



# The countryside charity Bedfordshire

## **OxCam Arc in Bedfordshire: East West Rail Consultation**

**Briefing issued 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

### **Parish Council appeals to Rail Minister ignored**

#### **Local economy and building new towns more important than countryside and village life in north Bedfordshire**

On 15<sup>th</sup> March, CPRE Bedfordshire joined representatives from Parish Councils in north Bedfordshire, in a meeting with the Rail Minister to put their case for a reconsideration of East West Rail's Preferred Route for the railway in Bedford. When the East West Rail Company published their Route Alignment Consultation proposals on 31<sup>st</sup> March, they were shocked to find that their concerns had been totally ignored.

The consultation proposals look at Route E only, the route that calls at Bedford Midland station, then runs across open countryside towards a station on the East Coast Main Line at St Neots or Tempsford, and gives no further consideration to Route B, the route that would stop at a new station at Wixams then follow the A421 southern bypass dual carriageway.

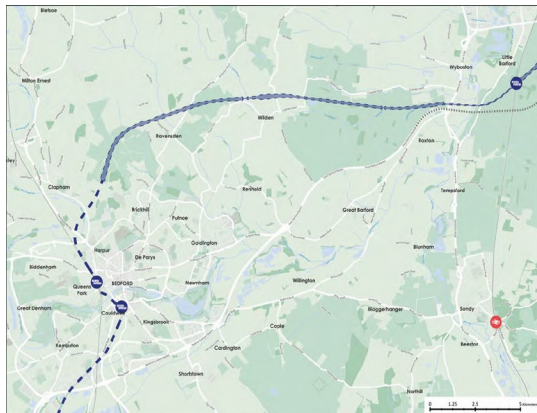
CPRE Bedfordshire supports the concept of East West Rail (EWR) as a scheme that can bring benefits by reducing car journeys and heavy goods vehicles on our roads. However, we believe that the route chosen by East West Rail, supported by the government and Bedford Borough Council, has been chosen for the wrong reasons and will represent a massive, missed opportunity to improve our quality of life in Bedford. A southern route at Bedford would be a much better alternative.

The Parish Councils most affected have combined to form a campaign group, BFAre (Bedford For A Reconsultation), supported by CPRE Bedfordshire. The group have launched a petition which asks the Minister of State for Transport to instruct EWR to re-consult on a shortlist of the routes making environmental considerations the focus.

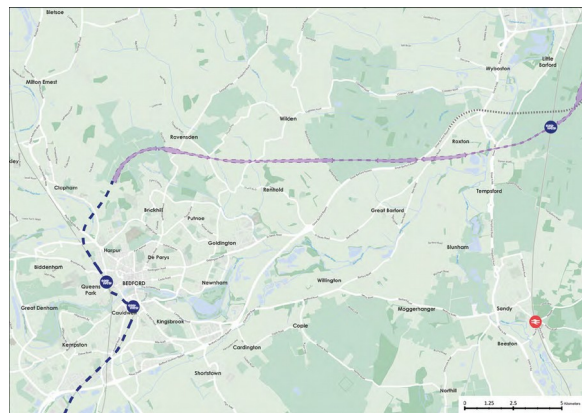
**The petition recommends that an adjusted Route B is considered, as this is the most consistent with government environmental and decarbonisation policy. So far nearly 2,000 residents have signed the petition.**

The alignment options recommended for consideration in Bedford are:

**Alignment 1**



**Alignment 9**



(These maps can be found on page 224 of the consultation report – see link below)

**Now that the consultation proposals have been published, we can see why the parish councils’ appeal to the Minister has not been heeded.**

East West Rail say that the key Project Objectives they have been told to prioritise are to develop a railway that maximises opportunities to deliver economic growth and large scale housing development. Although protecting against environmental damage is said to be one of the factors taken into account, the consultation report gives very little weight to the damaging effects of the railway on the rural character of north Bedfordshire.

A route through Bedford will bring noise and air pollution, as well as adding to the severe traffic congestion on routes into Bedford and Bedford station. EWR have plans to build multi-storey car parks, without any apparent concern about the strain that all these additional car journeys will put on the road network.

One of the options for the route going north out of Bedford station puts at risk the quiet enjoyment of the homes of 90 residents of the Poets area including the demolition of an estimated 25 houses.

In order to cross the river and the A6 traveling towards Clapham, EWR plan to build a massive viaduct over 1km long and up to 18m high. An absolute monstrosity in the making.

The fact that the route across north Bedford then cuts a swathe across quiet open countryside and rural villages doesn’t really get a mention.

**This is because one of the key objectives of the line is to open up north Bedford for large scale housing development.**

Bedford Borough Council's Local Plan Review is due to commence second stage consultation this summer and will be building on the Issues & Options Paper of Summer 2020 (see link below). This puts forward six options for strategic housing growth in Bedford, including two EWR linked options. The Borough's proposed target is to provide for additional housing growth of 15,000 houses in the next plan period.

**In supporting Route E in March 2019, it appears that the Borough has pre-determined its favoured strategy to achieve this housing growth months in advance of further consultation on the new Local Plan.**

The Council's choice to support Route E in the consultation was not made known to the public, or openly debated within the Council until months after the response was submitted to EWR as a statement of council policy.

The Borough Council's response to EWR Co's 2019 consultation referenced the aim of EWR to support new settlements in the OxCam Arc and that opening up opportunities for new settlements represents a significant part of the case for the railway. In their consultation response the Council anticipated that new settlement proposals, at Colworth, Twinwoods, Thurleigh and Wyboston would be considered for the next Local Plan. They comment that each of these sites "are to the north of Bedford and would be better served by a northern route for EWR through Bedford Midland."

**Major sites submitted so far for the next Local Plan include the Twinwoods Garden Community stretching from Twinwoods / Clapham north to include Milton Ernest and Bletsoe (6,000-7,000 dwellings), a New Town at Sharnbrook / Colworth (4,000 dwellings) and the Dennybrook New Town, Wyboston (7,500- 10,150 dwellings).**

The impact of the new settlements will be staggering, bearing in mind the roads and additional infrastructure that will be needed to support the creation of two new towns, each one more than twice the size of Ampthill.

**The rural character of the area will be shattered, both by the railway line and by the new towns that the Borough Council intends will follow.**

By contrast, an alternative, running along the A421 transport corridor south of Bedford, put forward at the earlier EWR consultation, avoids the majority of the pitfalls of the northern route, providing options for a shorter, flatter, straighter route that passes through an area that is already developed for commercial activity.

**BFARe and CPRE Bedfordshire are encouraging local people to make their views known to the consultation and to deliver a strong message to East West Rail and the Borough Council that Route E in north Bedford is totally unacceptable.**

## References and further reading

East West Rail Main Consultation report March 2021:

[https://eastwestrail-production.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/public/EAS060\\_ConDoc\\_310321\\_Digital\\_MASTER-1.pdf](https://eastwestrail-production.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/public/EAS060_ConDoc_310321_Digital_MASTER-1.pdf)

EWR Route Option Consultation January 2019:

<https://eastwestrail-production.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/public/MediaObjectFiles/fe0f74c338/EWR-Consultation-Document.pdf>

Bedford Borough Council Response to EWR Consultation March 2019

[https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Parking%20Roads%20and%20Travel/Strategies%20and%20projects/Bedford%20EWR%20Response%20Final%202011-3-19%20%20BCC%20\(4\).pdf](https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Parking%20Roads%20and%20Travel/Strategies%20and%20projects/Bedford%20EWR%20Response%20Final%202011-3-19%20%20BCC%20(4).pdf)

Bedford Borough Council: ISSUES AND OPTIONS - CONSULTATION PAPER Summer 2020:

<https://edrms.bedford.gov.uk/OpenDocument.aspx?id=0oGrcg%2bElvEgGZR6su3cQA%3d%3d&name=Issues%20and%20Options%20Paper.pdf>

Bedford Borough Council: Call for Sites Map Local Plan Review:

<https://bluefoxtech.co.uk/demos/bedford-published-sites/#/center/-0.4205,52.1989/rotation/0.19>

BFAre

<https://bfare.org.uk/>