

Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 3/15

Date: 23 April 2015

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Regeneration, Community and Culture
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Purpose:

To inform Members of progress in respect of the proposed future use of former railway line (Gillingham Station to Chatham Dock)

1. Background

- 1.1 At the RCC Overview and Scrutiny meeting on the 29 January 2015, a Member asked Officers to 'investigate the possibility of using the old dockyard railway line as a transport corridor.'
- 1.2 Officers from Green Spaces, Integrated Transport, Planning, Regeneration and Economic Development have visited the site.
- 1.3 Attached are a location plan (Appendix 1) and photographs of the site (Appendix 2). The length of the former railway is approximately 0.8 miles.
- 1.4 The freehold of the site of the former railway line is owned by Peel Ports.

2. Options considered

2.1 Development Opportunities

- 2.1.1 Officers considered whether the site could facilitate commercial or housing development. The site is too narrow and lacks the opportunity to be widened due to the infrastructure either side of the tracks.

2.2 Sustainable Transport

- 2.2.1 Green Corridors are becoming increasingly integral to urban environments but these do require substantial investment. Option A below includes cycle and pedestrian paths, providing public access to natural habitats. Option B briefly outlines the potential for a bus route along the former railway line, outside of the Green Corridor.

2.2.2 *Option A - Pedestrian and cycle route*

The site provides the opportunity to link the Chatham Waters development including a new Asda and the University Technology College, (both currently under construction) with Gillingham town centre and railway station and the existing local cycle network. This route would take approximately 20 minutes to walk and up to 10 minutes to cycle. As well as a utility route it has great potential as a movement corridor, e.g. installation of trim trails (outdoor exercise equipment) should be explored further. Ideally the path should be a minimum width of 3.0m.

2.2.3 Due to width restrictions of the current bridges a footway would need to be provided with a minimum width of 2.0m. This would involve cyclists sharing with buses. There is insufficient width for two buses to pass and the Health and Safety aspects of shared use would need to be carefully considered.

2.2.4 Additional local links will also need to be explored, e.g. Hillyfields Park, taking due account of gradients. Investment into sustaining the local ecology on the site should also be considered. Assessment of appropriate access routes from pedestrian/ cycle friendly side streets will be necessary for safety rationale, as well as increasing access to the site.

2.2.5 *Option B - Bus route*

Arriva is keen to use a short section of this corridor to divert their high frequency Service 176 into Chatham Waters and so avoid the need to use the existing Gillingham Gate gyratory and its successor junction arrangements. Shuttle working across the bridge would be required and access to this link from Chatham Waters and Roseberry Road would need to be enforced by ANPR cameras.

2.2.6 *Other considerations*

Because the route itself is not overlooked, security is likely to be an important consideration. Lighting and CCTV will be required.

2.2.7 There are many UK examples of the use of former railway lines for transport corridors, particularly for cycle use. These include the Crab and Winkle line near Canterbury, the Tissington Trail in the Peak District and the Downs link in Sussex.

2.2.8 The New York High Lines provides a high profile case study, depicting the successful and positive public realm impacts from developing a former railway line into a public movement corridor.

2.2.9 The site of the old railway line is owned by Peel Ports and their agreement would be required to progress any transport related project. The bridge across the A289 Pier Road is also owned and maintained by Peel.

3. Way Forward

- 3.1 At the outset it will be necessary to approach Peel Ports to establish whether Peel would be prepared to allow use of the former railway line and bridge structure for pedestrian, cycle or bus transport purposes.
- 3.2 A S106 contribution was obtained from Victory Pier (the former Akzo site) for public transport improvements in Gillingham. £55,000 is currently available which could fund the necessary design and surveys and will therefore be at no cost to the Council.
- 3.3 The Council has also successfully bid for Local Growth Fund monies for cycling projects (£2.5million). But this is an allowance for the whole of Medway and it may not be appropriate to use it for this project.
- 3.4 It is proposed to utilise some of the S106 funding to carry out a feasibility study for the project.

4. Considerations

- 4.1 The project would require significant capital funding.
- 4.2 It will not be possible to progress the project without the support of Peel Ports.
- 4.3 A revenue budget will be needed, although the project should be adopted by the Council and therefore become the responsibility of the Council's Highway Maintenance Team.

Council officer contacts:

Sunny EE, Chatham Regeneration Manager – email:
sunny.ee@medway.gov.uk; tel: 01634 331030

Beth Carter, Graduate Trainee Project Officer – email:
Elizabeth.carter@medway.gov.uk; tel: 01634 338156

Site entrance Gillingham Station end

