SLRUG

SHAKESPEARE LINE RAIL USER GROUP

27 February 2025

Stratford on Avon District Council
Elizabeth House
Church Street
Stratford upon Avon
Warwickshire
CV37 6HX

Dear sir/madam,

South Warwickshire Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation – February 2025

We hereby respond to the SWLP Preferred Options as follows:

3. Vision and Strategic Objectives: South Warwickshire 2050 ***Broadly Supported***

We fully support the Vision and Strategic Objectives, with the understanding that housing development must attract effective investment in key infrastructure. The Local Planning Authority and its elected members will need to ensure this, as anything less will undermine the SWLP's Vision and Strategic Objectives.

It is imperative that a significant modal shift in transportation takes place. This necessitates a change in approach by the Local Transport Authority, where roads are not the preferred or exclusive solution.

4. Meeting South Warwickshire's Sustainable Development Requirements

4.1 Spatial Growth Strategy

SG23 North of Henley in Arden	*Comment as below*
SG24 Hockley Heath Group	*Comment as below*

The rail system holds the key to facilitating responsible housing expansion, particularly in areas surrounding both new and existing stations. However, for rail to fulfil this transformative role, it must be underpinned by strong passenger service levels and seamless connectivity to central metropolitan areas.

If the SWLP is to permit these spatial developments, it must commit to requiring investment in the rail infrastructure. This not only supports sustainable living environments but also ensures that we can effectively manage future growth while safeguarding our communities and the environment.

The South Warwickshire Local Plan must resolutely prioritise securing investment where there is spatial and/or large-scale development to ensure there is no diminution in existing services while crucially enable a dynamic and interconnected future.

Without investment in the rail infrastructure (which must include both capital infrastructure and services) the two areas defined as SG23 and SG24 are opposed.

4.2 Proposed New Settlements

A1 Land south of Tanworth-in-Arden	*Not Suitable*
A2 Land east of Wood End	*Not Suitable*
B1 Hatton	*Comment as below*
BW Land at Bearley and Wilmcote	*Comment as below*

For new developments at either of these sites to be supported and move forward, the SWLP must robustly require investment in rail infrastructure.
This investment is not just a support mechanism; it is essential for creating a sustainable living environment and effectively managing future growth while steadfastly protecting the communities affected and the environment.

The South Warwickshire Local Plan must resolutely prioritise securing investment in rail for each of these developments to ensure there is no diminution in existing services while crucially enable a dynamic and interconnected future.

Sustainable living environments are imperative for managing future growth and safeguarding our communities and the environment. We will not accept and thus will oppose either of these developments if they are promoted and pursued without a strong commitment to enhancing rail infrastructure.

Rail systems are critical for reducing traffic congestion, lowering carbon emissions, and providing efficient transportation options. Without this commitment, the SWLP will undermine its vision and strategic objectives, seriously impair sustainability goals and jeopardise the well-being of the communities within the SWLP area.

Without investment in the rail infrastructure (which must include both capital infrastructure and services) the two areas defined as B1 and BW are opposed.

C1 Land south of Kingswood	*Not Suitable*
E1 Long Marston	*Comment as below*

The Long Marston Airfield (LMA) Garden Village (LMAGV) and the adjacent Meon Vale developments cannot possibly be regarded as a sustainable community without the immediate reinstatement of the Stratford-Long Marston-Honeybourne railway line. The integrity of the Garden Village concept is wholly predicated on this crucial connection; without it, these developments starkly contradict the vision laid out in the 'LMA Garden Village – Expression of Interest, 2016.'

A comprehensive report by Transport for New Homes in June 2020 explicitly highlighted serious flaws in the LMA Garden Village plan, which drew national attention. This analysis of 20 Garden Communities made it clear that current plans will lead to distressing levels of traffic and render residents inequitably reliant on cars. Not only has the Long Marston Airfield Garden Village been condemned for this failure, but the, at best, lukewarm to indifferent attitude of the Local Transport Authority (Warwickshire County Council) in pursuing the potential rail alternative has to date been unacceptable.

Reinstating the rail link is an absolute necessity to avert trapping residents in a car-dependent lifestyle. With projected housing growth in the Long Marston hinterland at 6,087 homes for approximately 25,000 people, the stakes are sky-high. The Long Marston Airfield Garden Village proposes 3,500 homes for over 8,750 residents, while Meon Vale plans 1,430 homes, including 380 on the adjoining Codex site in Worcestershire.

The SWLP's current proposal to expand the LMAGV site to potentially accommodate 10,000 homes—pushing the population of the Stratford-Long Marston-Honeybourne corridor to 85,000—serves to intensify the urgency for appropriate rail services. Without this vital connection, car dependency would be recklessly increased, worsening traffic congestion and jeopardising the environmental amenity of the area.

The 'Long Marston Airfield Garden Village – Expression of Interest, July 2016' by Stratford DC/Cala Homes contains 12 emphatic mentions of the necessity of reinstating the Stratford-Honeybourne rail link. These benefits were pivotal in securing Garden Village status from the Government in 2017.

Furthermore, the Stratford Core Strategy, 'Long Marston Airfield New Settlement - Proposal LMA', received approval in 2016 based on the Inspector's Report, which clearly stated that reinstating the southbound rail link would *"provide a long-term solution to the town's traffic congestion."* There is unequivocal evidence that this service would establish a sustainable alternative to the use of private vehicles for residents and visitors alike.

4.5 Infrastructure Requirements and Delivery

Draft Policy Direction 5 – Infrastructure Requirements and Delivery

The 2024 Stratford-Honeybourne SOBC Refresh rail study needs to be incorporated into the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. This integration is essential for securing developer contributions towards the rail link, which is a critical component of the emerging Worcester-Parkway-Evesham-LMAGV-Stratford-Hatton-Warwick-Leamington (A46 corridor) development arc, as outlined in the final report.

By including this study in the plan, the South Worcestershire Local Plan (SWLP) can effectively mobilise the necessary funding and resources to improve transportation infrastructure. This is vital to accommodate the current and future growth in the region, which is critical to achieving sustainability and fulfilling the vision and strategic objectives of the SWLP.

4.8 Safeguarding Land for Transport Proposals

The importance of safeguarding the Stratford-Honeybourne-Oxford/Worcester railway line cannot be overstated. This essential route is aligned with the Stratford-on-Avon Core Strategy 2016 and adheres to the principles outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024, particularly paragraph 111(c). Protecting this route is crucial not only for its intrinsic value but also for its alignment with various local development plans and investment strategies across South and East Worcestershire, the Cotswolds, Tewkesbury, Cheltenham, and Gloucestershire (the A46 corridor).

The current policy language, particularly the use of the word "inhibit" in the draft policy, is inadequate. It must be strengthened to reflect the clear stance taken in the Stratford Core Strategy, which advocates against any development that undermines safeguarded schemes. The existing wording provides a justified and effective framework, ensuring that planning measures align with NPPF 2024.

The 2016 Stratford Core Strategy Inspector's Report highlighted the reinstatement of the southbound rail link as a long-term solution for traffic congestion. The report noted that this link would provide a sustainable alternative to car travel for residents and visitors alike. It is imperative for the South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP) to actively support the restoration of the Stratford-Honeybourne railway. Failing to do so would contradict the Inspector's Report recommendations.

One of the core objectives of the SWLP should be to reduce car mileage for South Warwickshire residents seeking rail services. Therefore, prioritizing the restoration of the southbound rail link from Stratford-upon-Avon to the North Cotswold Line is essential to achieve this goal. Road transport accounts for a staggering 80% of nitrogen dioxide emissions, while rail transportation contributes just 1.6%. As an authority that has declared a Climate Emergency, it is vital that planning policies reflect a commitment to sustainable alternatives and actively seek to mitigate the harmful effects of road transport.

Stratford is strategically located between Oxford and Cheltenham, yet it remains isolated due to a lack of public transportation options. The absence of rail connectivity south of Stratford has led to a high dependency on cars, undermining efforts to promote sustainable transport.
The draft Warwickshire Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) emphasises the need to address significant commuter movements across borders and highlights the North Cotswold Line's importance for access to major rail networks.

Support for increasing capacity (redoubling the remaining single-line sections) on the North Cotswold Line is fully endorsed. However, it is disingenuous for LTP4 to only support NCL plans to increase capacity while relying on car usage from Warwickshire to neighbouring Gloucestershire and Worcestershire for access to rail which adds additional pressure on the railheads in those counties.

LTP4 should advocate for the reinstatement of the Stratford-Honeybourne rail link as a priority, recognising that this restoration would ensure that the North Cotswold Line also achieves increased capacity. Reinstating the Stratford-Honeybourne-Worcester/Oxford railway is not merely an enhancement; it is a necessity.

This restoration would address the growing latent demand for rail travel. It would enable Long Marston Garden Village to thrive without becoming car-dependent and serve as a vital regeneration tool, revitalising Stratford's economy in the post-pandemic era while enhancing network resilience through the introduction of a second route between Birmingham and Oxford.

The SWLP must protect this railway route and prioritise its reopening. This initiative is not just about transportation; it is about fostering sustainable communities, reducing environmental impact, and investing in the future well-being of the area.

6. Delivering South Warwickshire's Economic Needs

Draft Policy Direction 14 – Major Investment Sites (MIS)

MIS 3 – The Long Marston Rail Innovation Centre

SLRUG unequivocally supports Porterbrook's presence at the Long Marston Rail Innovation Centre (LMRIC) and its acquisition of the site in 2024. We firmly endorse the recent and planned investments, along with a strong commitment to the rail industry. The site is strategically designated as a Major Investment Site in the emerging South Warwickshire Local Plan. As such, we fully support the proposed £45 million investment in the site and its significant potential for the region.

6.10 Supporting our Changing Town Centres

Draft Policy Direction 20 – Supporting our Changin Town Centres

Reinstating the Stratford-Honeybourne railway presents a compelling opportunity for economic regeneration in Stratford-upon-Avon, particularly in the wake of the challenges posed by the pandemic. Despite its rich cultural heritage and appeal as a tourist destination, Stratford currently attracts only 6% of its visitors via rail, a figure significantly lower than the 13% typical for similar town centres.

With approximately 3.5 million annual visitors, the reopening of this direct rail link with London could greatly benefit local businesses to the tune of nearly 245,000 extra visitors if the above national figure is applied to the current 3.5 million Stratford annual numbers. This is without taking into account the opportunity provided to visit Oxford en route, itself another tourist centre. Stratford upon Avon and South Warwickshire. Town centre businesses have noted that the lack of appealing rail services, particularly to London, has hindered their ability to thrive and draw investment.

A strong rail connection would not only enhance the appeal of Stratford as a destination but could also foster greater economic activity across various sectors, from hospitality to retail.
A survey conducted in 2018 highlighted a notable demand for rail services among residents, with 58% expressing interest in an Oxford service—an indication that supports the case for reopening the rail link. Furthermore, the Strategic Outline Business Case from 2021 concluded that not only would the project generate a useable Benefit/Cost Ratio above 1, but also that considerable user benefits would arise from an enhanced rail service connecting Stratford with greater networks, particularly south of Banbury.

An extended service from Stratford to London could significantly improve connectivity providing the convenience and simplicity of a continuous journey to key destinations including Oxford, Reading and Paddington. Similarly direct connectivity with Evesham, Worcester, the South West and South Wales would also be enabled.

62% or respondents said they would consider utilising a direct rail service to London. Moreover, local businesses overwhelmingly support this rail reopening with 94% of over 70 surveyed businesses expressed their backing for such a service arising from reopening the rail link.

The potential increase in footfall from both tourists and commuters could inject vital revenue into the local economy, providing a much-needed boost to Stratford post-pandemic. In summary, the reinstatement of the Stratford-Honeybourne rail link not only addresses connectivity issues but also serves as a powerful economic stimulus for local businesses. By catching the attention of new visitors and enhancing the travel experience for residents, this initiative could guide Stratford towards a flourishing future, ensuring it remains a vibrant and attractive town for both tourists and investors alike.

10. A Well-Connected South Warwickshire

10.1 Draft Policy Direction 31- Sustainable Transport Accessibility

The draft policy clearly states that "development proposals should prioritise access to public transport" and "developments should aim to minimise car dependency." However, the current reality starkly contrasts these objectives.

Stratford, along with the proposed major new settlement at Long Marston Garden Village, is on a trajectory that continues to favour car reliance, potentially undermining the very goals outlined in the policy. It is imperative that the South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP) and Local Planning Authority (LPA) and Local Transport Authority (LTA) take responsibility for reversing this trend. Without a decisive shift in transport investment—focused on enhancing public transport, particularly rail-based options, and promoting alternatives to private car use—these developments will further increase traffic congestion and create added environmental concerns.

The SWLP, the LPA and the LTA hold a crucial responsibility to adhere to their policy intentions and ensure that future developments genuinely prioritise sustainable transport solutions. The LPA and LTA are accountable for delivering fostering a community that supports public transport accessibility and reduces car dependency.

10.4 Draft Policy Direction-34-Vale of Evesham Control Zone

The Vale of Evesham Control Zone has clearly failed in its primary objective of managing the increase in HGV movements arising from development in the area. Instead of alleviating congestion and minimising the impact on local communities, it has merely shifted HGV traffic onto existing roadways, particularly along the A46 Trunk Road.

This policy, which ignores the potential of rail freight, is fundamentally unsustainable. Unless this policy is revised to incorporate rail freight options, it should be promptly removed from the SWLP. It's important to note that while other local authorities are moving towards this deletion, Warwickshire County Council seems to be an outlier in maintaining this ineffective policy.

This concludes our submission to the South Warwickshire Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation.

Yours faithfully

Peter Morris
Chair