

Oxford to Bletchley Enhanced LRG-Meeting note

Meeting #1

Date: 09/06/2025

Time: 6:00pm

Type of meeting: In person

Key discussion points and outcomes

1. Introduction, overview, and housekeeping

- 1.1 Sarah Jacobs (SJ) welcomed attendees to the meeting and ran through the housekeeping and agenda. SJ explained that the notes from the meeting will be made available on the community hub.
- 1.2 SJ noted that as members of the Enhanced LRG are considered statutory consultees, EWR Co will be able to share more detailed information with them. She added that it will be up to the group's discretion whether to share the information discussed during the meeting, although it should be noted that some information will be confidential.
- 1.3 All attendees, including EWR Co staff, introduced themselves and their respective parishes, wards or job titles.

2. Project updates

Universal theme park

- 2.1 SJ discussed the newly announced Universal theme park set to be built to the north of Bedford.
- 2.2 SJ explained that EWR Co are engaging with Universal to determine the potential implications of the park for Bedford and for the wider network. It has not yet been confirmed what the park may mean for EWR Co, but they are committed to maintaining close contact with all relevant parties such as Universal, Network Rail and the Department for Transport (DfT) to ensure accessibility and connectivity are core elements of the planning process.
- 2.3 John Riches (JR) asked whether Universal Studios would have its own station. Mark Conway (MCon) said that it's currently proposed that it would be serviced by a station at Stewartby; however, EWR Co are continuing to look at a consolidated station option.
- 2.4 SJ noted it was an exciting opportunity for the region and that EWR Co would keep the Enhanced LRGs updated once further information was available.

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- 2.5 Richard Hamley (RH) queried whether there had been discussions about combining both lines. MCon responded noting that a station is due to be constructed at Wixams on the Midland Mainline which is close to the proposed Universal theme park. This station construction is a separate project to the East West Rail project'.

Chiltern Railways

- 2.6 SJ explained that Chiltern Railways has been announced as the operator for the first stage of EWR.
- 2.7 SJ outlined that EWR Co are expecting services to start running later this year.
- 2.8 RH stated that he had heard on a local forum that the services had been delayed due to a union dispute. SJ noted that there are several reasons why delays may occur, however this is outside of EWR Co's control as this sits with Chiltern Railways.

Ground Investigation (GI) Works

- 2.9 SJ shared that the Phase 1 ground investigation (GI) works for EWR Co started in February this year and that EWR Co has been or will be in contact with the parishes to notify them of such works.
- 2.10 Mike Chapman (MChap) questioned whether any GI works were impacting the Oxford to Bletchley area. Anthony O'Dea (AO) noted that most infrastructure between Oxford – Bletchley is already built, however there may be instances where GI is required for the positioning of passing loops and electrical feeds onto tracks.
- 2.11 MChap explained that he had received generic communications about surveys, but this didn't clarify what was happening and whether it would impact the area west of Bletchley.
- 2.12 AO confirmed that GI works will be required for heavy infrastructure and environmental surveys that are still ongoing between Oxford to Bletchley.
- 2.13 MChap requested that residents and LRGs be notified of future on the groundwork and surveys, including what work was to take place and where. SJ confirmed that notifications have been sent to residents and the relevant LRGs regarding GI works since February and this would continue.
- 2.14 SJ explained that EWR had recently uncovered fossils during recent GI works and EWR Co would be conducting further archaeological, ecological and habitat surveys. The range of surveys and timescales were highlighted on the slides.
- 2.15 MChap questioned whether EWR Co would inspect whether planting had been completed post-construction, as there are landowners who are concerned that saplings have been planted but have not survived. AO responded that this would be Network Rail's responsibility, and they will have contractual obligations to ensure that planting is completed.
- 2.16 MChap explained that it had been two years since the previous work had been completed, however residents were not aware of any re-planting works. Denise Richardson (DR) commented that there had been a large amount of planting where she lived, with Network Rail visiting to manage vegetation, however a lot of the planting has died since then.

- 2.17 MChap asked whether EWR Co can ask Network Rail for its planting plans. SJ confirmed this was something EWR Co could pick up with Network Rail and that the EWR Co environment team can also provide a wider update around autumn time.

3. Non-statutory consultation (NSC) next steps

- 3.1 SJ provided an update on the non-statutory consultation (NSC) – A NSC summary document was published on 16th May 2025, with a link circulated to all Enhanced and Community LRGs.
- 3.2 SJ explained that a more comprehensive ‘You Said, We Did’ report will be published during the statutory consultation.
- 3.3 JR questioned whether the comprehensive non-statutory consultation report will be available on the website. SJ confirmed that it would be once published and that a link would be shared via email to all LRG members, similar to the recent non-statutory summary report.

4. Emerging themes

- 4.1 SJ provided an overview of the emerging themes, route wide that had arisen from the consultation feedback.

Construction impacts

- 4.2 MChap stated that the non-statutory consultation documents mentioned the B5 compound being used in its entirety, and this was a concern for residents due to light pollution and the lack of noise or light mitigation. MChap raised concerns that these impacts would worsen.
- 4.3 SJ questioned whether MChap had left this as feedback during the consultation and MChap confirmed he had.
- 4.4 DR agreed that there were similar concerns in Steeple Claydon regarding construction compounds and lights shining into properties.
- 4.5 AO confirmed that EWR Co will not need the same number or size of compounds as previously, however a few would be required on a smaller scale for the passing loops.
- 4.6 JR questioned whether substations would need to be built. AO confirmed this was the case, but they would not be large structures.
- 4.7 MChap queried when confirmation would be provided about what compounds will be required during the construction period. SJ confirmed that more information on construction requirements will be available during the statutory consultation.

Freight

- 4.8 JR raised concerns about diesel fumes and vibration impacts from freight trains sitting in the passing loops.
- 4.9 AO noted that while EWR Co would provide an electrified passenger service, the railway line itself would have freight, which is operated by diesel.

- 4.10 DR noted that EWR will manage where passing loops are located which contributes to where freight trains are routed. AO acknowledged this but noted that several factors must be considered for an area to be deemed suitable for a passing loop.
- 4.11 John Chilver (JC) questioned why the work on the passing loops was not completed simultaneously with the work on the line. AO confirmed he could not comment on this as was within earlier Network Rail works.
- 4.12 JR stated that when the work started, residents were assured by Network Rail that there would be no freight on the line.
- 4.13 Richard Hamley (RH) added that 'real' train times indicate freight trains are earmarked to travel between Southampton and Northampton at 3am and questioned whether this would become a regular occurrence.
- 4.14 SJ advised that passenger trains running on the EWR route would stop operating at midnight. AO noted that any nighttime schedule would be reserved for maintenance or moving materials.
- 4.15 RH added that residents were previously assured there would not be any train services running between 10pm and 7am. AO confirmed that there would be four trains per hour on the Oxford to Bletchley stretch, three along the MVL and four between Cambridgeshire and Bedford.
- 4.16 SJ added that EWR is built for passenger services, to serve local towns and cities, however it will allow freight.
- 4.17 MChap queried why indicative dates could not be provided for when services will start. He noted that timetables only change in May or December, therefore unless there are delays, it is likely to be December 2025 when the timetable is confirmed for the CS1 line. MChap requested more information on the timetable and for someone knowledgeable about future services to attend the next meeting. SJ confirmed she would look into this.
- 4.18 AO added that ultimately EWR Co have no control over the timetable for freight, only passenger services.

5. Development Consent Order (DCO) Process

- 5.1 SJ shared the Development Consent Order (DCO) process timeline and confirmed that EWR Co is still at the pre-application stage. The key principles of the DCO process were outlined, including that it is an inclusive process and EWR Co wants communities to have a say at every stage.

6. Revised Local Representative Groups (LRGs)

- 6.1 SJ discussed the revised group structure for LRGs and explained that all parishes and wards within the red line boundary have been placed into the 'Enhanced' LRGs, whereas those outside this boundary are part of the 'Community LRGs.
- 6.2 SJ explained that the decision lies with the enhanced group regarding whether anyone else can join their group (if there are any requests). This can be highlighted in the Terms of Reference (ToR).

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7. Terms of Reference and request to join LRG

- 7.1 SJ stated that the ToR had not changed significantly and that she would share these with the group alongside the meeting note after today's meeting. She stated that feedback was required from attendees on the ToRs.
- 7.2 SJ noted that the Oxford to Bletchley Enhanced LRG includes all parishes and wards from Oxford to Bletchley that sit within the red line boundary, who are being treated as statutory consultees. She added that EWR Co would be engaging with Buckinghamshire Council as there had been several changes within the Council following the May elections.
- 7.3 Damien McGuire (DM) asked whether there could be more than one representative from a parish or town council. SJ confirmed this was possible. DM also asked whether non-elected representatives, such as those from local interest groups or organisations, including Bicester Bike User Group, could be part of the group. SJ noted that the group is just for elected representatives, but if a member of the group would like a non-elected representatives to attend, this will need to be put forward to the group for a majority vote.
- 7.4 Gail Buckland (GB) confirmed that any requests to join from community groups should be directed to the project inbox and EWR Co are actively looking at ways to engage them.

8. Route section: Oxford to Bletchley

- 8.1 MCon provided a summary of the works being proposed between Oxford to Bletchley, including station upgrades, alterations to level crossings and passing loops.
- 8.2 MCon noted EWR Co had been analysing passenger numbers at Bicester Village and Winslow station to inform the development of station gateways, stairways and parking. This has included looking at the transport mode split for people travelling to and from the station.
- 8.3 MCon stated it was likely that services via Winslow (as per the announcement by Chiltern earlier in the year)- were planned for later this year.
- 8.4 AO highlighted that Oxford Parkway Station would likely be busy, due to housing developments in the area and the location of Oxford United stadium. AO noted EWR Co has proposed that car parking within the existing station boundaries.
- 8.5 RH raised concerns that Buckinghamshire County Council had recently introduced car parking charges in Winslow, deterring people from visiting and impacting local businesses. He noted that county wide parking policy would impact smaller towns and that these charges combined with EWR will make Winslow very congested.
- 8.6 SJ confirmed EWR Co would take note of the issue of car parking, however decisions around parking charges sit with Buckinghamshire Council.

London Road Level crossing

- 8.7 MCon outlined the three options available to mitigate the closure of London Road level crossing in Bicester.
- 8.8 MCon explained the first option was for a non-motorised user underpass. MCon explained that different alignments have been reviewed.

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- 8.9 MCon outlined the second option - a non-motorised user and restricted height vehicle underpass. This would be a single lane for vehicles and EWR Co are working with Network Rail and the local authority to understand any mitigations that may need to be put in place to reduce the risk of bridge strikes, as the height of this underpass will be lower than the height in Network Rail's standards.
- 8.10 The third option was explained by MCon - a standard footbridge with lifts and stairs. This would have a smaller footprint than the other options due to less land take being required.
- 8.11 DM stated that Bicester Town Council did not want a footbridge, and it would not be a popular option for residents. DM outlined his preference for an underpass.
- 8.12 DM questioned whether there would be mitigation against flooding in the underpass. AO confirmed that flooding has been considered for all the options and mitigation would be provided, as well as diversions of services and utilities.

Bletchley station

- 8.13 Myles Hudson (MH) provided an overview of the proposed works at Bletchley station. Due to increased passenger numbers and its status as an interchange station, enhancements and layout changes are required to ensure ease of travel between platforms.
- 8.14 JC questioned whether there would be an eastern entrance to the station. MCon responded that this is outside of EWR Co scope, however EWR Co are working with Milton Keynes City Council on the feasibility of an eastern entrance. It was raised that this would likely require funding outside of EWR Co.
- 8.15 RH stated that many people use Bletchley station to commute to London and questioned whether there would be a lift to get to the different platforms. MCon said it is proposed that the station designs for CS3 would have lifts.

Islip passing loop

- 8.16 MCon outlined proposals for two new westbound passing loops to be installed along the EWR route, one in Islip and one in Middle Claydon.
- 8.17 MH noted there were several constraints when identifying locations for passing loops, including the timetabling of EWR passenger trains, regulation points onto and off of other rail routes (such as the busy North Oxford Junction) and avoiding significant structural impacts (such as road overbridges).
- 8.18 RH questioned why there was no eastbound passing loop proposed.
- 8.19 MH confirmed that there is already an eastbound passing loop at Claydon.
- 8.20 MChap questioned whether EWR would be continuous or discontinuous electrification. AO confirmed EWR would be discontinuous, and some sections will be battery powered.
- 8.21 DR noted her concern about idling trains in the passing loops. AO confirmed that EWR Co could provide indicative timings for how long trains would remain in the passing loops. He noted it was likely that freight would not use the passing loops at night due to the absence of passenger trains.
- 8.22 RH asked whether the passing loops would hold more than one freight train at a time. AO confirmed the passing loops would only hold one train at a time, as they would be the length of a single train.

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9. NSC feedback summary

- 9.1 MCon outlined some key themes that had arisen from the non-statutory consultation, including issues that are being considered as part of the design work.
- 9.2 MCon noted there had been several pieces of feedback focusing on active travel and how people can reach stations. EWR Co are looking to work with other local developments on proposed active travel infrastructure.
- 9.3 AO noted EWR Co are awaiting a decision from DfT on Network Rail's Cowley Branch reinstatement. This could connect across Oxford and alleviate capacity issues at Oxford Station.
- 9.4 RH highlighted that the railway in Winslow has been reprofiled therefore bridges on the line are too low to enable electrification.
- 9.5 SJ noted that some of the points raised during the meeting are historic impacts from HS2 and CS1.
- 9.6 JR requested to see updated plans for the Middle Claydon passing loop. SJ confirmed once this was developed it can be shared with the group.

10. Discussion, Questions & Answers (Q&A)

- 10.1 DM noted he would be happy for non-elected members to join the group. SJ responded noting this would be decided via a majority vote from the group, and a poll will be issued alongside the meeting minutes to gather feedback.
- 10.2 SJ closed the meeting, thanking the attendees for joining.

Summary of Actions

- **ACTION 1:** EWR Co to confirm with Network Rail their post construction planting strategy, and confirm if follow up visits to review the success of any planting will take place.
- **ACTION 2:** EWR Co to confirm a service timetable.
- **ACTION 3:** EWR Co to confirm estimations for how long trains may idle in passing loops.
- **ACTION 4:** EWR Co to invite Lesley Hewitt to future meetings to cover any issues raised regarding CS1 or historic works.
- **ACTION 5:** EWR Co to share updated design plans with the group for Middle Claydon passing loop once available.

Attendees

EWR Co attendees

- Anthony O'Dea (AO) – Engineering Manager (EWR Co)
- Gail Buckland (GB) – Community Engagement Manager (EWR Co)

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- Mark Conway (MCon) – Programme Manager (EWR Co)
- Myles Hudson (MH) – Technical Partner Oxford to Bletchley (EWR Co)
- Sarah Jacobs (SJ) – Senior Engagement Manager (EWR Co)

Local authority councillors

- Cllr John Chilver (JC) – Councillor for Buckinghamshire Council, Horwood ward

Parish Councils

- Cllr Damien Maguire (DM) – Councillor for Bicester Town Council
- Cllr John Riches (JR) – Councillor for Middle Claydon Parish Council
- Cllr Mike Chapman (MChap) – Councillor for Newton Longville Parish Council
- Cllr Richard Hamley (RH) – Councillor for Winslow Parish Council


Other attendees

- Denise Richardson (DR) – accompanied John Riches

Apologies

- Addington Parish Council
- Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Parish Council
- Calvert Green Parish Council
- Charlton-on-Otmoor Parish Council
- Charndon Parish Council
- Chesterton Parish Council
- East Claydon Parish Council
- Gosford and Water Eaton Parish Council
- Great Horwood Parish Council
- Islip Parish Council
- Kidlington Parish Council
- Launton Parish Council
- Little Horwood Parish Council
- Marsh Gibbon Parish Council
- Merton Parish Council
- Mursley Parish Council
- Oddington Parish Council
- Poundon Parish Council
- Quainton Parish Council
- Steeple Claydon Parish Council
- Swanbourne Parish Council
- Twyford Parish Council
- Wendlebury Parish Council
- West Bletchley Parish Council

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- Bicester East, Bicester South and Ambrosden, Fringford and Heyfords, Kidlington East, and Launton and Otmoor wards, Cherwell District Council
 - Bicester East, Bicester South, Chesterton and Launton, Jericho and Osney, Kidlington East, Kidlington North and Otmoor, Summertown and Walton Manor and Wolvercote and Cutteslowe divisions, Oxfordshire County Council
 - Bletchley Park and Bletchley West wards, Milton Keynes City Council
 - Carfax and Jerico, Cutteslowe and Sunnymead, Osney and St Thomas, Summertown, Walton Manor, and Wolvercote wards, Oxford City Council
 - Grendon Underwood and the Claydons, Horwood, Newton Longville, Quainton and Winslow wards, Buckinghamshire Council