

Welcome to this latest edition of the Ravensden Neighbourhood Plan Newsletter. There is a lot going on!



First and foremost – EAST-WEST RAIL!

Whilst we await the promised next round of EWR consultation there has been continuing activity on many fronts to challenge the East-West Rail Company (EWRC) and our local politicians.

Bedford's Mayor Dave and his political allies at the Bedford Borough Council (BBC) have long seen Midland Mainline Station as a major rail hub despite increasing problems of getting to the station and parking. Previous attempts to regenerate the station area have come to nothing, so they see the coming of EWR as a way of achieving this. The Borough Council has vigorously supported EWR's Option E but the supposed benefits for the town are marginal compared with a parkway station on a new line south of the town. Despite studies by consultants and many requests for more information, details remain undisclosed. Residents near the proposed route both in-town and across North Bedfordshire are set to pay a very high price indeed - with whole communities disrupted and countryside ruined.



It is now clear that BBC signed up to Option E passing through the Town Centre and rural North Bedfordshire, without considering properly the environmental impact of freight trains from the east coast ports operating along the EWR. No public debate was invited. However, a highly successful on-line petition has been supported by literally hundreds of residents and has forced a full council debate on the issue (now scheduled for 24th February).

IF YOU HAVEN'T SIGNED UP – PLEASE DO SO!

Copy this to your Browser.

<http://www.councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?id=1078>

Very long and noisy freight trains would operate through the night and so will severely impact residents not only in quiet rural countryside but also in urban Bedford where tight track curves will result in wheels "squealing" for minutes on end.

More significant challenges to the EWRC have included the submission of formal Freedom-of-Information Requests; they have not only manipulated the financial case in favour of Option E, but also failed to address freight operations in their formal public consultation in 2019 or in the selection of their preferred route. Again, there has been a complete lack of transparency and a failure to answer queries. In the meantime, EWRC teams have been active with local landowners in assessing detailed route options through the parishes prior to further public consultation due in the next few weeks.



Ravensden Parish Council has teamed with other local parishes, Ward Councillors, and our elected MP, to keep the pressure on Government Ministers, the EWR Company and the Mayor. Plans are afoot to establish a greater online presence (website, social media etc.) and to use more effectively local media contacts (radio, press etc.) to support our campaign to challenge current plans.

An alternative EWR route south of Bedford and following the A421/A428 towards St Neots, Camborne and Cambridge remains the most acceptable solution. It is also being vigorously supported by pressure groups in Cambridge in order to meet similar concerns.

Keep aware and be ready to support future action to protect our precious community!

Green Infrastructure – Protecting and Enhancing the Local Environment

Just before Christmas, residents were invited to complete a questionnaire to say which from a list of possible projects for improving the local environment had their support and which could be dropped.

42 questionnaires were completed. Not surprisingly, providing safe routes along Oldways Road and Bedford Road came out on top, together with improvements to the condition of Green Lane at Church End. Enhancing other footpaths also came out strongly e.g., the path from Church End to Sunderland Hill and the footpath up from Oldways Road to Mowsbury Hill. Looking after trees, hedgerows and woodlands had strong support, including the planting of a community orchard. However, there was less support for benches beside footpaths or the creation of a village pond.

The next step will be to consider how many of the sites identified as being important *to you*, can be considered for official "Local Green Space" designation.

The Neighbourhood Plan can designate "Local Green Spaces" - the sites have to meet strict criteria and have real value in terms of wildlife, beauty, tranquillity or history - and also be close to where people live. Sites which already have legal protection, such as Mowsbury Hillfort, may not need to be included. You will be consulted on a suggested list of Local Green Space sites when the next round of consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan goes ahead later this year.



If you've not taken part in the GI surveys but would like to suggest an area for assessment as a "Local Green Space", please let us know as soon as possible.

Email : contact@ravensdenplan.info

Site Appraisals – working out where new housing, if any, could go.



In the Residents Survey last year, the majority of people thought there should be no new housing in the parish once the Graze Hill development and the Curry Mansion project had been completed. However, a significant minority thought a limited amount of new housing might be appropriate.

The Steering Group has been carrying out a detailed technical assessment of sites in the parish that may or may not be suitable to meet a possible limited housing requirement. The sites were identified from submissions made by landowners to Bedford Borough Council's current Local Plan and their emerging Local Plan Review. This was to make sure we considered sites throughout our Parish. A consistent approach is being followed so all sites are looked at objectively. We are currently in the final phases of this work, to assess if any of them should be put forward to meet possible housing needs. We will check with landowners to see if we've taken all factors into account. No decisions have been made about any of the sites – that will be for residents to decide in due course.

We will publish our findings at our next round of consultation, including all the detailed assessments and the Steering Group's suggested priorities, and you will be invited to give your views.

For more information go to The Neighbourhood Plan website : <https://ravensdenplan.info>

Or contact the Steering Group by email on : contact@ravensdenplan.info