local residents and communities

3.35. CA stated that the map provided to residents in the Poets area did not show an area of Granet Close Gardens as being required. MA confirmed that this land is no longer required.

3.36. BF asked for more information on why plans for land requirements on Ashburnham Road were not included in RUR and what was causing the delay in providing this information.

3.37. MA explained that EWR Co has undertaken in depth checking to confirm that decision making on the scheme to date has been accurately relayed and as a result elements of the detailed design have not progressed as far as may be expected. MA confirmed that this information will be available at the statutory consultation.

3.38. HS added that the current aim is to hold the statutory consultation in the first half of 2024, adding that exact dates are in part driven by central government and it is not possible to be more accurate at this point.

3.39. BF asked if there was the possibility of further information being shared before the statutory consultation. MA and HS explained that this is very unlikely. HS explained that the decision-making processes within central government make it difficult to share targeted information and that generally route wide decisions need to be made by central government before sharing this sort of information.

3.40. BF asked what efforts have been made to communicate with residents of Ashburnham Road, specifically if they had received a map similar to that received by the Poets residents.

3.41. JN explained that 508 letters had been distributed to affected residents across the entire EWR route and that he would confirm if residents of Ashburnham Road had received any letters.

Post meeting clarification: 43 residents in Ashburnham Road have been written to. 26 of these were delivered by hand and 17 by Royal Mail. 138 residents in the Poets Area have been written to. 115 of these were delivered by hand and 23 by Royal Mail.

3.42. BF emphasised that properties which are not located in Poets or on Ashburnham Road but are still potentially affected must not be forgotten. HS thanked BF for making this point during both this meeting and meeting #4. She highlighted how EWR Co is equally aware of all residents who may be impacted by the scheme but acknowledged how externally terms such as 'Poets' were often used unintentionally in shorthand to refer to all those potentially directly impacted by the scheme. HS agreed that EWR Co will consider how it describes this area to ensure all areas are included.

3.43. BF asked what would happen to people who were currently renting. JN outlined that this is something EWR Co is currently looking into and have yet to confirm their position on. HS explained that compensation in line with the Compensation Code would not currently apply for renters, but that EWR Co would provide an update on this when an approach is agreed and the information is available.

3.44. BF asked if more detailed maps will be provided as they were currently difficult to interpret. HS outlined that EWR Co is looking into making more detailed maps available for the upcoming community events.

Post meeting clarification: More detailed versions of the basemaps used at the community events are available on our website here: <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/routeupdate/osmaps>

3.45. ZL highlighted that the Poets acquisition map may not currently be showing the alignment of a specific property in Chesterton Mews correctly. HS requested that ZL send the details of this concern over via email so this could be reviewed and corrected if required.

3.46. ZL asked whether a site visit to these properties had been carried out since the non-statutory consultation. MA explained that to date site visits only included non-intrusive surveys.

3.47. ZL asked what monitoring, including structural investigations, had been carried out up to this stage. MA outlined that no structural investigations or onsite monitoring have been undertaken to date as these take place later in the design process, but that EWR Co had reviewed data from satellite modelling.

- 3.48. ZL outlined that the building specification of the houses on Chesterton Mews was not akin to the characteristic Victorian style build further down the road and that some of the houses already shake when trains run on the existing line. She clarified that she wanted reassurance that surveys undertaken to date would pick up on this kind of detail and asked whether these individuals would be eligible under the NtS Scheme if the assumptions made by computer modelling are different in reality.
- 3.49. JN emphasised that anyone could apply to the NtS Scheme and even if they are not currently marked as at risk, they may still be eligible and meet the qualifying criteria.
- 3.50. MA added that a Code of Construction Practice or similar document will be produced that will set out how construction impacts would be managed and mitigated. He added that this could include structural monitoring and solutions such as installing beams or putting measures in place at a property adjacent to one required for demolition to minimise risk of damage.
- 3.51. MA added that these sorts of solutions would be developed by a suitably qualified structural engineer and reassured attendees that EWR Co places a huge importance on health and safety and site works would not be undertaken unless a thorough health and safety assessment had been carried out.
- 3.52. CA asked for a breakdown of how the 66 properties that are likely to be directly affected in this area will be impacted. HS confirmed this information is in the [RUR](#) (Table 3, page 95). The EWR Co support team outlined in the zoom chat that 37 residential properties are likely to be acquired and or demolished (16 fewer than indicated in 2021 non-statutory consultation), 28 residential properties may lose part of their garden or parking area (16 fewer than indicated in the 2021 non-statutory consultation), and one commercial property is likely to be acquired and demolished.
- 3.53. CA asked how the upcoming community information events were being publicised to residents. HS outlined that information about the events was online and had been included in the recent community e-newsletter and was going to be publicised in the local media, through targeted online adverts and posters offered to all ward and parish councillors. She asked attendees if there was anything else they would suggest to reach the relevant people.
- 3.54. Attendees noted they had not received the request for posters. HS said she would look into this.
- 3.55. CA outlined that she would either like to be provided with leaflets to distribute to Poets and Ashburnham residents or for EWR Co to undertake a leaflet drop or come up with

Post meeting clarification: A copy of the poster was shared with LRG members on 9 June via email and requests for printed copies have also since been delivered.

an approach to get in contact with these individuals. HS agreed to take this away and get in contact with CA and other councillors separately to arrange this.

- 3.56. ZL did not consider that there was a reliable print media in Bedford and that perhaps a more 'boots on the ground approach' was needed in this area.
- 3.57. ZL expressed disappointment that the 'hand delivered' resident letters were simply posted through letter boxes rather than being delivered via a door knock as EWR Co had suggested.
- 3.58. ZL asked if the RUR and other documents could be made available in other languages. HS confirmed that EWR Co are happy to produce versions of the documents in other languages upon request and confirmed that previous communication had included this note in a variety of languages, but that to date no one had taken them up on this offer. She stressed that members of the group were welcome to make that request at any time.
- 3.59. CA asked what the 15% figure in the NtS Scheme referred to and when the date of the valuation extends to. JN responded that the 15% figure was a marker that would be used to indicate that an individual is unable to sell their home at market value. He explained that if the applicant was unable to demonstrate a 15% reduction, EWR Co would still urge an application to be submitted as long as an individual can prove a reduction in offers due to the EWR proposals compared to the full market value they would be considered by the independent panel.
- 3.60. In terms of valuation date JN explained that if an applicant was successful, they would need to sell their home within three years of being accepted to the scheme and that it is up to the applicant when they exercise the valuation process.
- 3.61. CA thanked JN for his answer but clarified that her question related more specifically to individuals wanting to sell their properties immediately and would come back to EWR directly about specific properties. JN explained that EWR Co have introduced the NtS scheme for homeowners who have a need to sell their property but are currently unable to do so due to EWR proposals. EWR Co will continue to explore other options and look to see if other schemes can be introduced to help homeowners who want to sell their property.

ACTION 2: EWR Co to confirm if and how renters impacted by the project would be supported once this approach is agreed.

Alignment 1 (Tempsford variant)

- 3.62. MH expressed his concern about the selection of Alignment 1 (Tempsford variant) and his belief that residents in the Roxton area had not been properly consulted before the decision was made to select this alignment. MA and HS confirmed this would be

consulted on at statutory consultation and explained this variant came about as a result of feedback from the previous consultations and further analysis.

- 3.63. CA asked why the properties required on the dip to Roxton were not mentioned in any of the non-statutory consultation documents. She emphasised that this was the same situation which had occurred for residents in the Poets area previously. MA said he would provide a written response to this point. HS emphasised that new elements of design will all be consulted on at statutory consultation.
- 3.64. BF asked if a station on the East Coast Mainline at Tempsford had been confirmed or not. MA and HS confirmed that a station at Tempsford had been confirmed and that this would interchange with the East Coast Mainline.

Post meeting clarification: Alignment 1 (Tempsford variant) was developed following feedback received from the 2021 non-statutory consultation and further technical studies. Given this option was developed following the non-statutory consultation the first opportunity to consult Roxton and surrounding areas on this route preference will be as part of our statutory consultation, which we expect to take place in the first half of 2024.

Route wide matters

- 3.65. CA quoted from a letter from the Rail Minister to Mr Yasin MP and asked when a decision around electrification would be made. HS responded that this decision was largely with central government to make and that EWR Co would update the public in due course.
- 3.66. CA asked what stage of development the Business Case was at and when it would be published. HS explained that this document is owned by central government and it would be up to them whether it is shared or not. HS outlined that the Business Case itself is a very specific series of documents guided by the Treasury's Green Book process and that this is currently in development and due to be submitted to central government after the DCO is submitted.
- 3.67. HS added that the Business Case is often confused with evidence on the benefits EWR would provide. It was noted that the ETR includes a lot of information on EWR's benefits.

4. Review of actions from meeting #4

- 4.1. HS outlined Action 6 from meeting #3 'EWR Co to explore options for potentially directly impacted residents to have regular meetings, in a similar format to an LRG, or explore alternative options to engage more frequently with them' and Action 1 from meeting #4 'EWR Co to look to provide an overview of its approach to community engagement and discuss with the Group how this could be improved as the topic for Meeting #5.'

- 4.2. HS noted that both of these actions are ongoing but could potentially be covered as one of the topics for the Group's next meeting.
- 4.3. She added that EWR Co are now in contact with Protect Poets and the Chesterton Residents Company and requested that the Group's members get in contact if there are any other similar groups EWR Co should be engaging with.
- 4.4. CA emphasised how while the LRGs are important it is imperative that EWR Co speaks to residents. HS agreed and outlined that there would be land and property specialists at the information events for residents to speak to.
- 4.5. JN added that there would also be rooms set aside at the community drop in event at Bedford on 13 June. He advised that those residents who received letters should get in contact in advance of the event if they want to book a session with a member of the land and property team to ensure availability.

5. Closing remarks, future meetings and topics

Topics for future discussion

- 5.1. HS re-emphasised that it would be really helpful to discuss with the Group how they and their residents want to engage with EWR Co and to cover the kinds of things they want to discuss and how events, for example, should be advertised going forward. She added that she was really keen to understand what more could be done to reassure and communicate with residents.
- 5.2. HS also suggested that the topic of environmental impact might be a good topic for future meetings following CA's suggestion that it could be helpful to cover viaducts, especially Fairhill Viaduct which begins and ends in Harpur at a future meeting.
- 5.3. CA suggested that provided other attendees were happy, instead it would perhaps be helpful if EWR Co could provide some ideas of future topics to her and that she could then confirm the Group's preferred topics when providing possible dates for the next meeting. HS and attendees agreed that they would be happy with this approach.

ACTION 3: EWR Co to provide suggestions for future meeting topics and agree a preferred topic and date for the Group's sixth meeting via CA.

Summary of actions

ACTION 1: EWR Co to provide the group with a written explanation as to why four-tracking would not be possible and why the route north of Bedford could not be pushed west of the properties.

ACTION 2: EWR Co to confirm if and how renters impacted by the project would be supported once this approach is agreed.

ACTION 3: EWR Co to provide suggestions for future meeting topics and agree a preferred topic and date for the Group's sixth meeting via CA.

Attendees:

EWR Co attendees

- Hannah Staunton, EWR Co lead.
- Mo Alserdare, Programme Manager for the Bedford Area
- Jonathan Nesbitt, Land and Property Team
- Sarah Jacobs Local Representatives Groups Engagement Manager
- EWR Co production and support team.

Local authority councillors

- Cllr Paul Edmonds, Castle & Newnham Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Lucy Bywater, Castle & Newnham Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Abu Sultan, Cauldwell Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Ben Foley, Greyfriars Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Christine McHugh, Goldington Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Colleen Atkins MBE, Harpur Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Zara Layne, Harpur Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Dean Crofts, Kingsbrook Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Michael Headley, Putnoe Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Mohammed Masud, Queens Park Ward in Bedford Borough

Other attendees

- Susan Edwards, Council Notetaker, Labour Group's Political Researcher

Apologies

- Cllr Fouzia Zamir Atiq, Cauldwell Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Harish Thapar, Cauldwell Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr David Sawyer, De Parys Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Henry Vann, De Parys Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Timothy Caswell, Goldington Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Ralley Rahman, Kingsbrook Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Max Royden, Putnoe Ward in Bedford Borough
- Cllr Nesreen Akhtar, Queen's Park Ward in Bedford Borough