



Network Rail



Via email: planningpolicy@testvalley.gov.uk

02 April 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

NETWORK RAIL RESPONSE TO TEST VALLEY LOCAL PLAN (REGULATION 18) CONSULTATION

Thank you for providing Network Rail the opportunity to make comment on the Regulation 18 version of the Test Valley Local Plan.

It is important that opportunities to promote the use of the railway as a more sustainable modes of transport are identified and taken forward. The railway network is a vital element of the country's economy and a key component in the drive to deliver the Government's sustainable agenda. This response is provided following full consultation with South Western Railway (SWR), as the train operator within Test Valley. As such, this should be considered as a joint rail industry response.

Network Rail is the statutory undertaker for maintaining and operating railway infrastructure of England, Scotland, and Wales. As statutory undertaker, Network Rail is under license from the Department for Transport (DfT), and regulated by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), to maintain and enhance the operational railway and its assets, ensuring the provision of a safe operational railway. As a matter of course, proponents of sites which are close to the railway boundary or sites which could affect the railway asset directly are required to engage with our Asset Protection and Optimisation team (ASPRO).

Network Rail has comments which we hope are of use to the Council and are keen to assist where possible to deliver these. Network Rail note the growth proposed in Test Valley and the Council's endeavours to meet their housing need as required by the standard

methodology. Network Rail appreciates the on-going communication, as noted in para 2.67, with the Council and would be keen for this engagement to continue.

Network Rail supports the Council's vision which identifies the need to deliver supporting infrastructure to meet development needs. As a provider of infrastructure that supports modal shift to more sustainable forms of travel, Network Rail is keen to work with the Council and other third parties to ensure this is embedded within current and future development. Supporting growth through enhanced public transport provision is an essential part of this process and there are significant opportunities that could be pursued within Test Valley.

One of the most sustainable locations for housing provision is around transport nodes, such as railway stations, and the Council should give due consideration to these opportunities. Andover and Romsey are identified as Tier 1 settlements and this is supported given the access to public transport. The on-going implementation of the Andover and Romsey masterplans remains an important factor in identifying regeneration opportunities to better link development with access to the rail network.

Network Rail can support the Council on this should this assistance be sought. Additionally, it is vital that the transport infrastructure required to support the level of growth that Test Valley are required to meet is fully considered and is identified as a key priority for the Plan.

Rail network in Test Valley

Test Valley features the stations of Mottisfont & Dunbridge (DBG), Grateley (GRT), Romsey (ROM) and Andover (ADV) with the latter being the boroughs busiest station. Following Andover is Romsey at over 320,000 entries and exits, then at almost a third of that number is Grateley with Mottisfont & Dunbridge the lowest.

Station	Entries and Exits (2018/19)	Entries and Exits (2021/22)
Mottisfont & Dunbridge	33,522	23,726
Grateley	265,440	122,492
Romsey	520,856	328,886
Andover	1,232,336	709,312

Network Rail supports paragraph 2.65 which notes Test Valley's access to a good rail network. From stations within Test Valley, rail users can access Salisbury, Reading, Basingstoke, Southampton, Woking and London Waterloo within relatively short timeframes. This presents significant commuting and leisure opportunities for residents and would be a key factor in making Test Valley an attractive place to locate.

These stations vary significantly in terms of facilities and offering for passengers. The infographic summarises these features and clearly denotes where improvements can be made. When looking at accessibility, it is clear to see that Grateley in particular suffers. The relatively low ridership numbers, potentially reflects this especially when compared to the larger stations of Romsey and Andover. This sentiment is echoed in observing that both Grateley and Mottisfont & Dunbridge are without toilets, hospitality or taxi facilities with each representing a possible area for upgrade in the future.

All of the stations include provision for bus interchange meaning passengers are able to continue their journey with the use of public transport. Additionally, all of the stations within Test Valley offer train ramp access and some cycle storage (albeit limited at Mottisfont & Dunbridge) with staff and seating available at most of the stations.

It is important to understand where people will access each of the stations by cycle and ensure sufficient cycle storage and safe access routes to the station with a focus on designated cycle paths, signage and traffic. This is particularly relevant at Andover station and should be considered as part of any linked site allocations or other development.

Development Growth

Network Rail notes the Council's proposed spatial strategy setting out how the housing requirement for the Borough is to be met. The identification of Andover and Romsey as Tier 1 settlements is supported and opportunities for development should continue to be maximised as part of the respective Masterplans. The approach taken by the Council to effectively separate the two parts of the Borough to consider differing housing markets is a sound approach to take. The proposal to provide for more housing within Northern Test Valley is supported given its better rail links however Southern Test Valley does include a greater number of Tier 2 settlements.

Policy 6 (SS6): Meeting the housing requirement

Network Rail note the strategic allocations as defined by the split in housing market areas. It is considered that outside Andover and Romsey, access to public transport is more limited as there are only four rail stations across the Borough. Improving access to public transport should be a significant focus of the Plan.

Policy 1 (NA1): Andover Town Centre

Given its role as one of the two Tier 1 settlements within the Borough, opportunities to maximise development within Andover should be pursued. The presence of the rail station would act as a key attractor for people wishing to locate to Andover and this provides a sound basis for focusing development. Network Rail control land around the station that could be utilised for development, including the current freight site that sits immediately to the north of the London-bound platform. Maintaining flexibility around its usage will allow the site to respond to market demands and maximise its potential. The current car park at Andover station has been decked due to demand for its use and retaining the ability to provide an additional deck of car parking, should this be required, would future proof the car park and allow for additional usage. Network Rail wish to ensure that potential future decking of the car parking would not conflict with any design or character guidance.

Northern Area Policy 4 (NA4): Land south of London Road, Picket Twenty

This site is within a reasonable 15 minute cycle to Andover rail station and therefore could support improved walking and cycling links. Network Rail would encourage inclusion of

this within the draft Policy to allow for improved access. The potential for increased use of Andover station because of the development would also justify this development contributing towards improvements at the station to ensure it can accommodate the increased usage.

Northern Area Policy 5 (NA5): Land at Manor Farm

This site is within a reasonable 15 minute cycle to Andover rail station and therefore could support improved walking and cycling links. Network Rail would encourage inclusion of this within the draft Policy to allow for improved access. The potential for increased use of Andover station because of the development would also justify this development contributing towards improvements at the station to ensure it can accommodate the increased usage.

Northern Area Policy 6 (NA6) – Land at Bere Hill

Network Rail notes the significant development proposed as land at Bere Hill, south of Andover. Network Rail note that this site falls within 20 minutes of the centre of Andover as a reasonable walking and cycling distance as identified within the Andover masterplan. Given its relative proximity to the centre of Andover, this proposed site allocation could reasonably accommodate improved cycling and walking links to facilitate access to Andover town centre. Network Rail would encourage inclusion of this within the draft Policy to allow for improved access. The potential for increased use of Andover station as a result of the development would also justify this development contributing towards improvements at the station to ensure it can accommodate the increased usage.

Northern Area Policy 8 (NA8) – Land to the South East of Ludgershall

Network Rail notes the proposal for access to the site to be via a bridge over the railway line. Network Rail would encourage the site promoter to engage with relevant teams within NR over any railway land required for the bridge. Further, there are level crossings on the section of the line adjacent to the proposed allocation. Re-development of the site and the provision of an alternative access via the railway bridge, could give rise to opportunities to pursue closure of these crossings. Network Rail would support the inclusion of potential for closing the crossings within the text of the draft allocation. This would help to improve safety and potentially allow for greater use of the railway line at some point.

Southern Area Policy 6 (SA6): Land at Velmore Park

This draft allocation is within a reasonable walking and cycling distance to Chandlers Ford and Eastleigh rail stations. It is likely that more users would travel to Eastleigh given the greater journey routes offered. The draft allocation could provide for improved access to these stations to encourage active and sustainable travel and improvements to cycling facilities and access at Eastleigh station. It is also important to consider wider transport integration with bus network and active travel opportunities for this site.

Policy COM1: Delivering Infrastructure

Network Rail supports the inclusion of an infrastructure policy within the Plan. However, there is scope for broadening out the Policy and Network Rail would request that reference be made within para d to the use of conditions to ensure required infrastructure is provided where development is dependant on this. This would give comfort to

infrastructure providers that the funding of the required infrastructure would be provided at an early stage.

Policy TR1: Active and Sustainable Travel

Network Rail supports the inclusion of a Policy covering the promotion of active and sustainable travel. Network Rail would support inclusion within the draft Policy in seeking opportunities to promote access to and from rail stations via station travel plans. This should become a consideration for all development to determine if such access is possible. This would allow for para 5.496 in the Plan to be fully implemented as part of a holistic approach towards improving access which should be reflected throughout the Plan.

Level crossings

There are several public and private level crossings within the Borough. Halterworth, a public automatic half barrier level crossing, located near Romsey is designated as having the highest collective risk rating (2). Should the Council pursue development opportunities that increases the interaction of members of the public with level crossing on the rail network, then closure or mitigation of such crossings should be an essential consideration within the new Plan. This would not block development but would need to be identified as a vital safety feature when developing site allocations or taking a decision on planning applications. Network Rail suggest that this would take the form of inclusion of a specific Policy focused on level crossing safety and mitigations as required arising from development or inclusion of this within a relevant Policy, within the Plan.

As the experts in rail safety, Network Rail would be able to support the Council in developing an effective approach which ensures the safety of residents and other users without compromising the safe and efficient running of the railway.

Infrastructure Delivery Plan

Set out below is an update for the IDP which can be reviewed regularly to ensure the most up-to-date information is provided.

Andover

Andover railway station is heavily used and is likely to see continued growth. Andover has been identified as a key station for delivering step free access improvements to ensure all users can safely access the station and the platforms. Specific improvements would help to address existing deficiencies and future proof the station. There is an identified need for improving direct access to Platform 1 and this could include the provision of a footbridge and lifts.

Network Rail identify Andover as being a Priority 1 station for such improvements meaning it is the highest priority in the short term (over next 5 years). Network Rail would encourage the Council to work with NR to secure contributions that could be used towards funding these improvements. Developments in and around Andover could contribute towards funding these improvements and reference to this within draft site allocations or used as part of the planning application process would assist in this.

Grateley

Grateley railway station is located towards the west of the Borough but does continue to see strong usage as it potentially allows for passengers to get a seat prior to reaching Andover. Given the high usage, Grateley is identified as being a Priority 2 station for

access improvements, meaning it is categorised as being high priority in the short term (over next 5 years). Network Rail would encourage the Council to work with NR to secure contributions that could be used towards funding these improvements from development close to Grateley.

Romsey

Romsey railway station is identified as a priority 4 station for access improvements. This makes it a low category station, but it still remains a priority due to existing deficiencies. Further development close to Romsey will worsen this and continue to impact on the passenger experience. Network Rail would encourage the Council to work with NR to secure contributions that could be used towards funding improvements to the station where these have been identified.

Mottisford & Dunbridge

Mottisford station is located near to a National Trust site and is within a fairly rural location. However, there are issues around pressures of car parking at the station and there are opportunities to pursue enhancing parking to reduce these pressures.

Land at Whitenap

The site is allocated within the Revised Local Plan 2016 and is subject to an existing planning application that has yet to be determined. The site allocation requires that pedestrian/cycle links are provided via a new bridge over the railway line. The need for the bridge remains and should be carried forward as part of the new Local Plan. Network Rail request that this is also identified within the IDP as essential infrastructure to allow the development to come forward.

Other station enhancements

Station Travel Plans devised by South Western Railway have identified a catalogue of potential improvements and developments that could be made at stations within the Test Valley borough, the infographic below summarises the list of possible projects that could take place to enhance the stations, from access to transport integration. The graphs depict the cost/impact of the proposed station enhancements with the section below giving more detail and assigning ownership. More detail can be found within the SWR produced Station Travel Plans.



Summary

The rail network within Test Valley provides a good basis to pursue development opportunities and to promote sustainable transport as a genuine alternative to using the car. However, this is generally limited to Andover and Romsey.

Network Rail supports the identification of public transport and promotion of active and sustainable travel within the Plan, however stronger wording would allow for this to become more embedded within draft site allocations and other policies. The Plan should continue to be developed, with appropriate policies and site allocations which promote the rail network in encouraging its usage and pursuing development opportunities.

Network Rail are keen to continue to work with the Council and other stakeholders in helping to deliver transport and infrastructure improvements for the benefit of residents of Test Valley.

I trust the above is of use and if there any issues raised that needs further discussion then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Hatton MRTPI
Senior Town Planner