

From: Morgan Barbara <Barbara.Morgan@networkrail.co.uk>
To: planning.policy@whitehorsedc.gov.uk
Date: 22/12/2014 10:26
Subject: Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2013 Part One

Dear Sir/Madam

Network Rail has been consulted by Vale of White District Council on the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part One Publication. Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to comment on this Planning Policy document, please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

Network Rail is a statutory undertaker responsible for maintaining and operating the country's railway infrastructure and associated estate. Network Rail owns, operates, maintains and develops the main rail network. This includes the railway tracks, stations, signalling systems, bridges, tunnels, level crossings and viaducts. The preparation of development plan policy is important in relation to the protection and enhancement of Network Rail's infrastructure. In this regard, please find our comments below.

We can confirm that First Great Western is promoting both the car park and northern underpass proposals.

Any proposals for additional platforms would need to be supported by the train operator (CrossCountry in this case, as they operate the north - south trains) as they would therefore incur a journey time penalty for an additional station call at Didcot Parkway. Additional work may also be required beyond the provision of the platforms due to interaction with other train services.

With regards to the provision of four stopping trains per hour between Didcot and Oxford, an additional two stopping services could not be accommodated on the existing infrastructure within the current timetable. In order to accommodate these services, one would have to either reduce the number of other train services currently using the route, or provide additional infrastructure. The Western Route Study Draft for Consultation has identified that four-tracking of the line between Didcot Parkway and Oxford would cost in the region of £225m, and grade separation of junctions at Didcot and/or Oxford may also be required. Clearly this would be a large project and would need to be justified by a range of benefits.

For your information, the Western Route Study Draft for Consultation document can be accessed through the following link:

Western route study - Long Term Planning Process - Network Rail<<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/long-term-planning-process/western-route-study/>>

We are happy to discuss any proposals with the Council; the point of contact would be either Claire Mahoney (Principal Strategic Planner) or Richard Clarke (Lead Strategic Planner).

Developer Contributions

The Local Plan should set a strategic context requiring developer contributions towards rail infrastructure where growth areas or significant housing allocations are identified close to existing rail infrastructure.

Many stations and routes are already operating close to capacity and a significant increase in patronage may create the need for upgrades to the existing infrastructure including improved signalling, passing loops, car parking, improved access arrangements or platform extensions.

As Network Rail is a publicly funded organisation with a regulated remit it would not be reasonable to require Network Rail to fund rail improvements necessitated by commercial development. It is therefore appropriate to require developer contributions to fund such improvements.

Specifically, we request that a Policy is included within the document which requires developers to fund any qualitative improvements required in relation to existing facilities and infrastructure as a direct result of increased patronage resulting from new development.

The likely impact and level of improvements required will be specific to each station and each development meaning standard charges and formulae may not be appropriate. Therefore in order to fully assess the potential impacts, and the level of developer contribution required, it is essential that where a Transport Assessment is submitted in support of a planning application that this quantifies in detail the likely impact on the rail network.

To ensure that developer contributions can deliver appropriate improvements to the rail network we would recommend that Developer Contributions should include provisions for rail and should include the following:

- * A requirement for development contributions to deliver improvements to the rail network where appropriate.
- * A requirement for Transport Assessments to take cognisance of impacts to existing rail infrastructure to allow any necessary developer contributions towards rail to be calculated.
- * A commitment to consult Network Rail where development may impact on the rail network and may require rail infrastructure improvements. In order to be reasonable these improvements would be restricted to a local level and would be necessary to make the development acceptable. We would not seek contributions towards major enhancement projects which are already programmed as part of Network Rail's remit.

Level Crossings

Development proposals affecting the safety of level crossings is an extremely important consideration for emerging planning policy to address. The impact from development can result in a significant increase in the vehicular and/or pedestrian traffic utilising a crossing which in turn impacts upon safety and service provision.

As a result of increased patronage, Network Rail could be forced to reduce train line speed in direct correlation to the increase in vehicular and pedestrian traffic using a crossing. This would have severe consequences for the timetabling of trains and would also effectively frustrate any future train service improvements. This would be in direct conflict with strategic and government aims of improving rail services.

In this regard, we would request that the potential impacts from development affecting Network Rail's level crossings, is specifically addressed through planning policy as there have been instances whereby Network Rail has not been consulted as statutory undertaker where a proposal has impacted on a level crossing. We request that a policy is provided confirming that:

* The Council have a statutory responsibility under planning legislation to consult the statutory rail undertaker where a proposal for development is likely to result in a material increase in the volume or a material change in the character of traffic using a level crossing over a railway:

* Schedule 5 (f)(ii) of the Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) order, 2010 requires that... "Where any proposed development is likely to result in a material increase in volume or a material change in the character of traffic using a level crossing over a railway (public footpath, public or private road) the Planning Authority's Highway Engineer must submit details to both Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate and Network Rail for separate approval".

* Any planning application which may increase the level of pedestrian and/or vehicular usage at a level crossing should be supported by a full Transport Assessment assessing such impact: and

* The developer is required to fund any required qualitative improvements to the level crossing as a direct result of the development proposed.

Planning Applications

We would appreciate the Council providing Network Rail with an opportunity to comment on any future planning applications or proposed site allocations should they be submitted for sites adjoining the railway, or within close proximity to the railway as we may have more specific comments to make (further to those above).

We trust these comments will be considered in your preparation of the forthcoming Local Plan document.

Regards,

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