

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 November 2015

PRESENT – Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors Cossins, Grundy, KE Kelly, Lyonette, Wright and York. (7)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin, Donoghue, L Hughes and MR Nicholson. (4)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Copeland. (1)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Dave Winstanley, Assistant Director, Transport and Capital Projects, Steve Petch, Place Strategy Manager and Lead Officer, Simon Houldsworth, Principal Policy Officer and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

Representing Arup, Consulting Engineers – Steve Wells, Arthur Smart, Elliott Wishlade and Sophie Cameron.

P27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

P28. BANK TOP MASTERPLAN – The Assistant Director, Transport and Capital Projects gave the background to the Bank Top Masterplan, which had been prepared by Arup, Consultants, and in doing so stated that transport was a high priority for the north east as connectivity to the rest of England would bring economic benefits to both Darlington and the Tees Valley. Darlington Bank Top Station had received no investment for many years and as traffic was set to increase it was important capitalise now for the future. A PowerPoint presentation by Arup gave further information to Committee.

It was stated that Darlington's Bank Top Station was seen as a national critical piece of infrastructure and the objectives of the Masterplan were to create an integrated transport hub, develop a strong local economy and enhance the grandeur and heritage of Bank Top Station. The draft Masterplan would be available mid to end of January 2016.

In relation to rail infrastructure Committee was advised that Bank Top Station had been assessed for future services and that rail journeys could double by 2043 with two out of six journeys being non-stopping. It was indicated that by 2043 new platforms would be required for the East Coast Mainline traffic and that the Bishop Auckland service would be broken at some point. It was also stated that passengers could increase from 2.2 million to 4.5 million by 2050 and Bank Top Station currently operated with crossing trains and junctions at capacity.

Details were provided of the two workshops held in Darlington, the most recent offering three illustrative Masterplan options which had stimulated a lot of discussion. The key messages of the workshops comprised the creation of an aspirational Masterplan; influencing Darlington's Gateway status; unlocking the east/west severance; enhancement of all three Bank Top Station entrances; retaining the existing station for rail operations; improving passenger convenience and walk

distances whilst also addressing intro-platform connectivity and creating a future proof preferred option.

Particular references were made to the historic content of Bank Top Station; the opportunities provided by its location within the Tees Valley Region and the benefits to Darlington's economy including building upon existing business infrastructure and providing a housing mix needs to match demand and aspirations. In relation to the Station itself there was a desire to connect ongoing developments with the Town and Station, capitalise on existing economic strengths and consider the opportunities available with the Cattle Market Site.

Scrutiny was advised that there could be opportunities for retail within the Station including the pop up shops and a community market; flexible use of the portico building; and links to the cultural quarter and Victoria Road/Feethams. Visitor attractions could embrace Darlington's strong railway heritage with touring exhibitions utilising the portico building and linkages to the biosciences offer currently in Darlington. In relation to housing developments there were real opportunities for regional commuters as homes were being built closer to new jobs and there was a need for greater housing variety. Business and enterprise prospects could be achieved by linking to business support in Central Park, utilising the Gateway to the Tees Valley via the A66 and letting industry flourish.

Scrutiny were advised of three options which are being explored for the re-modelling of Bank Top Station, namely, Station Place, providing east-west connectivity; Town Loop concentrating on the western side of the Station and Regional Hub providing a balance of both sides of the Station and linking to Central Park.

Discussion ensued on increased parking provision to be provided for all three options and Scrutiny noted that currently 43 per cent of passengers arrive via the Portico entrance to the Station; 2025 Railway celebrations and their impact on Darlington featuring highly on the Agenda and linkages to the existing Railway Museum located at North Road.

The Assistant Director, Transport and Capital Projects advised Members that Network Rail would provide the most investment although Darlington would have to compete with other projects and that as Virgin Trains wanted to invest in Darlington it was essential to have a Masterplan in place.

It was suggested that lighting strategies and art installations could be utilised to enhance features and landmarks in Darlington to make the Town more welcoming to visitors.

Committee was pleased to note that Heritage England had advised on proposals which had been put forward as suggestions and that Darlington Association on Disability had also been approached for their views.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Committee be extended to Arup for their informative and interesting presentation.

(b) That a further meeting be arranged to give consideration to the Masterplan Options when available.
