

**Wards Affected:**

Bletchley Park / Bletchley East / Bletchley West

**ITEM 3****DELEGATED DECISION****05 JANUARY 2016****BLETCHLEY, 'FIXING THE LINKS': IMPLEMENTATION**

Responsible Cabinet Member: Councillor Middleton, Cabinet Member for Resources & Commercialism

Report Sponsor: Jonathan Entwistle, Head of Spatial Planning & Implementation

Author and contact: Paul Hammond, Area Manager - MK Land & Tariff, Tel: 01908 254367

**Executive Summary:**

There is a recognition that, since the emergence and growth of Central Milton Keynes as a regional centre, Bletchley town centre has been in relative decline.

The aspiration to improve and strengthen Bletchley's 'offer' has been articulated in MKC policy over a long period of time and has led to a number of initiatives and projects aimed at promoting regeneration.

The proposed East-West Rail [EWR] link will place Bletchley at the intersection of strategic east-west and north-south rail routes linking key centres of economic activity. There is now an opportunity to capitalise on the undoubted opportunities that will flow from that project.

Improvements to the pedestrian and cyclist links/environment between Bletchley Railway Station and Bletchley town centre will enhance connectivity, safety and legibility. They will help to 'land' and capitalise on the opportunities flowing from EWR, thereby securing economic, regeneration and social benefits for Bletchley.

Implementation of the 'Fixing the Links' [FtL] scheme represents the first step in delivering what could be transformational change for Bletchley.

**1. Recommendations**

- 1.1 That production of a Preliminary Design scheme for the Bletchley, 'Fixing the Links' Project [Phase 1] and endorsement by the Project Board be noted.
- 1.2 That it be approved to proceed with scheme construction in line with:
  - (a) The Preliminary Design [Phase 1]; and,
  - (b) Conditions attaching to SEMLEP Local Growth Fund (LGF) investment grant in the sum of £1.5 million.

**2. Issues**

- 2.1 The proposed EWR link, which is routed through Bletchley has re-kindled interest in improvements to, and links with, Bletchley railway station.

- 2.2 EWR will place Bletchley at the intersection of strategic east-west and north-south rail routes linking key centres of economic activity, both within and beyond the SEMLEP area.
- 2.3 MKC's Cabinet has approved (October, 2013) a local contribution of £7.65m over the period 2014 - 2028 towards the delivery of EWR and there is now an appetite to capitalise on the opportunities that will flow from that project.
- 2.4 Bletchley railway station, despite being on the London to Birmingham section of the West Coast Main Line, is in poor condition which makes for a poor arrival experience for visitors to the town. Moreover, on exiting the train station, an illegible and 'intimidating' pedestrian route faces visitors wanting to access the town centre, limiting potential foot-fall and spend.
- 2.5 In response to this context, a 'Viability and Options' report - which explored the opportunities for improving the quality of pedestrian and cycle links between Bletchley Railway Station and Bletchley Town Centre - was commissioned. The outcome of this work was reported to Cabinet in October 2014 when the FtL project proposition was formally endorsed and approval was given for detailed design and costing work.
- 2.6 In 2014 MKC submitted a bid for Local Growth Fund (LGF) monies in connection with the FtL project and was successful in securing government investment, via SEMLEP, of £1.5 million. This investment was predicated on a 'local contribution' of £2 million.
- 2.7 Preliminary Design work has now been completed and approved by the FtL Project Board (see annex) and there is now a requirement to proceed promptly with the construction phase in line with the conditions attaching to SEMLEP LGF funding (i.e. the expenditure of £1million LGF grant monies in '15/'16).
- 2.8 In a scenario where delegated approval to proceed with implementation is forthcoming, and providing there is no subsequent 'call-in', it is anticipated that a 'start on site' would be made on 18 January 2016 (NB site preparation will progress, as per normal practice, in advance of the start date).

### **Consultation**

- 2.9 The Viability & Options report was produced in September 2014 in collaboration with local stakeholders and organisations including Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council, West Bletchley Council (NB the project area straddles the boundary of these parishes), land-owning interests and public transport operators/groups.
- 2.10 A positive stakeholder workshop was held at Bletchley Park on 3 July 2014 to inform and prioritise the options contained in the report. Representatives of Disability Access Group (DAG) and the Physically Disabled and Sensory Impairment Consultation Group (PDSICG) were engaged in that exercise.
- 2.11 Extensive stakeholder engagement has been undertaken throughout the ensuing design phase to inform production of the Preliminary Design. The culmination of that process is a Stakeholder Information Session which is scheduled to be held in Bletchley on 21 December.

## **Delivery Approach**

- 2.12 The approach to project delivery is necessarily holistic. The FtL scheme ‘dovetails’ with other MKC and stakeholder strategies to capitalise on opportunities and ensure that, wherever possible, synergies are realised. Where this is not possible, the approach will ensure that the FtL project does not preclude the delivery of planned improvements/interventions or compromise redevelopment potential.
- 2.13 Appropriate traffic management measures will be employed during the construction phase to facilitate the needs of: town centre retailers and customers; public transport operators and users; MK College and Bletchley Park; and, the emergency services located on Sherwood Drive.
- 2.14 The governance of project delivery will be consistent with ‘MK Approach’ project management methodology.

## **Project Scope**

- 2.15 For clarity, the project scope does not include:
- The creation of an ‘eastern entrance’ to the railway station; though the project will not compromise the potential delivery of an eastern access at some future date should this become viable.
  - Development of the area identified for integrated mixed-use development at the western end of the town centre (i.e. site MK8 in the adopted Local Plan, 2005).
- 2.16 Initial risk assessment highlighted a number of opportunities to potentially make a larger scale intervention in the environs of Bletchley Town Centre / Railway Station. EWR is a potential ‘game-changer’ for the town which could open up development and regeneration options beyond the scope of the current project proposition. In this scenario, ‘Fixing the Links’ might represent phase 1 of a wider and more ambitious development and regeneration programme to drive transformational change.

## **3. Options**

### **(a) Do Nothing**

This option would result in the FtL scheme not being delivered and a consequential failure to capitalise on the undoubted economic development and transport opportunities flowing from the EWR project. Moreover, committed LGF investment of £1.5 million would be lost. There is also reputational risk attaching to this option; it would damage the Council’s reputation in the eyes of the residents and businesses of Bletchley and, indeed, SEMLEP.

### **(b) Deliver scheme over longer timeframe**

This would result in a failure to fulfil conditions attaching to SEMLEP LGF investment (i.e. the expenditure of £1 million LGF funds in the current financial year). It would expose MKC to reputational risk and potentially jeopardise remaining, scheduled, LGF payments in the sum of £1 million.

**(c) Commence construction phase now and deliver to programme**

This option will expedite the delivery of positive improvements to the environs of Bletchley Railway station / Bletchley Town Centre and provide the best opportunity of securing prompt payment of remaining SEMLEP LGF investment totalling £1 million (NB MKC is already in receipt of an initial LGF payment in the sum of £0.5 million).

- 3.2 Reputational risk and a significant loss of external investment attach to options 'a' and 'b'. For the purposes of securing SEMLEP LGF investment of £1.5 million, it is imperative that the FtL scheme is delivered to programme.
- 3.3 Moreover, if MKC can demonstrate project delivery competence to SEMLEP it will enhance the Council's credibility and significantly improve the prospects of securing future funding towards an up-scaled project proposition which drives transformational change in Bletchley.
- 3.4 For the reasons detailed above the recommended option is 'c'.

**4. Implications**

**4.1 Policy**

The Central Bletchley Regeneration Strategy, adopted by MKC as Supplementary Planning Guidance in 2004, still carries 'weight' and provides supportive policy for the purposes of project delivery.

The Preliminary Design is consistent with policy aspirations set out in the adopted versions of the Local Plan (Policy S8) and the Core Strategy (Policy CS8) which seek to facilitate the regeneration of Bletchley Town Centre.

The scheme design also dovetails with MKC's Transport Strategy and objectives in LTP3 (2011-2031) to encourage more sustainable travel behaviour and support economic growth.

**4.2 Resources and Risk**

In 2014 MKC was successful in securing SEMLEP LGF investment of £1.5 million, predicated on a 'local contribution' of £2 million.

The 'local contribution' will be secured from a combination of: existing capital programme allocated for public transport improvements; New Homes Bonus funds; and, s.106 contributions. This is reflected in the Capital Programme for 2015/16.

Formal capital resource allocation and expenditure approval for £1.198 million in the current financial year was approved by MKC Cabinet on 13 July '15.

Delivery pressures and risks arise from the funding. Conditions attached to the SEMLEP investment means that we are required to achieve expenditure of £1 million of LGF funds in the '15/16 financial year.

Y	Capital	N	Revenue	N	Accommodation
N	IT	Y	Medium Term Plan	Y	Asset Management

**4.3 Carbon and Energy Management**

The project will enable more sustainable travel modes and behaviour. New lighting installations will realise energy and carbon saving efficiencies.

#### 4.4 Legal

The Preliminary Design details improvements on adopted highway land in the ownership of MKC. As such, delivery of the project will, substantially, take place under the provisions of the Highway Act 1980.

Implementation of the project will be progressed utilising traffic orders and the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (as amended).

The installation of new lighting under the Brunel Bridge is dependent on Network Rail (NR) permission since the bridge resides in its ownership. 'In principle' agreement to the installation has already been obtained from NR Structures Department and formal agreement to the same is currently awaited.

#### 4.5 Other Implications

Equalities:

The views of DAG and PDSICG have informed the Preliminary Design.

Sustainability:

The scheme will facilitate transport choices and encourage more sustainable travel behaviour [e.g. walking, cycling and train travel].

Stakeholders:

Consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including: relevant parish councils; public transport groups; land-holding interests; and, utility providers has been undertaken to inform the Preliminary Design.

Crime and Disorder:

The current pedestrian route under Buckingham Road Bridge offers an extremely poor and intimidating environment for users. Improvements detailed in the Preliminary Design will create a safer environment.

Road Safety:

Measures to: improve pedestrian crossing points; segregate cyclists from vehicular traffic; and, calm vehicular speed where demonstrably excessive, will realise road safety benefits.

Y	Equalities/Diversity	Y	Sustainability	N	Human Rights
N	E-Government	Y	Stakeholders	Y	Crime and Disorder

#### Background Papers:

- 1) Local Contribution to East-West Rail (MKC Cabinet report dated 16 October 2013 and associated decisions)
- 2) Bletchley - Fixing the Links: 'Options & Viability' Final Report (ITP for MKC, September 2014)
- 3) Bletchley: 'Fixing the Links' Project Proposition (MKC Cabinet Report dated 13 October 2014 and associated decisions)
- 4) Bletchley, 'Fixing the Links' Phase 1 Brunel Roundabout Preliminary Design (AECOM, October 2015)

Annex: Plan of Area