

Delegated Decisions - 19 December 2023

BLETCHLEY TRANSPORT HUB - SCHEME ENDORSEMENT AND CONFIRMATION OF FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Name of Cabinet Member	Councillor Jennifer Wilson-Marklew (Cabinet member for Public Realm)
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Exempt / confidential / not for publication	No
Council Plan reference	Not in Council Plan
Wards affected	All wards

Executive Summary

The Council has received **£22.7m** DLUHC funding from central Government to support the regeneration of Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Centres, and the Town Deal Board has approved allocations to a number of projects that support this overall aim.

One of the projects to be funded is the development and implementation of a new transport hub on Saxon Street, between the station and the town centre, where an interchange for the town centre from trains, buses (including possible future MRT), bicycles, scooters and pedestrians can take place in a high-quality environment, with seamless connections onward to the town centre.

The transport hub will be a key component in delivering greater levels of sustainable travel to and from Bletchley and will support the increased vitality and economic performance of the town centre. It will also help to 'stitch' the station to the town centre far better than at present and greatly improve connectivity and permeability in Bletchley Town Centre. It will therefore be a key component in any regeneration of the town centre.

To secure DLUHC Town Deal funding, the Authority has also had to demonstrate a level of commitment to the proposed schemes by providing a level of match funding, which for the Transport hub enabling works is proposed to be via the use of a sum of money currently allocated to support the East West Rail project (intended for projects which are complementary to the EWR scheme). The Council had set aside a capital allocation of £7.24m for this project.

This report sets out the development of the transport hub scheme, its current status, and future implementation, whilst detailing and agreeing the funding allocations and seeking approval to progress the scheme in line with the existing Bletchley Town Deal board agreements and DLUHC approvals and previous report to Cabinet in October 2021.

1. Proposed Decisions

- 1.1 That the Council's ongoing support for the scheme, and its important contribution to the overall regeneration of Bletchley town centre, be approved.
- 1.2 That the emerging scheme designs, attached as an Annex to the report, (although these remain work in progress subject to ongoing work and discussions and consultations with stakeholders), be noted.
- 1.3 That the allocation of £3.714m from the Town Deal, DLUHC Fund allocation for Bletchley towards the project, as previously approved by the Town Deal Board and S.151 Officer and approved in the Capital Programme, be approved.
- 1.4 That the resource allocation and spend approval of a further £5.54m from the Council's Capital Programme (currently allocated to the East West Rail project) to make an overall project budget of £9.254m be approved.

2. Why is the Decision Needed?

- 2.1 Bletchley is a regeneration priority for the Council, and the Town Deal Board has approved a package of interventions to be delivered with the allocated DLUHC funding as follows:

Project	(Capital)
1. Revolving Development Fund	£9,964,500
2. Transport Hub	£3,714,500
3. Public Realm Improvements	£3,601,418
4. Redway Improvements	£1,222,000
5. Tech Park Bletchley	£274,000
6. Transformation at Bletchley Park (both capital & revenue in the form of programme costs)	£2,240,000
7. Active Marketing of Vacant Sites (revenue)	£710,000

- 2.2 This report relates to only item 2 on the list above - Bletchley Transport Hub.
- 2.3 The provision of a new and improved public transport interchange to serve the Town Centre is considered an important component in the regeneration of central Bletchley and a catalyst to further improvement and inward investment. This was verified in a Council commissioned study undertaken by City Science in 2021, which proved both the business case and the feasibility of delivering the scheme. Some initial costings were also prepared, although these have subsequently been revisited.

- 2.4 A new interchange is therefore being proposed on Saxon Street, between the station and the town centre:
- to maximise the opportunities from East-West Rail interchange at Bletchley;
 - to optimise integration between trains, buses and active travel modes (and also future MRT); and
 - to deliver high quality onward public realm connections to the town centre and tackle existing severance between transport infrastructure and services and the town centre.
- 2.5 Discussions with Network Rail are also ongoing over a new Eastern entrance to Bletchley station from the new EWR platforms (7 and 8) on Saxon Street, which would enhance the proposed interchange still further. However, this work is complicated by the location of the existing Cemex aggregates depot access, and discussions are ongoing to find a relocation option which would simplify the delivery of a new station entrance in its current location.
- 2.6 While this new eastern entrance to the station is not currently funded within the EWR programme, Network Rail's involvement suggests they are keen to take the project forward and we are hopeful of a positive funding announcement. Some match funding from the Council may assist the securing of a financial commitment from Network Rail.
- 2.7 Emerging design work on scheme options for the new transport hub is shown in the attached **Annex**, which contains four alternative feasibility drawings for options for the proposed new bus station (relocated from existing), improved connections to the town centre, and the relocated Cemex access. No decision on a preferred option has been taken yet, as discussions with key stakeholders are still ongoing. However, the drawings illustrate the options under consideration.
- 2.8 The Town Deal Board has approved and set aside an allocation of £3.714M towards the new Transport Hub, as set out in the original bid documentation and subsequently endorsed by the Town Deal Board. However, this funding will not be sufficient to complete the full extent of the works required.
- 2.9 There is a capital allocation of £7.24m set aside by the Council for the EWR project, primarily for staff time, scheme design and project delivery of schemes which are considered 'of benefit' to EWR. This has not yet been allocated to a specific project, although a small amount of expenditure on staff time to support EWR has been incurred against this allocation.
- 2.10 Bletchley is a key interchange location along the East West Rail route, and therefore this project is clearly a complementary one, of the type which the WIK funding is intended to support. Officers have discussed the potential allocation of some of this funding towards the Bletchley Transport Hub with EWR & England's economic Heartland (EEH), who are in full agreement, and are highly supportive of the project and its outcomes.

- 2.11 It is therefore proposed to allocate **£5.54m** of the EWR capital allocation towards this project, making a total project budget of **£9.254m**.
- 2.12 This will leave approximately **£1.7m** of unallocated funds in the EWR capital allocation that can be used for other projects considered complementary to the EWR scheme.

3. Implications of the Decision

Financial	Y	Human rights, equalities, diversity	N
Legal	Y	Policies or Council Plan	N
Communication	N	Procurement	N
Energy Efficiency	N	Workforce	N

(a) Financial Implications

The £3.714m allocated from Town Deal Fund has been approved by the Bletchley Town Deal Board and also by the Council's S.151 officer as part of the bidding process to DLUHC. This is external grant funding, claimed from Central Government based on evidence of spend.

The additional £5.54m of EWR funding was subject to a START document and Corporate Portfolio Board approval on 22 March 2023.

It can be confirmed that there is sufficient funding within the budget to make this funding allocation, and there is c. £1.7m EWR funding remaining after this allocation is made.

The purpose of this report is therefore to officially endorse this funding package for the Bletchley Transport Hub scheme.

(b) Legal Implications

There are no specific legal implications associated with this decision. There are terms and conditions associated with the allocation of sums from both the intended funding sources, but these are met in full by this proposal.

The Bletchley Transport Hub was a named and costed item in the original bidding document to DLUHC and is therefore confirmed in scope and with the indicated funding of £3.714m set aside.

The EWR funding is intended for projects that support EWR and add value to the scheme overall, and the Bletchley Transport Hub clearly meets those criteria. Agreement for the allocation towards this project has been discussed with EWR and EEH who are in full agreement that it is an entirely appropriate use of the funds.

There may be legal processes involved in the later implementation of the scheme, as there are likely to be Traffic Orders and other changes to traffic regulation because of the changes to highway layout. However, these will be considered later in the process, and any preferred scheme would be subject to a further delegated decision prior to implementation, where these issues can be covered in full.

4. Alternatives

- 4.1 As stated, the Bletchley Transport hub is a key component in any regeneration scheme for Bletchley. Consequently, not progressing with a transport hub would not fit with that conclusion, and the success of the overall regeneration of Bletchley Town Centre could be put at risk. The Bletchley Transport Hub is a key component in the holistic regeneration of Bletchley. The Central Bletchley prospectus (2020) contains numerous aspirations in creating an eastern entrance and turning Saxon Street from a highway into a pedestrian scaled street, which will create a strong sense of arrival to Central Bletchley. This will help break the perceived divide between Bletchley either side of the railway line.
- 4.2 Therefore, given that the scheme is considered essential to the wider regeneration aspirations of Central Bletchley, the options then become the means by which it can be funded.
- 4.3 External grant funding is clearly preferable to any Council funding, and the funding streams available would appear to be the best fit.
- 4.4 The Town Deal bid to DLUHC specified the Bletchley Transport Hub as a key component of the bid and specified the amount of funding. While there is a change control process, and a larger sum could be secured from that source, it would require reductions in the allocations to the other key regeneration projects that are also to be funded from the Town Deal Funding allocation, which is not considered a viable option.
- 4.5 The EWR money could potentially be allocated to another project, but the Bletchley Transport hub is considered to align most closely with the original outcomes of the EWR project, while also being a priority for the Council.
- 4.6 Consequently, the option chosen maximises the use of external grant funding and minimises any financial exposure by the Council.

5. Programme Delivery

- 5.1 While four options are presented in the attached **Annex**, these remain work in progress, and discussions continue with key stakeholders over an optimal solution. They are provided for illustration purposes only.
- 5.2 Officers will continue to refine designs with external partners such as Network Rail and Cemex to reach a preferred design option, which will then be subject to a further Delegated Decision to approve the option and for it to proceed to public consultation.
- 5.3 Consultation, refinement and detailed design is scheduled to take place in the first half of 2024, with implementation due to commence in late 2024 to ensure commitment of the EWR WIK monies with completion due in 2026 which is the commitment date of the DLUHC Town Deal funding.

List of Annexes

Annex Bletchley Transport Hub - Feasibility - Options 1-4

List of Background Papers

Saxon Street Business Case - Transport Technical Note (City Science, May 2021)