

CABINET
24 JUNE 2021**Blakedown Rail Station Car Park**

Relevant Cabinet Member

Cllr A Amos

Relevant Chief Officer

Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure

Local Member(s)

Cllr M Hart

Recommendation

- 1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport recommends that Cabinet:**
 - (a) Notes the progress to date and authorises the continuation of the works, including surveys, necessary to progress the Blakedown Rail Station car parking scheme**
 - (b) endorses the allocation of funding to purchase the land for the rail station car parking scheme from the Capital Budget for Railway Station Upgrades**
 - (c) authorises the completion of a pre-planning public engagement and the preparation and submission of a Planning Application for the Blakedown Rail Station car parking scheme**
 - (d) authorises the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure and the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change to acquire the land or part thereof necessary to deliver the scheme (showing edged red in Appendix 1) through negotiation if possible and, if not possible, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport, to make a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) to acquire the land and rights required for the project, and further authorises the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change to approve any Statement of Reasons in relation to the land, that must accompany any CPO submitted for confirmation to the Secretary of State and notes that this will be approved prior to the making of any CPO**
 - (e) authorises the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport to finalise the design of the of the car park and links to the station**
 - (f) authorises the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure to award contracts and to enter any other such agreements as are necessary to complete the car park within the funding envelope**

(g) authorises the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure to award contracts and to enter into any other agreements as are necessary to manage the car park once it becomes operational.

Why are these decisions important?

2. It is important that these decisions are made now to progress the project to enable the provision of additional car parking spaces to address the demand at Blakedown Rail Station. Discussions with the relevant landowner are progressing well which will enable WCC to purchase the necessary land and progress the planning application for the scheme.

Background

3. Blakedown Rail Station is on the Kidderminster / Birmingham train line, with 2 trains per hour off peak. Additionally, there are also 3 trains per hour in the peak from Worcester -Birmingham and 2 Kidderminster – London Marylebone services. It is one of only two train stations within the Wyre Forest district. The station is popular particularly because of its links to Birmingham for employment and leisure and onward travel connections. Currently there are a total of 10 car parking spaces at Blakedown Rail Station, including a single disabled car parking space.

4. Data from the Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy (Autumn 2017) identifies an average of circa 150 daily return passengers travelling from Blakedown Rail Station, and whilst all of these passengers do not require a car park space the availability of 10 spaces represents an undersupply. The impact of this is that drivers park on residential roads near the station or travel to more distant train stations such as Stourbridge Junction where they can be confident of securing a car parking space, increasing traffic on the highways network.

5. Worcestershire Local Transport Plan 4 (adopted December 2017), includes a series of rail station enhancement schemes. Blakedown Rail Station is identified as one such scheme, including the need to provide car parking enhancements.

6. A report was commissioned in 2020 to provide clarification on the number of car parking spaces required at Blakedown Rail Station as part of the evidence base for the Wyre Forest Local Plan review. Taking into account the potential impact of Covid 19 on train travel, the need was identified for a total of 135 car parking spaces.

7. Worcestershire County Council has assessed options to increase car parking at Blakedown Rail Station and to mitigate on street parking in the village. This work identified a brownfield site immediately to the south of the station on Station Drive (sometimes referred to as the Callow Oils site) as having the potential to provide car parking for the station.

8. Following initial survey work, the Station Drive site is believed to have capacity for up to 120 car parking spaces with work currently being undertaken on a detailed layout, ground investigations, ecology etc to inform the design and layout of the car park. The final design of the car park will include provision for electric vehicle charging at a minimum of 5% of the spaces as set out in the Streetscape Design Guide. Provision will also be included for cycle parking.

9.The County Council has entered into a Heads of Terms options agreement with the current landowner to secure the land for the station car park, subject to a successful planning application.

Planning Context

10. Wyre Forest District Council are in the final stages of completing a review of their Core Strategy, with the proposed Wyre Forest Local Plan currently subject to examination by the Secretary of State.

11.The proposal to provide rail station car parking at the Station Drive site is included in the publication version of the Wyre Forest Local Plan (site: WFR/CB/2) and was discussed at the hearing sessions for the Examination in Public. Its proximity to the rail line and former industrial use mean it is suitable for a rail car park. A planning application for housing on this site has previously been refused because of poor residential amenity and proximity to the rail line.

12.As part of the preparation for the hearing sessions of the Examination in Public, consideration was given to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on rail demand and future working patterns. This proposal for car parking at Blakedown Rail Station is forecast to meet the existing demand and future demand envisaged from the Wyre Forest Local Plan.

Planning Policy

13.The National Planning Policy Framework 2019 strongly supports sustainable transport. Paragraph 102 sets out that:

- a. Opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued
- b. The environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure can be identified, assessed and taken in account – including appropriate opportunities for avoiding and mitigating any adverse effects and for net environmental gains.

14.The Wyre Forest Local Plan submission version 2020 provides further support for the provision of car parking at Blakedown Rail Station. Policy 13 Transport and Accessibility in Wyre Forest identifies Blakedown Rail Station enhancements as one of the 5 most significant scheme for the successful implementation of the Wyre Forest Local Plan.

Progress to date

15.The following activities have been completed or are underway:

- a. Discussions with the landowner;
- b. Agreed purchase price for the land as part of the heads of terms
- c. Topographical surveys
- d. Geotechnical surveys
- e. Preliminary ecological appraisal
- f. Bat activity surveys in progress
- g. Tree surveys in progress

- h. Transport assessment in progress
- i. Junction assessment
- j. Initial design
- k. Planning strategy
- l. Car park management strategy, in development

Planning

16. A planning application is required for the scheme which will be determined by the County Council. Prior to submission of the planning application, pre-application public engagement will be undertaken, with further consultation through the planning application.

Delivery Timescales

17. Subject to the conclusion of the activities outlined above, the following timetable is currently proposed:

- a. Design development Autumn 2021
- b. Planning application submission Winter 2021/2022
- c. Planning determination Summer 2022

Start on site following planning approval (assuming a Compulsory Purchase Order is not required)

Legal Implications

18. The proposed car park is on privately owned land which will need to be acquired. Negotiations for this are advanced with the current landowner and heads of terms have been agreed for WCC to purchase the land and undertake the necessary preparatory works for the determination of the planning application.

19. Recommendations have been included in this report to enable the use of the CPO process if required. However, as heads of terms have been agreed with the landowner this situation is unlikely.

Financial Implications

20. The total costs for the development of the additional car parking at Blakedown Rail Station are estimated to be £1.94 million including land purchase, scheme design, construction and project management. Funding is available to enable this project to be delivered within the existing £3.7m Capital Programme allocation for Railway Station Upgrades.

21. Demand for the car park is anticipated to be high. Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic, the car park was anticipated to be fully occupied within its first year of operation (2023). Post pandemic there is less certainty of travel patterns and with an estimated 30% reduction in rail demand at Blakedown, demand is deemed to be sufficient for the car park to be fully occupied by year 4 of operation (2027), following which demand is forecast to return to pre-covid levels.

22. Based on this demand model, a £5 per day charge, 111 car park spaces and an annual maintenance and management cost of £50k, an annual operating surplus of c£75k is expected to be generated from 2023 rising to c£94k by 2027. This indicates that the car park is expected to break even and payback the £1.94m capital costs by 2042, giving a payback period of 21 years from date of investment.

HR, Privacy and Human Rights Implications

23. No Human Resources or Human Rights Implications have been identified.

24. No privacy issues have been identified but this will be modelled during the design process eg: potential for overlooking.

Risk Implications

25. Key Project Risks are set out below:

Risk	Mitigation
Delays to land acquisition	Options agreement signed with the landowners, with 18 months to secure the necessary permissions to implement the car park proposals. Compulsory Purchase is not expected to be required for this proposal.
Unknown ground conditions	Investigations are currently underway, including geotechnical surveys which will inform the design and confirm the final number of spaces to be delivered.
Costs of development	Amend design to address any unexpected costs identified during the design phase.
Car park management strategy	To be developed during the detailed design phase to ensure that the car park is managed appropriately, and all revenue costs of operation are fully mitigated by the charging policy.

Joint Equality, Public Health, Data Protection and Sustainability Impact Assessments

26. A **joint impact assessment (JIA)** screening (and any full impact assessments – if screening indicates that they are required) **must** have been completed before the cabinet report is submitted.

30.The JIA screening has been carried out in respect of these recommendations. It identified that further impact analysis will be required in respect of:

- Sustainability
- Equality and Public Health

These will be undertaken as the project develops to ensure that the full impacts can be understood.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1: Land Acquisition Plan
- Appendix 2: Joint Impact Assessment screening

Contact Points

Specific Contact Points for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Worcestershire Local Transport Plan 4
- Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy
- Wyre Forest District; Future Rail Demand and Car Park Options Summary Report, October 2020