

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMY AND REGENERATION

**CULLOMPTON AND WELLINGTON NEW RAILWAY STATIONS PROJECT
UPDATE**

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Richard Chesterton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration
Responsible Officer: Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration

Reason for Report:

- 1. To update Members with regard to the Cullompton and Wellington new stations project and related service enhancements; and**
- 2. To identify the next steps for taking forward the project.**

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That Members note the contents of this report; and**
- 2. That Officers continue to explore funding opportunities for the next stages of the project.**

Financial Implications:

In May 2020, the partnership was successful in securing funding of up to £50k from the Department for Transport's **"Restoring your Railway" Ideas Fund**. This funding has supported the development of the **Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC)** referred to in more detail in the main body of the report. The "Restoring Your Railways – Ideas Fund" provides 75% of the cost of preparing the SOBC the remainder has been funded from existing budgets previously set aside for the project along with contributions from partners.

The SOBC is the first phase of work for any major transport infrastructure intervention and at the time of writing is in the process of being finalised and submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT). We can expect a decision in early 2021 by DfT on whether it is appropriate to progress to the next stage of the project and enter the next stage of the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline described below.

The Government recently announced alongside its Comprehensive Spending Review its intention to invest in the railway network and Officers are working closely with the DfT in anticipation of a fourth round to the **"New Stations Fund"** in 2021. The third round having been expanded in November 2020.

In addition to the Strategic Outline Business Case other development works are necessary to support a bid to the New Stations Fund. For the Cullompton Station element it is estimated to cost approximately £200,000 to prepare the bid material

and complete other rail industry requirements. Officers are currently investigating external funding opportunities to finance this work as part of an integrated transport approach to facilitate the delivery of the Culm Garden Village.

The detailed capital costs of delivering a new station at Cullompton is currently unknown; however initial estimates would suggest that it would be in the order of £16 million. If the station reinstatement was supported by DfT through the New Stations Fund process the typical level of government contribution would be 75% of the delivery costs. This would leave a shortfall of approximately £4 million. Officers are currently investigating where these funds could be secured. It is likely that it would be through a combination of s106 contributions, partnership investment and other external funding mechanisms.

Budget and Policy Framework: The Strategic Outline Business Case has been funded primarily through the Restoring Your Railways fund alongside partner contributions including Mid Devon District Council from previously pledged and allocated funding within the budget for 2020/2021. Funds for future stages of the project have yet to be identified. Members however will be updated once a clearer idea of a possible funding package emerges.

The Mid Devon Local Plan 2013-2033 includes a site allocation for a Cullompton Railway Station. The Cullompton area is the largest focus for strategic growth in the Local Plan accommodating 50% of planned growth during the plan period. The station and service enhancement will form part of a wider multi modal approach to transport in and around Cullompton and the proposed garden village scheme.

Legal Implications: No significant legal implications are anticipated at this time. Legal implications could arise as part of any bid to the New Stations Fund. Should these arise they will be reported to Cabinet through future update reports.

Risk Assessment:

Robust, suitable and appropriate governance arrangements for the new stations project are necessary to drive the project progress, allow it to operate efficiently and to build relationships with stakeholders. Project risks are reviewed regularly by the steering group and a risk assessment is an important part of the SOBC.

Effective governance arrangements will also ensure that best use is made of funding opportunities and provide a structure within which the project will develop and be accountable.

Risks will be constantly reviewed as the project develops. Decisions whether to continue with the project will be made at each significant gateway milestone as explained later in the report. This will allow the opportunity to withdraw from the project should the risks outweigh the likelihood of satisfactory delivery.

Equality Impact Assessment: No equality issues are identified for this report at this stage. As the project goes forward it will need to consider the views from representatives from protected groups that the project has the potential to impact upon.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The proposal for a new railway station contributes to all four corporate priorities of economy, homes, community and environment and

is central to the delivery of many of aims identified within the Corporate Plan. It is a significant strategic project which could have a national profile.

Impact on Climate Change: The strategic case for the new railway station proposal is part of a multimodal approach to catering for the demands from new development in the area. Sustainable transport is an important part of that approach and the project will encapsulate pedestrian and cycle access.

1.0 Introduction/Background

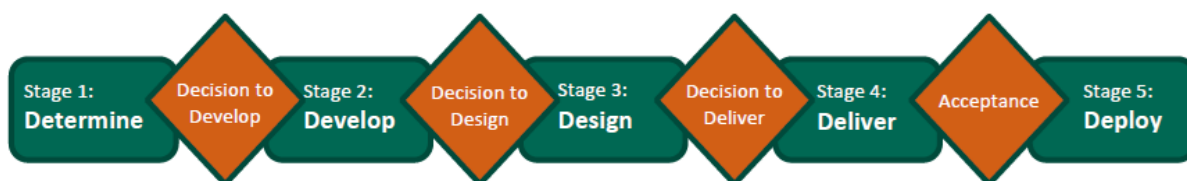
- 1.1 There have been long established aspirations to reinstate stations at Cullompton and Wellington. A key impetus for delivering these projects is that both areas are proximate to significant planned growth. It is considered that this can be part of a more general enhancement to the rail service between Bristol and Exeter. Within our submission to the new stations fund the service enhancements were deemed to be the most appropriate in order to meet the needs of stakeholders' aspirations of an hourly service at Cullompton and Wellington was the extension of Cardiff to Taunton services to Exeter. However this could be supplemented by a Taunton Exeter shuttle.
- 1.2 Across the South West Peninsula, there has been a significant growth in rail Journey to Work trips to Exeter, growing by 181% between 1991 and 2011, compared with just 30% by car (driver). This has provided an important context to the desire to examine the potential for reopening a station at Cullompton particularly given the scale of growth planned for the area. Cullompton has experienced significant population growth since the closure of the station in 1964. This trend is continuing given the focus of growth in the Cullompton Area in the Local Plan along with the Garden Village proposal.
- 1.3 Work on this project was initially based on meetings held by the Devon and Somerset Metro Officer meeting with the occasional meeting with MPs. This has been the basis for the subsequent forming of a strong partnership between the County, District and Town Councils, the rail industry (both Network Rail and TOCs) and the Local Enterprise Partnership. The Members of Parliament for Tiverton and Honiton and Taunton Deane have also jointly sponsored the project. Members may recall that these partnership governance arrangements have recently been formalised to give the project a firmer footing with the creation of a Project Board and Officer Steering Group as agreed by Cabinet at its meeting of 23rd April 2020.
- 1.4 It has also been decided that in recognition of the respective County Council's (i.e. Devon County Council & Somerset County Council) being unable to commit sufficient time/resource to be the project sponsor, that the two District Councils (Somerset West & Taunton Council & Mid Devon District Council) would undertake this role for the initial stages of this project.
- 1.5 A site for a new railway station, north of Station road in Cullompton, is allocated within the Local Plan. Network Rail carried out a timetable study in 2017 to explore whether a service could be provided calling at Cullompton and Wellington. In January 2019 an initial feasibility study was undertaken by WSP Consulting to check whether station arrangements fit within the allocated footprint and to assess if there are any signal issues. The results from these initial studies suggest that there would be a sound value for money

case and that it should be feasible to provide a suitable train service without adverse impacts upon other services using this part of the main line. It was also concluded that subject to topographical, structural and ground investigation surveys, a new station at Cullompton could be accommodated. Signal D181 would however need to be relocated. Similarly Wellington was also assessed favourably. The potential service patterns and frequencies is shown diagrammatically in Appendix 1. The opportunity to reopen these stations is particularly timely, as it aligns well with the work which Network Rail has already committed to conduct for the Bristol to Exeter corridor, through its Continuous Modular Strategic Planning process. It should also be noted that the Cullompton scheme could form part of wider rail service improvements in Devon with the recent announcement of the restoring rail links to Oakhampton.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline

- 2.1 In March 2018 the Government published the Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline 'A New Approach for Rail Enhancements' (RNEP). This process sets out the key stages that rail enhancement projects (including the provision of new stations) will need to undertake to be successful. There are five stages of activity separated by formal investment decision gateways. The first three stages, "Determine", "Develop" and "Design" relate to project development. The last two stages "Deliver" and "Deploy" focus on construction and at this stage all investment decisions would have been taken. Each of these key stages is separated by decision gateways to determine whether or not to proceed with the enhancement. The first three stages will all require a suitable and government compliant business case.



Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline, A New Approach for Rail Enhancements, Department for Transport, March 2018

- 2.2 The Cullompton and Wellington Railway Stations Re-instatement project is currently at stage 1. A key requirement before a project can progress to the next stage is the development of a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC). The SOBC then has to be agreed by Government before it will engage in "Decision to Develop" discussions.

Strategic outline Business Case (SOBC)

- 2.3 Mid Devon District Council, in partnership Somerset West and Taunton Council, submitted a bid to the New Ideas Fund in March 2020, seeking support to develop the technical work required to progress the two station proposals to SOBC stage. Subject to approval of the SOBC by the Department for Transport (DfT) this would provide a basis for entering into

discussions regarding progressing into the next stage (Stage 2 Develop) of the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP).

- 2.4 WSP consulting was appointed to undertake the SOBC work in September 2020. The Strategic Outline Business Case is a technical piece of work and your Officers have been contributing to its development through active participation on the project steering group and through direct engagement with the consultants. The Project Board chaired by the two Local MPs (Neil Parish MP and Rebecca Pow MP) has reviewed work at its last meeting and considered significant progress had been made to move the project forward.
- 2.5 At the time of writing the SOBC is nearing completion and is on schedule for submission to DfT in December 2020.

New Stations Fund

- 2.6 The Government recently announced (November 2020) alongside its Comprehensive Spending Review its intention to invest in the railway network with the third round of the New Stations Fund having been expanded by £32 million. Officers are working closely with the DfT in anticipation of a fourth round to the “New Stations Fund” in 2021 so that the project might be in the best position to make a strong application for further funding. It is encouraging that in the recently published National Infrastructure Strategy that new stations for Cullompton and Wellington are explicitly referenced.
- 2.7 Sufficient information needs to be prepared alongside the Strategic Outline Business Case to form a credible bid to the New Stations fund, which we anticipate could be required by the end of quarter two 2021/2022. The likely costs of this work is approximately £200,000 to prepare the bid material and complete other rail industry requirements. Officers are currently investigating live external funding opportunities to help finance this work as part of an integrated transport approach to facilitate the delivery of the Culm Garden Village.

3.0 NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 The next steps to advance the project are as follows:
- DfT to consider the SOBC and to meet with the partners to consider next stages including whether the project will proceed. This decision will precede any formal entry onto the next stage of the rail enhancement pipeline (Develop);
 - Continue positive contact with senior officials within the rail industry and the DfT to continue to raise the profile of the project;
 - Development of a bid for the New Stations Fund in the event of a fourth round being announced in 2021;
 - Continue to seek funding opportunities,
 - Ensure that there is engagement with Network Rail through the Continuous Modular Strategic Planning (CMSP) process;
 - Review governance arrangements at next key stage in the project.

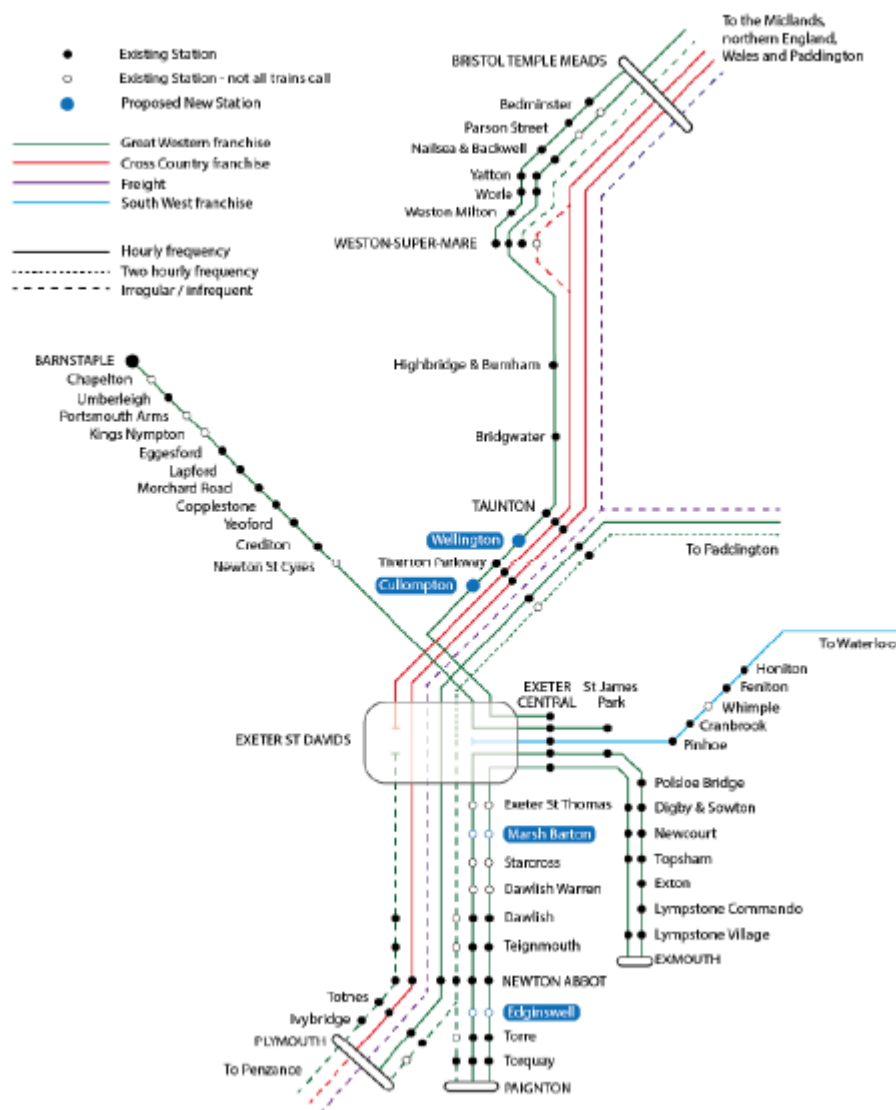
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Circulation of the Report: Cabinet Member, Cabinet, Leadership Team

List of Background Papers: Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline ‘A New Approach for Rail Enhancements’.DCLG prospectus locally led garden villages, towns and cities <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rail-network-enhancements-pipeline>
Restoring Your Railway Fund Guidance (Department for Transport) January 2020
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-opening-beeching-era-lines-and-stations>

Cabinet Report of the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration
Cullompton and Wellington New Railway Stations Project –
Governance, Process, Project Funding and Next Steps (23 April 2020)
<https://democracy.middevon.gov.uk/documents/s17182/Cullompton%20Station%20Update%20and%20Rail%20Governance%20FINAL.pdf>

APPENDIX 1



Service patterns and frequencies