

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



DEVELOPMENT & TRANSPORT POLICY DEVELOPMENT & SCRUTINY PANEL

DELIVERY OF A RAILWAY STATION AT WINCHBURGH

REPORT BY HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & REGENERATION

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to advise the panel of the position with respect to delivery of a railway station at Winchburgh and to consider options for addressing the identified difficulties.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the panel notes and considers the following recommendations which will be presented to Council Executive for approval:

1. notes that the agreed masterplan for Winchburgh identifies the provision of a railway station and identifies a site for the station;
2. notes that delivery of the railway station requires the specific agreement of Transport Scotland;
3. notes that the developer has indicated that the indicative costs for the railway station are not affordable;
4. agrees that council officers should continue to work with the developer and national transport agencies to secure a funded solution for the delivery of the railway station; and
5. agrees that one of the considerations should be an approach to the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal seeking funding from the Housing Infrastructure Fund within the City Region Deal.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; making best use of our resources; working in partnership.
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	The masterplan is being progressed under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None.

IV	Impact on performance and performance Indicators	None.
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	The requirement for contributions will support Outcome 8 – We make the most efficient and effective use of resources by minimising our impact on the built and natural environment.
VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	The report describes a funding shortfall for the delivery of the railway station at Winchburgh. However, it does not raise any specific resource issues for the council.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	The proposals set out in this report have not been considered by a PDSP previously. However, updates on the overall development strategy has been provided previously.
VIII	Other consultations	There was wide consultation on the West Lothian Local Development Plan and on the planning application for the masterplan.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 Background

The masterplan for the Winchburgh Core Development Area allows for the development of 3,450 houses. To support the development a number of infrastructure improvements are identified including the provision of a railway station on the main Edinburgh – Linlithgow - Glasgow rail line.

Notwithstanding the identification of the station in the masterplan, there is no condition on the planning consent, or clause in the associated Section 75 Developer Obligation which places an absolute requirement on the developer to provide the railway station. The reason for this is that Transport Scotland would not allow delivery of the station to be conditioned as part of the planning consent as, at the time, further work on the business case for the station was required. This was mainly modelling work to confirm that stopping trains could be facilitated on this part of the main line. The planning consent, in Condition 44, confirms that delivery of the station requires to be the subject of the explicit consent of Transport Scotland.

A further planning condition (Condition 40) requires the lead developer, Winchburgh Developments Ltd (WDL), to submit a public transport strategy identifying proposals for the provision of either new or extended bus services in respect of residential development beyond 1,000 units. A public transport strategy has to be approved by the planning authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland and prior to the occupation of the 750th residential unit. Work on the public transport strategy is currently underway but, crucially, WDL are advising that it cannot include an integrated transport assessment which includes rail travel from Winchburgh railway station because delivery of the station remains subject to Transport Scotland's requirement for an appraisal and business case being submitted by the applicant and agreed by the planning authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland. The business case has not been concluded for reasons set out elsewhere in this report.

Condition 44 of the consent was included to ensure that additional and appropriate bus services were available to serve the community together with provision of the rail station. However, it also affords the opportunity to require additional bus services in circumstances where agreement could not be reached on delivery of the railway station.

D.2 The Current Position

Discussion concerning the delivery of the station have principally been between the lead developer, Winchburgh Developments Ltd (WDL), and Transport Scotland. Council officers have, however, been kept up to date with progress through on-going liaison with WDL concerning the wider development.

As part of these discussions WDL has indicated that it is likely the Transport Scotland will now approve provision of the railway station. However, Transport Scotland who would be responsible for delivery are indicating that the cost of delivery will be significantly higher than WDL's budget assumption – by up to 100%. The council has not been party to the commercial discussions between WDL and Transport Scotland but the lead developer is now indicating that the cost estimates are not affordable given cost escalation on the railway station estimates by the transport authority and other significant transport infrastructure cost pressures on the development. It is understood that the increase in costs for the station alone may be around £10 million.

In view of these increased costs and reflecting on the impacts of Covid-19 which WDL suggest will reduce the need for rail commuting on an on-going basis, WDL has indicated that it will have to progress discussions on an alternative public transport strategy for the expanded settlement, without reliance on rail transport, in accordance with the condition on the planning consent, unless the balance of funding for the station can be secured from another source.

D.3 The Council Position

The council has recognised the need for a sustainable transport solution focused on a new railway station since the earliest days of identifying the Core Development Area at Winchburgh. Part of the attraction of the site is that the main Edinburgh – Linlithgow – Glasgow railway line traverses the site which affords the possibility of direct sustainable transport connections to Edinburgh, Falkirk and Glasgow and easy connections to other parts of the central belt from the expanded community.

The impact of Covid-19 is recognised and accepted. However, as restrictions are removed and the workforce transitions back to a more office based work pattern than has been the case over the last two years the use of the railway network will no doubt increase. There are, however, no firm forecasts available from the Transport Authorities on when pre-Covid rail passenger transport levels will be achieved. Nevertheless, the benefit of the rail network does not exist only for commuting and is important for many other purposes including access to further education, specialist health care and socialising.

While access to these facilities could, no doubt, be provided by alternative public transport provision it is likely that any such solutions would be suboptimal in comparison to direct access to the rail network particularly when such access was a principle consideration for the allocation of the site for development in the first place and Transport Scotland has now, it is understood, agreed to the provision of the station.

Given this, it is suggested that every option should be explored to ensure that the cost of delivering the station is minimised and that a funded solution is secured. While the alternative public transport solutions would have to be considered there is no guarantee at this stage that an agreeable alternative could be secured and that could put on-going development at Winchburgh at risk.

D.4 Funding

WDL has asked if funding from the City Region Deal can be secured. The City Regional Deal has a £50 million infrastructure fund which is provided to support development in seven strategic sites across the City Region. Winchburgh is one of the seven named strategic sites. Specifically, the fund is there to unlock stalled sites. At the present time only around £8 million has been committed from the fund.

While the development at Winchburgh has not stalled there is the risk that this could happen if the station is not delivered and there is no agreement on an alternative public transport strategy. Therefore, it would seem, at least in principle, that the station would be eligible for funding support via the City Region Deal.

Ultimately, it will be for the developer to make the funding case to the City Region Deal. However, in doing so WDL are likely to seek support from the council. Any such support will clearly be dependent on an assessment of the business case itself, but at this stage it is recommended that support in principle is offered and that officers commit to working with WDL to develop a possible business case.

Subject to Council Executive agreeing to such an approach it is suggested that the council encourages WDL and Transport Scotland to refocus their efforts on developing a proposal which is deliverable within the budget available or utilising any other infrastructure funding support which is, or may become available to the developer out with the City Region Deal.

E. CONCLUSION

The core development area at Winchburgh was, at least in part, allocated on the basis that it afforded a significant opportunity to build a new community around sustainable transport solutions. A railway station was a key component of the sustainable transportation approach.

It is disappointing that a significant number of hurdles have been placed in the way of delivering the station and that it is now considered unaffordable by the developer. This raises a risk that the wider development will stall if costs cannot be reduced or alternative funding solutions secured.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

West Lothian Local Development Plan
Planning application 1012/P/05

Appendices: None

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