26 March 2019

District Councillor Tony Jefferson
Leader
Stratford on Avon District Council
Church Street
STRATFORD UPON AVON
CV37 6HX

Joint Highway Authority Response – 18/01892/OUT & 18/01883/FUL

We are the recognised Rail User Group for train services between Birmingham and Stratford upon Avon and Leamington Spa and Stratford upon Avon.

We wish to refer to the response dated 17 March 2019 addressed to Stratford on Avon District Council from the Local Transport Authority, Warwickshire County Council, which was jointly prepared with Gloucestershire and Worcestershire County Council’s in respect of the above two planning applications, being for housing development conferred with Garden Village Status at Long Marston Airfield and a South Western Relief Road.

The joint response from the three County Council’s states:

- The actual trip generation for motor vehicles is underestimated for the development.
- There is a lack of assessment of the potential modal share for the development.
- Warwickshire County Council supports Gloucestershire and Worcestershire County Councils’ view that more information is needed on proposed modal share and trip generation for sustainable modes of transport.
- There is insufficient information to assess the impact of additional traffic through the villages of Mickleton, Lower Quinton, Ilmington, Pebworth, Broad Marston, Badsey, Long Marston, Welford on Avon, Bidford on Avon, Studley, Chipping Campden and Moreton in Marsh.
- The Authorities are concerned that the identified sustainable transport measures are not significant enough to provide a full and robust alternative to car-based journeys.

Background

We have previously expressed our view voluntarily, as a part of public debate and most importantly formally through the planning process. In summary, we expressed opposition to the proposals solely because the Shakespeare Line Promotion Group (SLPG) cannot not accept a new road being imposed across the Avon Valley and Western Stratford without examination of what transport infrastructure would best serve the area and deal with the issues that arise from housing growth to the South West of Stratford that amounts to over 6000 new homes and population increase of just over 15,000.
Due to the lack of evidence needed to support a view that there was ‘no alternative’ to a SWRR, as it was presented to the local community as a fait-accompli, led to our objection.

The jointly agreed response from three County Councils’ now confirms that there is insufficient information concerning the impact of additional traffic, a lack of assessment regarding modal share and a potential underestimation of likely additional traffic volumes such a situation, stated not by one, but the three Local Transport Authorities, is compelling and confirms that alternatives to a SWRR and car based journeys cannot have been investigated or considered. Consequently, it is erroneous to suggest a SWRR is required simply because there is ‘no alternative’.

**The Railway - History**

In 1975 the British Railways Board considered the future plans of its South Midlands network and decided to invest in upgrading the railway line between Stratford upon Avon and Cheltenham, which connected to the Worcester – Oxford – Paddington line at Honeybourne. Line speeds were to be increased and the lines’ infrastructure modernised, the work was planned to commence in 1977. In August 1976 the railway line was forced to close due to a derailment at Winchcombe. The economic circumstances at the time prevailing in the country which involved the need for support from the IMF meant the government would not permit the British Railways Board to spend capital to repair the damage and reopen the line.

The railway track was eventually lifted except for a section of the line that remains open between Honeybourne and Long Marston. The disused route and alignment situated in Warwickshire was purchased by Warwickshire County Council and has enjoyed protection under successive Local Plans adopted by Local Planning Authority, Stratford on Avon District Council. The nature of the protection is based on the ‘potential reopening of the railway line’.

**The Railway – SLPG’s Position**

While there has been a campaign for decades to reopen the railway line south from Stratford upon Avon it has not enjoyed sponsorship for a number of reasons. Administrative boundaries of local authorities, Network Rail and even Regional Government offices have determined that no one body or organisation can or could take accountability for pursuing any potential examination of a reopening scheme.

SLPG are not campaigning for the re-opening the Stratford upon Avon to Honeybourne line in outright terms. We recognise that for any railway reopening to have potential it first must demonstrate a quantifiable forecasted economic benefit that offset against the level of investment required leads to a positive GVA. In addition, we acknowledge that a key dependency of any reopening is reliant on investment to upgrade and increase capacity along the Cotswold main line. Consequently, we support the Cotswold Line Task Force, led by Lord Faulkner of Worcester and who are currently working on the case required to attract the necessary funding to enable the desired upgrade and capacity increase for the Cotswold route.

Various infrastructure studies and updates have been produced in the past concerning reinstating the railway between Stratford upon Avon and Long Marston and upgrading the 2.5 mile original and existing section between Long Marston and Honeybourne. While such studies are helpful in terms of giving a very outline cost of reinstatement they amount to ‘putting the cart before the horse’. For any railway line to open or reopen the first step is a clear economic justification, only after that milestone has been reached and the economics are confirmed as positive can a scheme be properly considered with the next step being understanding the potential cost of reinstatement.
SLPG believe that an Economic Impact Study (EIS) is required into the reopening the railway between Stratford upon Avon and Honeybourne to determine if reopening the railway is economically desirable and when offset with the costs and environmental requirements is financially feasible.

**Economic Impact Study**

We believe that an EIS should consider the following:

- The Garden Village development at Long Marston Airfield and its modal share for journeys:
  - North to Stratford upon Avon, Solihull, Birmingham and the West Midlands
  - South to Oxford, Reading, Heathrow Airport and London Paddington (Crossrail)
  - The impact on house prices and local economy of the Long Marston area of a frequent train service
- The level of economic impact arising from increased visitor numbers to and from Stratford upon Avon Town Centre and district:
  - Wider and more frequent connectivity
  - Doubling Stratford’s 6% of visitors by rail to the national average of 13%
- Indicated growth arising from an orbital service operating between Birmingham, Solihull, Stratford, Evesham, Worcestershire Parkway, Worcester and Birmingham
- Economic growth arising from direct connectivity between Stratford upon Avon and Oxford, Reading, Heathrow Airport and London Paddington
- Economic growth arising from direct connectivity, via the new Worcestershire Parkway, between Stratford upon Avon and Cheltenham, Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, Penzance, Cardiff and Swansea

Previous economic appraisal work was conducted for Worcestershire County Council in 2017 but did not consider several of the elements outlined above. The work was not specific to Stratford upon Avon or South Warwickshire and omitted key factors such as the visitor economy and home<employment travel. These elements are all needed to obtain a comprehensive Economic Impact Study.
In Spring 2018 SLPG conducted two online surveys, one designed for Rail Users and members of the public and the other specifically dedicated to Stratford upon Avon Town Centre businesses. With over 1,000 responses the results from the surveys confirmed that over 93% of both users and Stratford upon Avon Town Centre businesses wanted to see an Economic Impact Study carried out as soon as possible.

Through the summer of 2018 SLPG shared the results of the surveys and its Aims & Objectives to over 15 key stakeholders, this included all local authorities in the area. Towards the end of 2018 SLPG met with Stratford on Avon District Council and encouraged the authority to take the lead with other local authorities and stakeholders and commission an EIS. SLPG were asked to prepare and submit a paper that could be used by the District Council to progress and promote further consideration and potential joint funding for an EIS. We duly submitted the paper and to date we have not been contacted.

Updated financials and further considerations on a previous infrastructure study related to the railway reopening was mentioned and SLPG expressed its view that it couldn’t support such work as an EIS is the recognised first step to determine if the economics of any reopening are positive. We understand this work has recently been completed. However, any conclusions and financial elements lack the provenance required and that can only achieved by a full economic appraisal. Consequently, the results from such work cannot be used to confirm or dismiss any proposed railway scheme.

**Future Process**

In view of the Warwickshire County Council’s response, agreed jointly with the neighbouring County authorities of Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, it is clear that alternative means of sustainable transport now require to be looked at as part of these planning proposals and related applications.

Consequently, we believe that the case for carrying out an EIS is now overwhelming not least because it is the only objective means of determining, one way or another, the viability of reopening the railway which is a potential alternative means of transport underpinned by the following:

- The conferring of Garden Village Status upon Long Marston Airfield site was granted following the submission of a case that mentioned the potential railway reopening over a dozen times yet the subsequent planning applications make no mention of the railway or any alternative.
- Railway travel is sustainable
- The route of the closed railway has been protected by the LPA through all of its Local Plans for the express purpose of potential railway reopening
- Railways are the most effective means of facilitating modal shift reducing car-based journeys
- Birmingham City Council have adopted a Clean Air Zone to meet emission requirements and over the next years and decades will be significantly reducing car-based journeys
- Reopening the railway would obviate the car-based journeys needed to access the rail network at Stratford upon Avon and Honeybourne and the impact that these additional journeys have on the villages and communities affected along the various routes.
- The West Midlands Rail Executives’ *Rail Investment Strategy* adopted in January 2019 includes the development of new rail corridors citing the Midlands Connect A46 expressway corridor improvements (South West Worcestershire-Warwickshire) referring to potential expansion of both existing and closed rail routes (which includes Honeybourne – Stratford upon Avon).
SLPG realise that the results from an EIS and the estimated cost of railway reinstatement may determine there is not an economic case for reinstating the railway if so SLPG would accept this.

If the results from an EIS confirmed a significant uplift in economic growth as has been notionally suggested and when offset against the estimated cost of reinstatement the case was positive then a scheme could be objectively and successfully promoted and crucially attract third-party funding from the developer.

In the event of a negative case for reopening the railway south of Stratford upon Avon the results of an EIS would be useful in promoting alternative rail network enhancements north of Stratford upon Avon such as increasing capacity by redoubling the railway line between Bearley Junction and Hatton.

**Conclusion**

The joint advice headed from Warwickshire County Council states that;

- “The Authorities are concerned that the identified sustainable transport measures are not significant enough to provide a full and robust alternative to car-based journeys.”

- The impact of additional traffic on numerous local communities is insufficiently understood.

The case supporting the bid for £86million recently made by Warwickshire County Council to the Government’s Housing Infrastructure Fund is placed serious doubt by the joint advice of the 17 March 2019.

The Garden Village Bid and its numerous references to sustainable transport potential citing the railway reopening and the subsequent Planning Applications that make no mention or accommodation are contradictory. SLPG have raised this specific point with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government and have been advised to request the applications be called in if they are granted without amendment from their current form.

The desirability of providing an alternative and sustainable means of transport for an envelope south-west of Stratford that will total some 6,000 new homes combined with much wider and transport connectivity for visitors at Stratford upon Avon would be properly examined by an EIS. Such a study would provide an evidence based determination of such a scheme and demonstrate consideration of an alternative means of transport to car-based journeys.

We request that Stratford on Avon District Council, in co-operation with Warwickshire County Council and Gloucestershire and Worcestershire County Councils, consider, agree and action/require a full Economic Impact Study to be carried out concerning the reinstatement of the railway between Stratford upon Avon and Honeybourne for the reasons as outlined above.

Thanking you in anticipation of your attention and consideration

Fraser Pithie
Secretary