

REPORT TO: Cabinet

6 March 2019

LEAD CABINET: Deputy Leader
MEMBER:

LEAD OFFICER: Joint Director Planning and Economic Development

East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation response

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to seek agreement for the Council's response to the current East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation.
2. This is not a key decision.
3. The consultation is running between 28th January 2019 and 11th March 2019. Five routes are being consulted upon, with a preferred route due to be announced before the 2019 parliamentary summer recess.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the draft response to the East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation at Appendix 1 on behalf of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Reasons for Recommendations

5. To respond to the current East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation, having regard to the implications for South Cambridgeshire of the railway route options, taking into account the limited information currently available.

Executive Summary

6. The East West Rail Bedford to Cambridge route options consultation is being held between 28th January and 11th March 2019. Five routes are being consulted upon (see Appendix 3), which for South Cambridgeshire all include a proposed station either around Cambourne or at Bassingbourn barracks. The consultation identifies the potential for significant housing delivery around whichever station is selected. A preferred route is due to be announced before the 2019 parliamentary summer recess, ahead of work on a more detailed route alignment.
7. There is significant uncertainty about the potential scale of growth envisaged to be unlocked by/support the railway, and there is also a need for further integration of spatial planning and environmental considerations with this infrastructure project.
8. Based upon a high level comparative assessment at Appendix 2, and acknowledging the limited information available and need to consider issues raised in greater depth, the draft Council response to consultation at Appendix 1 identifies the benefits of

route options including a station around Cambourne (B and E) as being preferable to routes including Bassingbourn barracks. The response supports the approach of all routes accessing Cambridge via the south, but highlights the importance of delivering Cambridge South station as a separate but complementary project; it also requires further detail to understand potential community and environmental impacts more fully.

Background

9. The East West Rail Bedford to Cambridge route options consultation is being held between 28th January and 11th March 2019. Five routes between Bedford and Cambridge are being consulted upon (see Appendix 3), with a preferred route due to be announced before the 2019 parliamentary summer recess.
10. The Bedford to Cambridge section forms part of the wider Oxford to Cambridge East West Rail project, which itself sits within Government's wider ambitions for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, building on proposals from the National Infrastructure Commission in its Partnering for Prosperity November 2017 report. The project is being led by the East West Rail Company (EWR Co.), which was set up in 2017 by Government.
11. The current route options consultation follows the announcement of Bedford-Sandy-Cambridge as the preferred broad corridor; beyond selection of a preferred route drawing on this current consultation, there will be further consideration and consultation relating to the detailed alignment ahead of a formal Development Consent Order process intended for completion in 2023. EWR Co. aims to open the line by the mid-2020s.
12. Key features of interest of the route options for South Cambridgeshire residents include:
 - Within South Cambridgeshire, all five options include a proposed station either around Cambourne (route options B and E) or at Bassingbourn barracks (route options A, C and D), and the consultation document identifies the potential for significant housing and employment growth around whichever station is selected;
 - Outside South Cambridgeshire, all five options include the potential for growth close to the boundary of South Cambridgeshire either around Sandy, north of Sandy, close to Tempsford and/or south of St Neots. Route options B and E (growth at Tempsford area/south of St Neots) seem to offer potential for the most significant amount of growth;
 - All five options propose connecting to the West Anglia Main Line to the south of Cambridge slightly north or south of Great Shelford, in order to connect to the proposed Cambridge South station (which is not proposed to form part of the Bedford-Cambridge project), and on to Cambridge station.
13. EWR Co. is seeking feedback on three key issues:
 - challenges and opportunities relating to the route options
 - whether EWR Co. is right to focus on route options that approach Cambridge from the south
 - the overall approach EWR Co. has taken to developing route options.Further details of the background to consultation, route options and supporting evidence are contained in the consultation documents identified in the background papers below.

14. In considering its response to the current consultation, members and officers have been in discussion with neighbouring authorities to understand whether there is consensus on a single preferred option at this stage. South Cambridgeshire District Council officers have also heard feedback from affected parishes at parish events organised by EWR Co. (due to the timing of these events, headlines from these are not included in this report, and will be shared verbally with Cabinet).
15. In parallel to the appended South Cambridgeshire consultation response, a shared response letter will be sent on behalf of Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, and Bedford Borough Council. This letter will be signed on behalf of South Cambridgeshire District Council by the Leader.

Considerations

16. A number of key considerations affect the Council's response to this consultation:

Support for the principle of East West Rail

17. Full Council in September 2018 agreed its support for the principle of the central section of the East West Rail line, on the basis that it has the potential to be transformational for the regional economy, allowing sustained growth and geographical expansion of our high value industries such as life sciences, IT and digital.
18. Further to this, the motion agreed by the Council included the following points:
 - selection of route options must take account of analysis of how they support and unlock housing and employment growth and how they fit with our existing development strategies.
 - investment on this scale carries enormous risks in its impacts on the environment while also presenting us with an unprecedented opportunity to make positive contributions to the net biodiversity and natural capital gain of the areas affected. This Council therefore commits itself to promoting environmental enhancement of benefits along the corridor and asks that this is included in the route evaluation criteria.
 - East West Rail and the growth of the corridor more generally will bring significant change to existing communities. The Council will work closely with those affected from the earliest stages of the project and will ensure that the delivery bodies do likewise.
 - This Council will continue to collaborate with the East West Railway Company on the route options and on analysing their benefits and impacts.
 - This Council will coordinate its work with all the local partners as well as the East West Rail Consortium, of which the Council is a long-standing member.
19. Discussion below, and the draft response at Appendix 1, are shaped by the principles set out above.

Purpose and role of East West Rail Central section

20. The purpose of the East West Rail Central Section (Bedford to Cambridge) is defined in its revised strategic objectives (derived from Government's aims for the Cambridge

to Oxford corridor, following the Partnering for Prosperity report)¹. The headline features of these objectives include:

- “Improve east-west public transport connectivity by providing rail links between key urban areas (current and anticipated) in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc;
- “Stimulate economic growth, housing and employment through the provision of new, reliable and attractive inter-urban passenger train services in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc”.

The Technical Report explains that the “strategic objectives have underpinned the development of route options that prioritise serving locations that could support growth and new homes over fast end-to-end journey times, while still resulting in significantly faster journey times than would otherwise be available (e.g. connections via London)”².

21. These objectives and the accompanying explanation are instructive in understanding what the railway will mean for South Cambridgeshire:
- First, the railway is intended to serve journeys between larger urban areas; not to facilitate short distance commuting from or between villages and into Cambridge;
 - Second, the purpose of and business case for the railway is to facilitate housing and employment growth, with the implication of locating a station on the rail line being to locate growth around it. Uncertainties regarding the potential scale of growth are discussed below, but it is clear that the selection of a preferred route will significantly influence future Greater Cambridge development strategy, and depending on timetable, may impact the forthcoming joint Local Plan.

Uncertainty regarding the growth implications of consultation

22. Given the centrality of housing and jobs growth to the railway’s purpose identified above, this consultation is very broad in its description of the scale of growth envisaged around the potential station locations: growth opportunities at Bassingbourn barracks are described as ‘significant additional housing’ or for around Cambourne: ‘further development’. More detailed analysis of capacity is referenced in the consultation Technical Report, but the economic/business case justification for specific housing outputs is not made clear for these locations.
23. Notwithstanding the above, other information suggests that very significant growth would be required to support the business case for the railway; growth that would in great part be focused around station locations. Related evidence provides varying estimates or assumptions of growth levels: the consultation Technical Report cites one assumption in relation to the economic benefits of the whole scheme of some 150,000 *additional* (i.e. not those included in current local plans) homes across the five authorities through which the Central Section might pass³; equally, different reports supporting the Partnering for Prosperity report assumed growth at Bassingbourn barracks of 43,000 households⁴, and ~31,000 people⁵ (roughly

¹ East West Rail Bedford to Cambridge Route Option Consultation Technical Report (EWR Technical Report), 2.8

² EWR Technical Report, 2.9

³ EWR Technical Report, A.21

⁴ Steer Davies Gleave, November 2017. Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge Northampton Growth Corridor National Infrastructure Commission Transport Infrastructure Assessment: Final Report, Table 3.3

equivalent to 12,000 homes- roughly the current size of St Neots) respectively. Whatever the exact numbers, the implication of a new station at either Bassingbourn barracks or around Cambourne seems to be that the selected location would be expected to see growth to become at least around as large as St Neots is currently.

24. Given that the consultation does not make clear what scale of growth would be needed to support one or another route, it is not currently possible to say whether such growth could be physically accommodated, or whether it would be environmentally or socially acceptable. The Technical Report makes clear that the route options have not at this stage been subject to Environmental Impact Assessment⁶ (due to be completed when the project reaches the stage of identifying a detailed alignment). Instead, the route options have been developed and appraised using high level assessment criteria, based upon the strategic objectives referred to above.
25. Based upon the above discussion, given the potentially significant growth implications for Cambourne area or Bassingbourn barracks arising from the selection of a preferred station location, together with the very limited information available on the scale of growth, environmental impact and delivery expectations, it is recommended that the Council's response at this stage suggesting a preference for a specific route option should be heavily caveated in relation to requiring further information.

Need for wider and more in-depth consideration of issues via the Local Plan

26. Further to the abovementioned uncertainties in the consultation regarding the potential scales of growth envisaged to support the railway, it is considered that in principle, large-scale transport infrastructure projects should respond to spatial planning strategies that integrate consideration of economic, social and environmental issues.
27. At a local level, such work will be undertaken via the forthcoming Joint Greater Cambridge Local Plan. This document will set a spatial strategy based upon detailed evidence and, following legal requirements, considering all reasonable options. Ahead of this, any response that the Council makes suggesting a preference for a specific route option can only be partial, based on a limited consideration of issues. The Council's response at this time does not therefore prejudice full consideration of strategy options at a later point, based upon more detailed information. The proposed response at Appendix 1 notes this limitation.

Headline comparison of route options

28. A high-level summary comparison of route options as they apply to South Cambridgeshire (ie routes including a station either around Cambourne or at Bassingbourn barracks) is contained at Appendix 2. This draws upon the consultation Technical Report and other existing information, together with officer views. No planning assessment of development potential at Bassingbourn barracks or land around Cambourne has been undertaken to support this consultation response, noting the abovementioned lack of certainty regarding scale of development envisaged, and that such an assessment will be a matter for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan process.

⁵ 5th Studio/SQW, Nov 17. NIC Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford Future Planning Options Project, p80

⁶ EWR Technical Report, 1.9

29. Given the limitations of information available, the comparison does not lead to a definitive conclusion. Some of the comparators do not suggest much difference between the routes (e.g. transport user benefits), and in others it is not possible to make meaningful comparison (e.g. in terms of historic site assessments, no large scale proposals have previously been made for land at Bassingbourn barracks).
30. Notwithstanding the above limitations, routes via Bassingbourn cost less (although see below regarding the need for additional infrastructure), have greater potential headline environmental impacts, would form a new growth location in relation to previous strategy, and might require greater infrastructure provision given that this area has not previously been a location for large-scale growth. Routes via Cambourne cost more, have fewer headline environmental impacts, would build on existing growth locations in the current strategy, and could make best use of existing and proposed infrastructure. Based upon this comparison, subject to the above uncertainties and need for further consideration, route options going close to Cambourne could be considered preferable. The arguments supporting this limited conclusion are set out in the draft response at Appendix 1.

Structure and content of the response to consultation

31. Beyond the above discussion, the draft response to consultation at Appendix 1 sets out the reasoning and justification for its conclusions. The response is structured as follows, answering the consultation's key questions identified above:
 - Expression of the Council's in principle support for the railway
 - *Overall approach taken to developing route options*
 - Notes the uncertainty regarding growth levels, and caveats the Council's response regarding route preferences as being subject to requiring further information;
 - Identifies the need to more fully consider transport, planning and environment issues in an integrated way via the regional Oxford Cambridge Arc project and through the Local Plan;
 - *Challenges and opportunities relating to the route options*
 - Subject to the above uncertainties and need for further work, identifies in-principle opportunities of route options going close to Cambourne (B and E);
 - *Focus on route options that approach Cambridge from the south*
 - Supports the approach of all routes via the south of Cambridge, but highlights the importance of delivering Cambridge South station as a separate but complementary project; requires further detail to understand potential impacts more fully;
 - Requests closer working with EWR Co. as the railway project progresses.

Options

32. Members may decide to:
 - Approve, without amendment, the proposed response by South Cambridgeshire to the East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation;

- Approve, with amendments, the proposed response by South Cambridgeshire to the East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation;
- Not approve the proposed response by South Cambridgeshire to the East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation.

Implications

33. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:

Legal

34. Consultation with 3C Legal team was undertaken to confirm whether the Council's suggesting a preference for any particular one of the route options would in any way prejudice the legal requirement to assess all reasonable strategy options as part of the forthcoming Joint Greater Cambridge Local Plan process. This risk is considered limited, given that the choice of route is not for the Council to make. The mitigation response to this is to caveat the Council's response, noting that it is based upon the limited information currently available, and highlighting that the Local Plan process will include full consideration of all reasonable options.

Financial

35. The East West rail project, if advanced through a Development Consent Order process, will have potentially significant resource impacts as the Council seeks to participate and shape the outcomes for its residents in the design phase and the lead up to the inquiry. At this stage, the response and engagement with EWR Co. can however be made from existing resources.

Other

36. In the absence of specific details on each route and given the high level nature of the proposals before the authority, the implications for the Councils' carbon commitments, climate change, community safety, equalities and wider impacts cannot be easily quantified.

Effect on Corporate Priority Areas

Building homes that are affordable to live in

37. Whichever route is selected, it is assumed that substantial additional jobs and homes could be expected to be delivered in the vicinity of a station in South Cambridgeshire. Greater Cambridge Local Plan policies, supported by the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy, will require a wide range of new homes including a proportion that would need to be affordable. The consultation does not make clear whether one or other route option provides greater or lesser opportunity for providing affordable housing.

Helping business to grow

38. Significant investment in national strategic rail infrastructure could be expected to engender a positive environment along the corridor for further economic growth. Large scale growth in the district would create jobs to serve new populations, and could support the expansion or creation of new businesses aligned to the faster/easier access along the Cambridge to Oxford corridor.

Being green to our core

39. A new rail line would in principle enable more people to travel using transport other than the private car. Equally though, this new connection is predicated on significant housing growth, and would be likely to encourage more and longer distance

commuting: the Technical Report estimates that the total number of return trips each year between Cambridge and Oxford (in both directions) would increase from around 18,000 to around 50,000 over the 20 year period to 2038/39⁷. In addition, the construction of the line would carry with it a significant amount of embedded carbon emissions which may be hard to offset.

Background Papers

East West Rail Company consultation web-page (https://eastwestrail.co.uk/haveyoursay), including:	
• Consultation document:	https://eastwestrail-production.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/public/Central-Section-Consultation/fe0f74c338/EWR-Consultation-Document.pdf
• Technical Report:	https://eastwestrail-production.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/public/Central-Section-Consultation/db652106d4/EWR-Technical-Report.pdf
National Infrastructure Commission, November 2017. Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc	https://www.nic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Partnering-for-Prosperity.pdf
Steer Davies Gleave, November 2017. Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge Northampton Growth Corridor National Infrastructure Commission Transport Infrastructure Assessment: Final Report	https://www.nic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/First-Last-mile-Strategy-Assessment-Reports-Transport-infrastructure-Assessment-First-Last-mile-Strategy-Assessment-Report-SDG-2017.pdf
5 th Studio/SQW, Nov 17. NIC Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford Future Planning Options Project	https://www.nic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/171122-NIC-Final-Report-5th-Studio-optimised.pdf
Minutes of Full Council including motion relating to East West Rail	http://scamb.southcambs.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=410&MId=7251

Appendices

Appendix 1 Draft response to the East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation on behalf of South Cambridgeshire District Council

Appendix 2 Headline comparison of route options, focusing on South Cambridgeshire-specific impacts

Appendix 3 Route options map

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⁷ EWR Technical Report, 4.11