Public Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: East West Rail - Making Meaningful Connections

Non-Statutory Consultation

Meeting/Date: Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) – 2

June 2021

Cabinet – 17th June 2021

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning

Report by: Strategic Growth Manager

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report considers the route alignments being consulted on for the East West rail route based on the previously chosen Route E option.

In 2018, the Department for Transport created the East West Railway Company (EWRC) to look at plans being developed for a new railway between Oxford and Cambridge. The original plans were developed by the Department for Transport, Network Rail and the East West Rail Alliance. EWRC is now responsible for planning the section of East West Rail (EWR) between Bletchley and Cambridge, while overseeing delivery of the section between Bicester and Bletchley, which is being delivered by the East West Rail Alliance.

The EWR proposal is a nationally significant infrastructure project. It will enable faster journey times, lower transport costs and ease pressure on local roads. Locally, it will also open up jobs and growth opportunities and support opportunities for existing and new communities. It will support economic growth in the area as part of the wider aspirations of the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge (OxCam) Arc.

Cabinet previously considered the principle of the project and has supported Route E through the 2019 consultation by EWRC (See Minute 62). The responses to the 2019 consultation can be found at Appendix 1.

In January 2020 the preferred route was announced as Route E, which would serve:

• Bedford Midland station, providing interchange with Thameslink and Midland Main Line services

- A new station between the existing Sandy and St Neots stations, providing interchange with the East Coast Main Line
- A new station at Cambourne
- Cambridge station, after connecting to the West Anglia Main Line to the south of Cambridge, with at least some EWR services also expected to serve the proposed new Cambridge South station that is being promoted separately by Network Rail.

The provision of an east-west rail link is a key component of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. It has been supported through the Council's own Corporate Plan, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Transport Plan (CPCA, 2020), and the England's Economic Heartland's Transport Plan (EEEH, 2021).

EWRC is currently undertaking a non-statutory consultation, the subject of this report. This report considers the current, non-statutory consultation on the EWR proposals on nine option alignments that have been considered for the new rail link based on the preferred Route E within the section passing through Huntingdonshire, called the Clapham Green (north of Bedford) and The Eversdens (northwest of Harlton) section. Appendix 2 includes a plan of the five shortlisted route alignments from the nine options considered. Specialist officers have reviewed the current consultation documents and this report outlines key elements highlighted noted. This along with the ongoing discussions with neighbouring authorities, including the Cambridgeshire County Council, will help to inform and guide the final response to be submitted by the Council, as noted in the recommendations below.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- Note the information provided in relation to the current consultation regarding potential route alignment
- b) Consider the key elements noted to be referenced in the Council's response following consultation with specialist officers and provide direction or comment.
- c) Confirm the Council's continued support of the EWR scheme including a new station to the south of St Neots
- d) Delegate authority to the Executive Leader and the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning in consultation with the Managing Director and Strategic Growth Manager to complete and finalise the Council response to the consultation following ongoing discussions.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report provides an outline of the details set out in the non-statutory consultation on the East West Rail (EWR) proposals. It sets out the background and outlines the route alignment options presented by EWR. It considers the advantages and disadvantages of the options in so far is possible with the information available at this time and current context. Recommendations on the response on behalf of Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) to the consultation are set out. If further information becomes available a further update will be provided before or at the meeting.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The EWR proposal is recognised as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). It is a key component within national transport corridor improvements, which also includes the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Improvement Scheme, addressing the connectivity opportunities identified in the Oxford to Cambridge (OxCam) Arc Economic Prospectus. The Arc is a national economic priority area between Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford – an area that spans the counties of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

2.2 The vision for the Arc is that:

"By 2050, the Arc will be the world leading place for high-value growth, innovation and productivity. A global hub where ideas and companies are generated and thrive, home to exemplary models of 21st century development, with a high-quality environment and outstanding quality of life, and with a strong economic focus that drives inclusive clean growth. The Arc accounts for 7.1% of England's economic output (measured by Gross Value Added, or GVA) and it is home to some of the country's fastest growing and most innovative places. However, it is constrained by inadequate infrastructure and escalating housing costs, amongst other matters."

The EWR proposal may open up a range of growth opportunities. The scale of this growth will be highly dependent upon the precise alignment and its relationship with the proposed A428/A421.

- 2.3 In 2019 EWR consulted on route options for EWR. A joint response by Bedford Borough Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, and Cambridge City Council was issued along with one directly from the Council. This included reference to:
 - support of additional development associated with a NSIP such as this
 provided there are specific identified benefits to Huntingdonshire that
 outweigh the overall cost
 - support of the route providing the potential for growth at the junction of the East Coast Mainline, East West Rail, A1, A428/A421 between St Neots and Sandy.

- 2.4 This collective support from the Council and its neighbouring authorities noted in the above paragraph was for Route E. It also set out the shared view that the interchange with the East Coast mainline should be a new station south of St Neots; and that the route through South Cambridgeshire should be to Cambourne but must be sensitive to the relationships with existing villages and should tie in with a Cambridge South station at the biomedical campus. The full responses are shown at Appendix 1.
- 2.5 In January 2020 it was announced that the preferred route as Route E (Bedford Midland south of St Neots / Tempsford area Cambourne Cambridge). EWRC has since worked on identifying alignments for the route.
- 2.6 The current consultation details can be found on the <u>EWR website</u>. It covers customer experience, railway operations and a range of infrastructure proposals. These include route alignments, stations and level crossings. The route has been divided into six geographical areas. Project Section D covering Clapham Green to the Eversdens includes the part of the route within Huntingdonshire. Nine alignment options have been considered which have been shortlisted to five. Alignments 1 (dark blue) and 9 (purple) have been identified as the emerging preferences by EWRC (See consultation doc page 23 for reasons). A plan of the five shortlisted route alignments can be seen at Appendix 2.
- 2.7 Due to the pandemic, the usual public consultation events cannot be held but virtual consultation rooms can be visited from the EWR website. A number of events have been held that have included stakeholders and ward members to the south of the district.
- 2.8 The public consultation period is 31st March 2021 9th June 2021. EWRC have approved a later submission by the Council to enable Cabinet to consider the proposals.

3. ALIGNMENT PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The alignments proposed by EWR can be viewed via the consultation documents and an Interactive Map. Due to information from Highways England on the A428 scheme and comments received from the 2019 consultation, EWR has considered how potential alignments in the area of the proposed A428 scheme might also perform compared to those wholly within the Preferred Route Option area. The opportunity, by working with Highways England, to modify the design of the A428 Improvement Scheme to better accommodate the new railway is noted which could:
 - Allow the railway to run closer to ground level, particularly in the areas around the proposed A428 Improvement Scheme junctions and reduce the volume of earthworks and number / length of structures required for EWR.
 - Allow EWR to consider moving the railway closer (horizontally) to the road alignment where possible which may have benefits for construction and reduce overall impacts of the Project.

- Allow integration of the construction programme for both schemes, to be more efficient and minimise the overall period of time for which residents are affected by construction.
- Create efficiencies arising from joint arrangements to divert underground and overhead utility services
- 3.2 The nine alignments considered were assessed against a series of factors to reach the short list being consulted on (see Technical Report Chapter 9, section 9.6). These factors were transport user benefits (journey time and modal shift); contribution to enabling housing and economic growth including best serving areas benefiting from developable land; capital cost (including programme risk); overall affordability (maintenance and renewal); performance (infrastructure reliability, and resilience); safety risk (operations and maintenance); and environmental impacts and opportunities. The shortlisted five options now being consulted are noted below with information of the part of the route within Huntingdonshire to Cambourne:
 - Route Alignment 1 (dark blue) St Neots South Option A station to Cambourne North station
 Within the district a new St Neots South Option A station is proposed where the alignment crosses the East Coast Main Line (ECML). The alignment follows the same corridor as the proposed A428 scheme running to the north of the dual carriageway and continues to the north of Cambourne where a further new station is proposed. A viaduct is proposed between the A1/Black Cat junction and the ECML.
 - Route Alignment 2 (red) St Neots South Option A station to Cambourne South station
 Within the district a new St Neots South Option A station is proposed
 where the alignment crosses the ECML. The alignment follows the
 same corridor as the proposed A428 scheme running to the north of
 the dual carriageway before turning south to cross the A428 scheme
 on a viaduct to the west of Cambourne. A new station would be
 located to the south of Cambourne. A viaduct is proposed between
 the A1/Black Cat junction and the East Coast Main Line (ECML)
 - Route Alignment 6 (light blue) St Neots South Option B station to Cambourne South station

 This alignment includes a proposed viaduct to the south of St Neots between the A1 Black Cat Junction and the ECML. It includes viaduct crossings of the A1 and the River Great Ouse. A new St Neots South Option B station would be provided where the alignment crosses the ECML. The alignment crosses under the A428 Improvement Scheme and passes to the south of Abbotsley. The alignment passes between Great Gransden and Eltisley and curves to the south to pass between Caxton and Cambourne. A station would be located south of Cambourne.
 - Route Alignment 8 (yellow) Tempsford Option B station to Cambourne South station
 This alignment proposes viaducts over the A421 and A1 roads and the River Great Ouse. The alignment passes Brickhill Country park and affects Willow Cottage Cattery. North of Tempsford the alignment passes near to a sewage treatment works before crossing the ECML

on a viaduct where a new station would be provided. The alignment curves to pass south of Abbotsley and passes between Great Gransden and Eltisley. A station would be located to the south of Cambourne.

 Route Alignment 9 (purple) Tempford Option A station to Cambourne North station

This alignment proposes viaducts over the A421 and A1 roads and the River Great Ouse. The alignment passes Brickhill Country park and affects Willow Cottage Cattery. North of Tempsford the alignment curves to the north and crosses the ECML on a viaduct, where a new station would be provided. The alignment crosses under the proposed A428 Improvement Scheme and under the B1046. The alignment follows the same corridor as the A428 Improvement Scheme, running to the north of the new dual carriageway and continuing to the north of Cambourne. The alignment impacts the Papworth Inn to the north west of Cambourne. A station would be provided to the north of Cambourne.

- 3.3 EWR has identified the dark blue and purple alignments (Alignment 1 and Alignment 9) as the emerging preferences for the following reasons:
 - Joined up infrastructure they benefit from a shared 'travel corridor'
 with the proposed A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Improvement
 Scheme, meaning they already cover a route used regularly to connect
 people to places
 - New housing and communities there are more potential for new homes and communities in the area (particularly for Cambourne North compared to Cambourne South)
 - Economic growth alongside the development of new housing, a new station could bring economic growth to the community, creating more jobs and prosperity
 - Value for money they are expected to be less costly to deliver than other alignments connecting to the same station pairings.
- 3.4 The consultation document states that whether a new station should be at St Neots South or Tempsford is still being considered. EWR have noted that there could be substantial advantages to choosing to go via Tempsford but are awaiting further evidence.

4. ANALYSIS

- 4.1 The consultation documents have been reviewed by specialist technical officers at the Council and initial comments provided. Key areas for consideration are:
 - Air quality
 - Land contamination
 - Vibration effects
 - Lighting
 - Electromagnetic radiation and odour from diesel engines
 - Noise
 - Landscape and Visual impacts

- Ecology and Biodiversity
- Cultural Heritage:
- Health Impacts including walking/cycling opportunities
- Climate change
- 4.2 It evident that the Arc, including EWR provides significant potential economic opportunities that weigh in favour of continued support of EWR.
- 4.3 Huntingdonshire Economic Growth Strategy signposts infrastructure improvements as one of the districts conditions for economic growth. Improved road and rail infrastructure is viewed as an essential ingredient to aid the growth of the district. An improved A428 and East West Rail is cited as an important part of this package.
- 4.4 A new station closest to St Neots (Option A St Neots South) would provide an opportunity to establish north/south and east/west connectivity within close geographic proximity. However, limited availability of evidence means that the economic advantage or disadvantage of either of the stated preferred options of Alignment 1 or Alignment 9 is difficult to assess at this stage.
- 4.5 As highlighted in the 2019 response, the risk of coalescence between St Neots and any growth has been cited. It could, with careful planning, provide a corridor to form a spinal buffer zone between existing and future development with a new station accessible to both communities. Alignments 1 & 9 have similar impacts on St Neots and are closely colocated with the A428 improvement scheme. Environmental aspects are a key consideration. Opportunities to combine mitigation to maximise environmental benefits may also be possible.
- 4.6 A key concern is the lack of detailed information evidencing how the assessments in the consultation document were made and supporting detail on the impacts and mitigation of the scheme. Of particular note is the lack of detail regarding land considered for housing and growth despite conclusions being drawn on this assessment factor in Table 9.2 of the Consultation Technical Report. As the East West Rail proposal forms part of the wider OxCam Arc growth aspirations the absence of this is critical to the ability to make fully informed judgements and responses to the choice of alignment that should be supported.
- 4.7 The consultation notes that growth potential around Tempsford has been identified in local development plans, which is not yet the case around the St Neots South station option. However, given the timeline for progressing the East West Rail project compared to that for bringing forward a replacement local plan this should not be considered a significant drawback. The potential capacity of this area will be affected by the land take necessary for the A428 and East West Rail projects and as EWR develop their proposals further it is expected that there will be continued discussions relating to anticipated growth.
- 4.8 It is considered that the EWR proposal is seen as a key opportunity to improve east-west connectivity and unlock growth opportunities. At this

time, while recognising that this is a non-statutory consultation and at the very early stages of engagement, the East West Rail consultation document states that Alignment 1 demonstrates preferable environmental improvements on air quality, climate, historic environment and water resources and flooding in comparison to Alignment 9. It goes on to say that Alignment 9 would result in a slight worsening of the impact on ecology and biodiversity, which would not be in line with the ambitions of the OxCam Arc prospectus and it would cost more. However, more detail will be required in order for officers to fully assess the alignments proposed and the necessary mitigation required, including the consideration of the economic, environmental and existing and future community needs.

5. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

5.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

6. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- The level of future growth within the District will need to be considered. The Council will continue to work in co-operation with neighbouring authorities to understand the implications for the wider area. This is especially important in the context of the OxCam Arc and ensuring that the benefits of the Arc are fully realised for Huntingdonshire and any obstacles overcome. The EWR consultation comes ahead of a consultation on the proposed spatial framework for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, planned for later this year.
- 6.2 Lack of detailed information is noted and, whilst it is acknowledged that this is an early stage of the EWR programme, it is key that any relevant information be made available to enable fully informed decision making. It is hoped that further detail will be provided by EWRC prior to any decision on the final alignment and station location. This is especially so as it relates to future growth and any potential environmental impacts. Officers will work with the EWR company and neighbouring authorities in seeking to ensure that these risks are adequately addressed, preferably ahead of the next stage of consultation.

7. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 7.1 The Council response will be submitted before the end of June as agreed with EWRC.
- 7.2 Following this non-statutory round of consultation, there will then be a statutory consultation at the end of 2021/early 2022, prior to submitting detailed plans to government for a development consent order (DCO). The DCO is likely to be developed and considered by stakeholders with EWR between 2022-2024. Should the DCO be approved, it is anticipated that construction on the new railway will start in 2025.

8. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

(See Corporate Plan)

- 8.1 This helps to deliver across a number of the Council's priorities for 2018 2022 but specifically:
 - Support development of infrastructure to enable growth.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None currently for the Council, as this is a non-statutory consultation response. Part 6 of the Planning Act 2008 sets out the legal requirements regarding Development Consent Order applications.
- 9.2 As the DCO progresses there may be a requirement for legal representation at the Examination

10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no resource implications for the Council at this stage. As the scheme continues to be developed, more officer time will be required. This is in addition to the ongoing DCO for the A428.
- 10.2 Specialist external officer advice, including legal advice, may be required for the DCO at the Council's cost.

11. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Government has recognised the need to plan for and deliver substantial new infrastructure ahead of the arrival of new communities, including necessary transport infrastructure, utilities, digital connectivity, health and education. The EWR project has potential to remove motor vehicle trips from the road and, if appropriately located and designed, encourage people to arrive at any train station by non-motorised means or public transport, with benefits to the environment air quality and health through encouraging active lifestyles.

12. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 12.1 It is considered there is not enough information provided in relation to how the alignments were assessed by EWRC. The Council will continue to work with EWR as further supporting material used in EWRC's assessments is made available. Similarly, further detail is required to enable fuller consideration of the potential environmental impacts.
- 12.2 At the time of drafting this report, ongoing dialogue is continuing with our neighbouring authorities and for that reason our recommendations are for the following reasons.
 - The Council remains supportive of the EWR project as part of the OxCam Arc

- Support for a new station south of St Neots has previously been given by Members.
- Until such time as more detailed information is provided by EWR, it is not possible to respond in terms of stating a preferred alignment and station location
- The Council would welcome the opportunity to provide further response on this as detailed information is provided.

13. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Plan of the five shortlisted route alignments Appendix 2 – Letter responding on behalf of HDC to the 2019 consultation

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Cabinet Report February 2019
- East West Rail Consultation website
- East West Rail Consultation Technical Report
- East West Rail Interactive Map

CONTACT OFFICER

Name/Job Title: Claire Burton, Implementation Team Leader

Tel No: 01223 616841

Email: claire.burton@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Huntingdonshire District Council response to the 2019 consultation



Pathfinder House, St.Mary's Street Huntingdon PE29 3TN www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

contact@eastwestrail.co.uk

Date: 11th March 2019

Dear Sirs

<u>Huntingdonshire District Council's response to the East West Rail Bedford to</u> Cambridge Route Option Consultation

Following careful consideration of the 5 proposed options, Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) supports Routes B or E on the basis that:

- HDC is keen to welcome additional development provided there are specific identified benefits to Huntingdonshire that outweigh the additional cost, and Routes B and E have the potential to do this.
- Along with the A428/A421, these routes would provide a key, single, multi-modal east-west transport corridor along which to concentrate connected, sustainable (economic, social and environmental) growth hubs, and encourage modal shift. This would promote real choice of transport type and costs (to the traveller). A new station south of the District's largest town, St Neots, also provides a significant and powerful opportunity to enable sustainable east-west and north-south travel and thereby expansion of that functional economic and housing market geography. A new station on the East Coast Mainline at Alconbury Weald to the north of Huntingdon would also connect the 150ha Enterprise Zone at Alconbury Weald to this North-South and East-West network.
- They provide the potential for growth at the junction of the East Coast Mainline, East-West Rail, A1, A428/A421 between St Neots and Sandy, not as further extensions to existing towns but as a new connected, sustainable settlement(s).
- We support South Cambridgeshire District Council's view that a station at Cambourne rather than Bassingbourn would be preferable to build upon the existing settlement strategy in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan. In addition to the benefits of a single multi-modal corridor highlighted above, a single multimodal corridor also has an important environmental benefit in that it significantly

reduces the visual and climate change impact compared to having two entirely separate transport/growth corridors.

- The responsibility here and now that must not be missed is the much greater and
 holistic opportunity to deliver the future growth and community connectivity
 opportunities, not just a simplistic transport operating cost/time efficiency solution.
- Route E has the collective support of South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and Bedford Borough Council.

Whilst East-West Rail undoubtedly provides the opportunity for further growth, given that the consultation does not make clear what scale of growth would be needed to support any one route, it is not currently possible to say whether such growth could be physically accommodated, or whether it would be environmentally or socially acceptable.

It is essential that, following the close of this consultation period, East-West Rail Co. collaborates with local authorities along the route at each stage of the project's progression.

Yours sincerely

Graham Bull Executive Leader

G.J. Bun

1 01480 388047

Email: graham.bull@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Joint authorities' response to the 2019 consultation



East West Railway Company Ltd Via Email

Antoinette Jackson
Chief Executive, Cambridge City Council
Antoinette.jackson@cambridge.gov.uk
01223 457001
(on behalf of:
Bedford Borough Council,
Huntingdonshire District Council, and
Cambridge City Council)

08 March 2019

Dears Sirs

Re: East West Rail Bedford to Cambridge Route Option Consultation

The public consultation is now underway for the route options and the undersigned councils have established a common understanding of local principles that we wish to collectively register.

There is an understanding that with infrastructure investment there is an expectation of housing growth. All the councils are currently delivering significant housing growth and are continuing to work with other councils in the development of the OxCam Arc. There is already significant latent capacity within this area with thousands of new homes already "live" in the planning system. The critical measure of success for all of us is that the delivery of these new homes is accelerated. We believe this can be achieved effectively through confident and definitive decisions about investment in strategic infrastructure accompanied by a planned and sustainable approach to community development. What is important is that future growth is accompanied by the local and the strategic infrastructure expected by communities. In this way, housing should be seen as just one part of a planned approach to developing economically successful, sustainable and healthy places where people want to live and work.

Consensus has also been reached on the value of some of our existing landscapes and there is a preference for routes that do not despoil currently undeveloped countryside and make maximum use of existing corridors, so protecting existing rural communities from encroachment by urban and suburban expansions. The obvious corollary to this is that there is then a significant opportunity to enhance natural capital and reduce environmental impact.

The technical report accompanying the consultation contains limited detail on the spatial, economic and environmental considerations underpinning the development of the route options to date. It also recognises the theoretical basis for several assumptions underpinning the route identification methodology.

The consultation proposals omit significant and important detail on the environmental effects of the route options and the expectations around housing delivery. Significant further work will be required to assess the impact and acceptability of the options.

In respect of locational points we collectively agree that:

- The interchange in Bedford should serve the existing Bedford Midland station
- The interchange with the East Coast mainline should be a new station south of St Neots
- The route through South Cambridgeshire should be to Cambourne but must be sensitive to the relationships with existing villages and should tie in with a Cambridge South station at the biomedical campus.

This leads to only one conclusion which is that route E represents the Councils' favoured route based upon the material to date. There are however many nuances to this position which will be referenced by the individual council submissions, which will support the specific locational points. Given the significant work underway to consider growth in the corridor and beyond, we would also highlight the need for continued and richer engagement with the local authorities in the area as the evidence base and critical delivery requirements emerge. The decisions on strategic infrastructure cannot be taken in isolation but must have regard to local authority

We look forward to continuing a positive dialogue as matters move forward.

Dore Hodgen G. J. Buce Bridget Smith Fampure

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Dave **Hodgson MBE**

Elected Mayor and

Leader of Council,

Bedford Borough

Council

Cllr Graham Bull

Executive Leader,

Huntingdonshire

District Council

Leader, South Cambridgeshire District Council

Cllr Bridget

Smith

CIIr Lewis Herbert

Leader, Cambridge City Council

PO Box 700, Cambridge, CB1 0JH www.cambridge.gov.uk • Switchboard: 01223 457000



Appendix 2 – Plan of the five shortlisted route alignments

