



**STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND**

**BETWEEN**

**WEST BERKSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**AND**

**NETWORK RAIL**

**March 2024**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared by West Berkshire Council (WBC), and Network Rail (NR) hereafter referred to as “the parties”. It documents those matters agreed and disagreed by the parties with regard to the West Berkshire Local Plan Review (LPR) Proposed Submission 2022 – 2039.
- 1.2 This SoCG along with a separate SoCG between WBC, NR, Englefield Estate and Beftonforth relating to Policy DM43 Theale Rail Road Transfer Site reflects and confirms the current position agreed by both parties with regard to representations made by the NR to the LPR.
- 1.3 This statement is provided without prejudice to other matters of detail that the parties may wish to raise during the examination.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Network Rail was consulted at each stage of the preparation of the LPR and made representations in response to the consultation stages of the Plan as detailed within the Regulation 22 Consultation Statement for the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2022-2039 March 2023 (Appendix 1 Annex B, Appendix 1 Annex H and Appendix 2).

## **3 Matters on which the parties agree**

### **On-going co-operation**

- 3.1 WBC has engaged with NR throughout the preparation of the Local Plan Review. This has included:
  - meetings on 25/09/2023, 19/10/2023 and 08/02/2024.
- 3.2 The parties met on 25.09.23 to understand in more detail the nature of the matters raised by Network Rail in its Local Plan representation. The main matters related to the effect of the Submission Plan’s proposals on the existing railway level crossing at Thatcham from potential increased use and for the inclusion of the provision for the expansion of a strategic rail freight site at Theale.

### **Thatcham Level Crossing**

- 3.3 The parties met in September 2023 to discuss the issues currently and historically being experienced at Thatcham level crossing, the impact any

additional housing might import, any mitigation included within the LPR and what additional solutions there might be.

- 3.4 The circumstances at Thatcham level crossing are complicated by the close proximity with Thatcham station making signalling controls very complex.
- 3.5 The crossing has the highest level of crossing protection with full manually controlled barriers (remotely monitored by CCTV) and as such, the only betterment would be a full closure of the crossing by way of diversion or bridge.
- 3.6 The current risk score at the crossing is J4<sup>1</sup>. The line speed is 100mph with 150 trains per day. 9234 vehicles have been recorded crossing per day.
- 3.7 The main issue at the crossing is queuing back causing drivers of the vehicles frustrations and then risk of incidents occurring at the crossing.
- 3.8 Any additional housing would increase the volume of traffic on the local transport network. This has been identified in modelling undertaken by WBC.
- 3.9 Mitigation within the LPR includes improvements to alternative routes (changes to the A4 to encourage travel movement over the A4 rather than over the crossing to Crookham Hill). Modelling undertaken with the mitigation included concludes that the level of traffic added to the crossing would still be increased but at a reduced level than if the mitigations were not implemented.
- 3.10 Other solutions are for a new bridge. NR would be fully supportive of any positive effort to build a bridge that would also bring about the closure of the level crossing.
- 3.11 The parties agree to continue to work positively together, including with other relevant parties on this locally important issue and other matters that may arise during the plan period.

#### **4 Matters on which the parties do not agree**

- 4.1 There are no areas of disagreement.

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<sup>1</sup> Individual Risk Rating is the risk to individual users of the crossing. It is presented as a single letter, with A being the highest risk and M being the lowest. Collective Risk Rating is the overall risk of any incident involving any person or vehicle on the crossing, including train staff and passengers as well as users of the crossing. It is presented as a number, with 1 being the highest risk and 13 being the lowest. This is the most important rating when prioritising safety measures at level crossings.

## **5 Conclusions**

5.1 The parties agree that:

- i. Network Rail is satisfied that all matters raised in its representations to the Regulation 19 consultation on the West Berkshire Local Plan Review have now been addressed;
- ii. West Berkshire Council has complied with the Duty to Co-operate in preparing the LPR; and
- iii. The parties will continue to work positively together on all matters, including with other local authorities where relevant on strategic cross boundary issues.
- iv. The parties agree that a funding stream being started for a future bridge, with contributions made by future developments would be the most reasonably practicable way of one day removing Thatcham Level Crossing.

### **Signed on behalf of West Berkshire Council**



Name: Katharine Makant  
Position: Chief Planning Officer

Date: 20 March 2024

### **Signed on behalf of Network Rail**



Name: Colin Field  
Position: Town Planning Manager, Wales and Western Region

Date: 20 March 2024