

Briefing note for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 November 2018

Update on Cheltenham Railway Station Responsible officer: Jeremy Williamson

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

1 Why has this come to scrutiny?

A railway station scrutiny task group was initiated in 2014. Overview and Scrutiny requested an annual update on the recommendations to cabinet from the task group.

2 Background

Improvements to Cheltenham Spa station has been an objective of CBC for several years following the huge surge in passenger growth and the paucity of the offer to meet passenger needs.

Most recent data from Office of Rail Regulation: Rail passenger journeys in Great Britain in 2018-19 Q1 increased to 429 million (3.1% rise compared to 2017-18 Q1). Estimates of station usage data based upon ticket sales data recorded in rail industry systems which is released annually rather than quarterly shows Cheltenham with 2016-17 data recorded as 2,352,712 entries and exits and 190,905 interchanges, totalling 2,543,617 passengers. For comparison Gloucester data was 1,435,698 and 68,390 respectively, totalling 1,504,088 passengers.

The challenge of improvement has been pursued jointly by Cabinet and the Cheltenham Development Task Force, plus interventions from the Cheltenham MP.

Significant progress was made on funding from the complex and silo based funding processes of the railway industry. Funding commitments for a forecourt upgrade secured from Gloucestershire LEP have been matched with funding secured by GWR from SCPF (Station Commercial Project Facility), DfT's Cycle-Rail Fund and Network Rail's Access for All programme. GWR are also contributing £500,000 from their Station Development Match Fund and have secured an additional £185,000 for environmental measures from the DfT. The latter will go into improvements such as motion sensitive LED downlighting in the car park and extra tree planting that will reduce impacts on nearby residents. However, progress for wider station improvements has been slow and hampered by wider rail industry woes such as the electrification programme cost over-run.

The Task Force and Cabinet are members of the Great Western Railway (GWR) stakeholder group. Progress has accelerated more recently following a GWR commitment to bring greater resource to delivery.

3 Update

The combined forecourt and car park upgrade plan is attached and works have clearly started in earnest. The current design reflected a best fit compromise following a design review workshop held

at CBC where concern was raised that the hierarchy of need was tilted towards cars rather than pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.

Initial assessments for interventions focussed upon the central bund as its contents and ecological value were unknown. Fortunately the bund was not contaminated as feared, and a programme to relocate all protected species began on 14th May 2018. Approximately 200 slowworms were relocated to the CBC Pilley Bridge nature reserve. This ecological clearance enabled works to begin on the removal of the bund on 3rd September 2018 and this phase is largely complete.

The forecourt works noted on the plan include removal of three panels to incorporate a new access staircase (due to height differences either side of the front wall) to reduce vehicle and pedestrian conflict at the front of the station. In addition the first three panels of the wall are being reduced to waist height to give better sight lines of the station. This work is scheduled to begin 11th February 2019 with main car park works beginning 18th February 2019 and the new cycle hubs due 17th April 2019 with allowances made to manage the races in March. Car park completion scheduled for 4th July 2019. It is hoped longer term that some public art can be incorporated into the design.

The cycle path link from the end of the Honeybourne Line to Lansdown Bridge is perceived by CBC and GCC as a key component of the package of works, however it has also proved the most complex, as it extends beyond the lease area of GWR and has necessitated complex negotiations with Network Rail. A plan in principle is being finalised after some aborted designs that were too costly or undeliverable due to factors outside of our control such as land ownership, reliance upon historic walls for structural stability etc. The current thinking but subject to further design that is anticipated to begin in January 2019 is for a cycle link south of the bridge off Shelbourne Road (essentially a 130m switchback ramp) and a pedestrian link north of the bridge (essentially a galvanised staircase from the bridge). This configuration would allow connectivity to the Stagecoach 94 (10 minute frequency) bus service and also cycle connectivity from the south. A wider ambition is to connect this cycle link to the railway with further works out to Arle Court (via Growth Deal 3 funding for the cyber park infrastructure) and beyond to Gloucester (via a Highways England funded cycle highway). The access around Lansdown bridge has been supported by Network Rail but 2 pinchpoints remain from the bridge to the station. These are at the Trimnasium and then the route from there to the station for pedestrians and cyclists. This is currently the focus of risk assessments and potential re-design (with support from GCC highways engineering team) and negotiations with Network Rail/GWR. Should a finalised design meet the necessary safety criteria then delivery could start in August/ September 2019; tying in with the Access for All project delivery. However this situation is fluid as requires an asset protection agreement with Network Rail which can be lengthy to secure.

A further complication raised by Network Rail is that before delivery can commence on Network Rail land they will be seeking a long term maintenance agreement with either CBC or GCC. My understanding is that both parties may resist this as the route is entirely upon Network Rail land, and Network Rail must have a role in promoting pedestrian and cycling access to stations.

Access for All funding was delayed due to national funding issues. It is understood that Network Rail will deliver the improvements (such as platform lifts) early in Control Period 6 (2019 - 2024). Network Rail funding triggers from April 2019 when they will start GRIP5 (final phase) design and tendering processes They are working with GWR as franchise holder with a view to co-ordinating the various programmes and works. Given the processes noted works are likely to commence late summer/early autumn 2019, once a contractor has been appointed.

4 Funding

Funding for the car park and forecourt has been secured; confirmed by recent GWR signing of LEP funding agreement. Access for All will be funded by Network Rail direct. The cycle link remains a challenge. Some of the funding will be deployed as part of the forecourt upgrade with new cycle

storage facilities, security etc. Final costs of the link are yet to be determined but any proposal to deploy a ramp over the retaining wall to avoid the Trimnasium pinchpoint will render the scheme unaffordable, hence the need to explore at grade solutions within the car park. It is unclear whether the existing funding pot will match the costs.

5 Other Issues

New rolling stock has started to be deployed and the new Hitachi inter-city express trains are becoming a regular feature on GWR routes. As you will be aware the doubling of the service to hourly through the day was planned for December 2018, but the whole timetable change was paused following a national review by Network Rail/DfT in the Spring of 2018. The earliest that such timetable improvements are likely to be implemented is May 2019 and GWR are pushing for that but concede that it could be as far off as December 2019.

Jeremy Williamson
November 2018