

West Somerset Railway

Southern Gateway Programme: Redevelopment of Bishops Lydeard Station Site-Consultation Programme Brief

Introduction

The PLC in conjunction with its stakeholder partners, is now consulting on the proposals for the redevelopment of Bishops Lydeard station site under what is known as the Southern Gateway Programme. These proposals are being put forward by the Southern Gateway Project Board whose members include:

- West Somerset Railway PLC
- West Somerset Steam Railway Trust
- West Somerset Railway Association
- Friends of Bishops Lydeard Station
- Taunton Deane Borough Council

Plans to develop at Bishops Lydeard are not new. There have been discussions about various ideas and propositions going back almost 20 years. More recently, 2008 saw the emergence of outline schemes linked to the housing development that we now know as Station Green. However, it is only in the last 18 months that detailed work has really emerged which has involved all the key players in order to pull together an integrated vision for the site. The Project Board recognises that this is not the “finished article” but the propositions are sufficiently well thought through and are felt to be capable of being delivered providing that funding and support across the Railway is there.

This is the most far-reaching and ambitious programme of proposed developments on the West Somerset Railway for some time. It reflects the aspiration of partners around the Programme to make Bishops Lydeard somewhere that people come not just to ride on trains but also to gain some real experience and enjoyment from education and knowledge of heritage railways and their history with static exhibits, artefacts and, for the young in years and in spirit, some hands-on interactive opportunities.

Why is it Necessary?

The WSR is in a changing and increasingly competitive market both in terms of heritage railways and general tourism and leisure where the expectations of the travelling public and others means that we have to “step up to the plate” in terms of the customer offer. We need to keep the West Somerset Railway relevant to our many thousands of visitors each year and indeed, attract more people to this part of the world, including those who do not necessarily want to ride on trains or make the whole journey along the line. Bishops Lydeard is the main gateway to the railway and offers the best opportunity to realise our Vision.

The Vision

This has four main strands which are to:

- broaden the appeal of the railway by offering more than a train ride, and to maintain its relevance for a new and aspiring generation of visitors who no longer have the personal reminiscences of travel by steam train.
- increase the operational capacity and covered accommodation for managing and berthing trains and improve the facilities such as car parking, toilets and catering
- facilitate direct rail access from Taunton. This will be delivered initially through the proposed pilot project and then, subject to evaluation and approval, through permanent arrangements which include the use of Platform 3 for regular passenger services,
- from a heritage and tourism perspective, to make the most of the built environment of the existing station and, by developing an 'interpretation trail' from car park/bus stop to train, to allow the whole station area to develop beyond that of an open air museum, to become a vital, live railway experience in a safe environment, with a wide range of all weather interests and activities.

From this Vision, derived from a more detailed consolidated planning brief (available separately to read on the website, the Project Board has developed a high level Master Site Development Plan with two current options which illustrate the opportunities and how they might be brought together in a coherent way that allows the expanded site to work to best effect. **You are encouraged to read the consolidated planning brief which gives you more detailed background on the thinking that has led to the development of the two "options" for consultation.**

OPTION 1: To be undertaken in the following sequential phases

Current Phase 1 Summary

- Pursue land acquisition purchase requirements
- Visitor Entrance Pavilion/ticket office
- Improved waiting area/cafe (minus ticket office)
- Pedestrian footbridge
- Heritage vehicle display
- Temporary Museum
- Relocated water tank
- Heritage Carriage Shed
- Improved coach drop off point/arrivals area
- Staff/disabled car park
- New decked car park

Current Phase 2 Summary

- Pursue land acquisition purchase requirements
- Volunteer Accommodation
- Extend Platform 1 to accommodate eight coach trains
- New cafe restaurant with commercial kitchen
- Move existing museum contents into temporary Museum
- Create play area

- Renovate existing station building on Platform 1 and forecourt
- Construct 6 m wide wetland corridor

Current Phase 3 Summary

- New workshop/offices (temporary buildings to be removed)
- Creation of events space
- Construction of new Visitor Centre/Museum
- Service compound and access routes to operational storage area
- Completion of pedestrian circulation routes
- Structural planting to site boundaries

OPTION 2: To be undertaken in the following sequential phases

Current Phase 1 Summary

- Pursue land acquisition purchase requirements
- Museum/Visitor Centre/Cafe/Ticket Office
- Improved coach drop off/arrivals area
- Staff/disabled car park
- Improved waiting area and smaller café
- Decked car park

Current Phase 2 Summary

- Pursue land acquisition purchase requirements
- Volunteer Accommodation
- Extend Platform 1 to accommodate eight coach trains
- Heritage vehicle display
- Heritage carriage shed
- Pedestrian footbridge
- Play area
- Renovate existing Platform 1 station building and forecourt
- Renovate Goods Shed
- Locate new water tank
- Construct 6 m wide wetland corridor

Current Phase 3 Summary

- New workshop and offices (temporary facilities to be removed)
- Creation of events space
- Service compound and access routes to operational storage areas
- Completion of pedestrian circulation routes
- Structural planting to site boundaries

Non-Sequential Work Common To Both Options

- Operational Carriage Shed

- New Locomotive Compound staff facilities
- Local Authority play area (work already underway-TDBC responsibility and funding)
- Additional parking area (to be provided as part of the above)

Issues For Further Consideration

- Future shape and nature of locomotive facilities at Bishops Lydeard
- Future substantive use of current cafe/shop area on Platform 2
- Future shape, nature and location of volunteer accommodation
- Alternative approaches to capacity planning in the event of failure to secure additional land

These” options” have been prepared by the Project Board via an established Master Planning Consortium to test out the feasibility and content of what we want to do. There are some aspects of the proposals that are self-evidently sensible, but others will be open to alternative approaches. **They are not the definitive end product and will be subject to change not just through consultation but as we work through the detailed requirements in the next phase of planning.**

Consultation last until the end of April 2017. All the views put forward will then be assimilated and considered by the Project Board and judgements will be made about the changes required/possible as a result of consultation feedback. Once the Project Board has completed this work, formal recommendations will then go to the PLC Board for consideration and approval of any revised approach (which might include more than one option). This will then lead to finalisation of the masterplan and detailed planning and design for each of the specific projects.

The PLC has also agreed a new Investment Policy which gives far greater flexibility to fundraising on a major scale than was previously available. There are various options which the PLC will pursue in partnership with railway stakeholders to acquire the funds necessary to afford each of the projects as they are developed.

The scale and scope of these proposals means that the outline Project Plan as currently written assumes a timeframe of at least 10 years for completion.

The Opportunity for You to Have Your Say

There will be four ways in which staff, shareholders and other stakeholders can contribute to the debate about the proposals.

- 1) There will be a Stakeholder Meeting on Saturday 25th of February at 2 PM in the Village Hall Bishops Lydeard at which Southern Gateway will be presented with the opportunity for questions and answers.**
- 2) There are going to be two meetings organised for staff in March. The intention is to hold these in the Village Hall at Bishops Lydeard. Dates are being finalised and will be published on the website soon.**

- 3) A public meeting for the residents of Bishops Lydeard again in the Village Hall at Bishops Lydeard. This date will also be published on the website soon.**

- 4) Making a formal written response to the proposals. If you want to put your views in writing, you can do so by no later than Friday, 28 April 2017. The should be sent to Steve Williams, PLC Planning Director at williams@oakevillage.wanadoo.co.uk**