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**BANK TOP STATION**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Chris McEwan,  
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Richard Alty, Director of Place**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to advise Cabinet of proposals to reconfigure the rail network / track layout within and adjacent to Bank Top Station as part of a wider scheme to increase the frequency and decrease the journey time of trains to and from London. The report also seeks agreement for the Council to work with partners to deliver a whole industry and regeneration solution for Bank Top Station in order to make Bank Top Station and the surrounding area an anchor for the regeneration of southern part of the Town Centre Fringe area.

**Summary**

2. Network Rail are currently in the process of identifying and securing improvements to the East Coast mainline in order to implement the Intercity Express Programme (IEP), which will see the roll out of a new generation of passenger trains on the East Coast Main Line from 2018 onwards. The trains themselves are being assembled just to the north of Bank Top station at Newton Aycliffe.
3. Not only will journey times be improved along the route, but the business case suggested that there will be additional services between London Kings Cross and the north east and Scotland, some of which may give additional stops at Darlington. There is also an opportunity to secure development that supports the delivery of part of the Tees Valley Metro.
4. The Council has been approached by Network Rail and afforded the opportunity to work with Network Rail, Bank Top Station and a range of partners and stakeholders including the Home and Communities Agency and Tees Valley Unlimited to develop a “whole industry solution” for Bank Top Station.
5. Historically changes to the rail network have been done predominately with the sole consideration of the impact the changes will have on the railways. The opportunity is to work to secure the best solution in term of track layout, re-configuration and redevelopment of station facilities as part of a wider scheme or programme. This is particularly important as Darlington’s key regeneration schemes (Central Park and Town Centre Fringe) are

adjacent to and to some degree have interdependence with Bank Top Station.

6. Bank Top station has the opportunity to cement its place as a key asset for Tees Valley and through working with Network Rail, Tees Valley Unlimited, Homes and Communities Agency and a range of stakeholders and partners, it may be possible to design a comprehensive scheme whereby development within the station is complemented and enhanced by suitable development in the surrounding areas and neighbourhoods, with appropriate links to the wider transport networks.

### **Recommendation**

7. It is recommended that Cabinet:-
  - (a) Note the contents of the report.
  - (b) Endorse the Council's participation in delivering a whole industry solution for Bank Top Station, including ensuring links are made with key Council regeneration schemes including Central Park and Town Centre Fringe and that wider social, economic and environmental impacts are taken into consideration.

### **Reasons**

8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
  - (a) To enhance the environmental, social and economic well-being of the Borough.
  - (b) To support actions arising from Darlington's Economic Strategy.

**Richard Alty, Director of Place**

### **Background Papers**

- (i) Presentation entitled 'Darlington Bank Top Station : Fusing our History with Opportunities for the Future'

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S17 Crime and Disorder	Design will have regard to managing crime and disorder issues.
Health and Well Being	The concept incorporates active travel options that contribute to health.
Carbon Impact	The concept seeks to implement more efficient and effective local transport systems that will reduce carbon emissions.
Diversity	The project will seek to create improved access for all to the station and create wider opportunities to support the economy.
Wards Affected	Bank Top and Park East

Groups Affected	Rail users, visitors, Tees Valley Businesses, local residents and property interests.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This project particularly meets the ‘One Darlington’ priority of the Council’s SCS. It is providing support to new and existing local businesses that will better equip them to survive the early days of trading as well as improve prospects of growth and the creation of local, high-skilled and higher added value jobs.
Efficiency	There are no efficiency opportunities.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

9. In 1825, the Stockton and Darlington Railway was opened as the first publicly subscribed passenger railway in the world. Much of this railway exists today in the network across the Tees Valley. Darlington continues to play a pivotal role in the proud railway heritage of this country. As Darlington approaches the bicentenary of the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, the Government is again recognising the rail network as a driver of economic growth with the delivery of new intercity trains and the implementation of a new high speed network.
  
10. An opportunity is emerging to develop plans for the future of the railway in Darlington, providing a mainline hub that recognises the importance of connecting to the rest of the country and the provision of a mainline hub connecting to the rest of the Tees Valley. A project is currently being developed to confirm Bank Top station’s important role not just for Darlington but also as a key resource for Tees Valley. The significant role of Bank Top station within Darlington is quite clear. The station sits at the heart of the various regeneration projects being promoted across the town, and forms a vital link between them.
  
11. To the west is the town centre, within which the Town Centre Pedestrianisation project was completed in 2007, providing major public realm enhancements and open spaces and reduced traffic that has allowed quality independent traders to move in and a wealth of on-street events to be held.
  
12. To the north is the Central Park site, planned to include 28,000 sq m of office space, up to 480 residential units and public open spaces. More importantly, it is already home to Darlington College and the Darlington Campus of Teesside University, ensuring an untapped demand for rail use on the doorstep of the station.
  
13. Between the two is the area known as the Town Centre Fringe, about which the Council is consulting at the moment. The plan is to support commercial, retail and leisure developments between the town centre and Central Park, as well as creating new office space adjacent to the town centre. Between the latter two projects, some 3,000 additional jobs are forecast.

14. To the immediate east of the station, along Yarm Road, is a swathe of residential streets, including some of the most deprived wards within Darlington. The severance impact of the railway line exacerbates the difference between quality of life on either side of the line.
15. Bank Top station lies at the heart of Darlington, as well as being the major rail hub for the Tees Valley, with up to 4 long distance train services per hour, and 2 local services. Its importance to the town and the wider hinterland is crucial now, and will increase in the future.
16. In recognising the station's key role within the town, there are a number of current issues with the station and its operation:
  - (a) Poor connectivity through the station – this is the existing footbridge over the mainline through tracks, not exactly a facility for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to encourage people to use it at all times. The existing subway is not all that welcoming at the moment, either.
  - (b) The existing station portico is used as a short stay car park, meaning that the first impression of the station from the town centre is one of an impressive building being masked by vehicles.
  - (c) The station's retail offer is somewhat limited, with only two outlets being before the ticket barriers, and so there is little incentive for the station to become a destination in its own right.
  - (d) From a rail operations perspective, the track alignment on the southern approach to the station means that all local services have to cross the main line at Darlington South junction
  - (e) Access to the existing platforms is via relatively low speed turnouts, thereby affecting longer distance service journey times and the ability to increase local service frequencies and stopping patterns.
  - (f) Without addressing the many conflicts at Darlington, there is little opportunity for future growth, or some services will be squeezed even more than at present.

## **Project Drivers**

17. The government has recognised the importance of investing in key infrastructure to facilitate and drive economic recovery. The rail industry's objectives are;
  - (a) To facilitate eight trains per hour on the main east coast route between London and Edinburgh. This is related to the Intercity Express Programme (IEP), which will see the roll out of a new generation of passenger trains on the East Coast Main Line from 2018 onwards, although the trains themselves are being assembled just to the north of Bank Top station at Newton Aycliffe. Not only will journey times be improved along the route, but the business case suggested that there will be additional services between London Kings Cross and the north east and Scotland, some of which will give additional stops at Darlington.
  - (b) To develop a solution that facilitates the Tees Valley Metro project, this aims to make much more efficient use of the existing heavy rail network to support the economic

regeneration of the Tees Valley. By 2014, some £7.5 million will have been spent across the network on station facilities.

- (c) To develop a solution that enhances the network for freight goods and connectivity to and facilities at Tees Port. Works are already planned on the Darlington to Tees Port line for gauge enhancement and a solution needs to be found to timetabling conflicts at Darlington.

18. There are of course drivers for both the local area and the region. These include maximising the regeneration benefits from the combined projects of Bank Top, Central Park, Town Centre Fringe and what already has been achieved in the town centre. At a regional level the Tees Valley Metro and enhanced freight facilities at Tees Port are important elements to the Tees Valley Business Plan.

### **Outcomes of a “Whole Industry and Regeneration Approach”**

19. This project was born out of the desire of the National Rail Network to achieve a more efficient use of the East Coast line. However through working collaboratively with the rail industry it has increasingly been recognised that working in collaboration with a wider group of stakeholders would potentially create a more positive outcome for all. These outcomes are recognised as being;
- (a) Delivering the Intercity Express Programme (IEP) by maximising the use of the new rolling stock and improving approaches and exists to the station on the main line.
  - (b) The Tees Valley Metro fixed infrastructure can be delivered to allow services from the rest of the Tees Valley running into and out of the station, but with a more regular clockface timetable and improved frequencies.
  - (c) Local partners also wish to maintain services to Bishop Auckland, working closely with the Community Rail Partnership. Although there is a continuing discussion on the way these services are configured, peak hour surveys suggest a continued demand for through travel between Bishop Auckland and Middlesbrough, and so there is a recognised need for some local services to run through Darlington, as at present.
  - (d) There is also an aspiration to connect to Tees Valley Metro through to the Central Park site in the future and a possible halt at the University is being future proofed.
  - (e) The rationalisation of freight movement to Tees Port avoiding timetabling conflicts at Darlington.
  - (f) A reconfiguration and makeover for the Bank Top Station improving its facilities for users and its image.
  - (g) Creating opportunities for a local transport interchange focused on the reconfigured station layout.
  - (h) Providing a catalyst for the regeneration of the surrounding areas in response to the station development.

20. Council officers have been working with Tees Valley Unlimited, Network Rail, rail operators towards this “whole industry solution”. **Annex A** (attached) illustrates what such a solution would look like.
21. Components of the scheme would include:
- (a) New platforms on the east side of station to serve both southbound long distance and local services.
  - (b) Maintaining the existing through lines to the east of the station.
  - (c) The retention of the existing Platform 1 for northbound stopping services.
  - (d) The retention of the existing Platforms 2 and 3 to provide operational flexibility.
  - (e) The conversion of the existing Platform 4 to a bay platform at its northern end to serve Bishop Auckland services.
  - (f) New high quality linkages through the station by means of a DDA-compliant footbridge centred around the new platform and the existing station.
  - (g) Public realm enhancements at Garbutt Square to provide a new entrance to the station on the east side.
  - (h) New pick-up/drop-off facilities on the east side.
  - (i) At least the same number of long stay car parking spaces on the east side.
  - (j) The opportunity to consider the use of the station portico for retail or additional station usage.
  - (k) The opportunity to consider how best to use the redundant space on the southern part of Platform 4 for additional station facilities or bus use.
  - (l) The possible extension of the local service through to Central Park using existing freight line.
22. For the rail customer, there is the creation of much better linkages across the station for all users and there are opportunities to enhance the retail offer within the station and make it a destination in its own right. There is also the ability to create gateway entrances to the station, befitting its role within the town and the wider area. The suggested solution has a range of regeneration benefits, including:
- (a) Annual benefit of £0.8 – 1.0 million due to public real enhancements on east side of station.
  - (b) Bank Top Station can become a “destination”, driving retail revenue - sales in stations were up 2.35% on a like-for-like basis in the last quarter of 2011.
  - (c) Potential to create serviced office space at or near the station.
  - (d) Increased regeneration opportunities for adjacent sites including Central Park and the Town Centre Fringe.

23. There are also potential wider transport benefits within the traditional project appraisal framework including:
- (a) Encouraging modal shift to rail – reducing carbon emissions
  - (b) Complementing investment being made through Bus Network Improvements
  - (c) Better interchange between all modes, including cycles
  - (d) Enhancement to townscape around station
  - (e) Reducing severance between key regeneration sites and local residents
  - (f) Facilitating transport hub development.
24. If all of these benefits to the whole industry solution were not enough, the timing of developing and delivering the solution could not be better, for the following reasons:
- (a) Network Rail will be seeking options to address constraints for the ECML to accommodate the IEP service pattern to be funded in Control Period 5
  - (b) ECML/Cross Country franchises to be renewed in 2013, and Northern Rail/TPE franchises to be renewed in 2014
  - (c) DfT will be devolving local transport major scheme funding from 2015 onwards
  - (d) Move to secure Darlington’s rail heritage

## **Conclusion**

25. Working with partners to develop a “whole industry solution” enables the Council to influence the development of a key economic asset that is significant to the Borough, Tees Valle and the North East Region. In order to take this forward, four recommendations are made:
- (a) To support the proposal for Network Rail to include east side track/platform layout proposal within next stage of IEP GRIP work.
  - (b) For the Council and Network Rail to work together with other potential partners and stakeholders to develop a strategy for the station and its environs.
  - (c) To work with Network Rail to ensure that the track and associated platform improvements at within CP5 commitment (i.e. within Network Rail’s next planning period).
  - (d) To work with partners and stakeholders to develop a funding package for the other elements.
26. This is a unique opportunity to build on Darlington’s rail heritage and history and realise our opportunities for the future. It is a chance to cement Darlington’s role as a key transport hub on the main line. It is a means of delivering the aspirations of partners for the benefit of all users, the local community, business and support the delivery of our ambitions for the local economy. It also affords an opportunity to work with partners to deliver the sort of solution for Darlington envisaged by the railway pioneers almost 200 years ago with a station fit for the third century of rail travel within the Tees Valley.

**BANK TOP STATION – DIAGRAM OF WHOLE INDUSTRY SOLUTION**

