

## NOTES OF A PUBLIC MEETING ON THE FUTURE OF PERSHORE'S TRAIN SERVICES.

### BRIEF SUMMARY:-

A packed meeting at Pershore Town Hall, chaired by the Mayor of Pershore, Councillor Bob Gillmor, heard that Pershore, as a town, will likely not benefit directly from the new Worcestershire Parkway rail station as new services there will be at the expense of trains already calling at Pershore en route to either London or Worcester.

Despite the benefit to the area caused by the plans to increase rail services to London to one train per hour, six of these trains will not call at Pershore, the meeting heard.

Commenting on the long-running saga of car parking at Pershore Station, one speaker described the negotiations as a "journey of disappointment" for all the parties involved.

It appears that the pot of money originally earmarked for an extension of the 20-place car park on the existing site has now been lost, after the failure of negotiations with the landowner regarding a land swap, meaning that the negotiations for a new car park on the north side of the line will have to be started from scratch.

This means that the Councils concerned, along with Network Rail and the Great Western Railway will have to bid again for the money needed, which the meeting was told will be substantial, given that the cost of the necessary footbridge between the car park and the platform alone will cost in the region of three million pounds. Already some £30,000 has been spent on the revised proposals. However GWR expressed the hope that this could be done before the end of their franchise in 2020.

The consultants advising the County Council on the Worcestershire Parkway scheme gave a detailed analysis to the meeting of the background to the project, given that currently south Worcestershire is "poorly connected" by rail. They were supported by the GWR who pointed out that further housing development was intended with plans for some 45,000 new homes in the County by 2030 including some 22,000 in the south Worcestershire area over the next decade.

Since the County economy is valued at some £12 billion a year, GWR share the County Council's "strong approach and vision" for the future of rail services quoting as examples of why improvements are needed that even with one train per hour on the Cotswold Line, there are currently 2 trains an hour on the Chiltern railways line to Marylebone from Warwick Parkway and three trains per hour on the West Coast Main Line from Birmingham International and both these Birmingham and Warwick stations are currently taking traffic from the Cotswold Line.

Again, deficiencies in car parking spaces were identified with Worcestershire as a whole having only 437 car parking spaces and the Cotswold Line as a whole having only 1,514 spaces.

However, the new Parkway station at Norton will have adequate car parking, the meeting was assured, will be staffed and will be open in December 2018 with the new Inter City Express trains entering service on the Cotswold Line concurrently. The Parkway station will also offer connections into Cross Country rail's Nottingham to Cardiff service. It is expected that the new station will generate around 650 return journeys a day – 450 on the Cotswold Line and up to 240 on the Cardiff to Nottingham line, removing 8 million miles of motoring off the road network.

However, Councillor Julian Palfrey, a Pershore Town Councillor, responded by pointing out that back in 2004 the new Adelante trains then, with every train stopping at Pershore, only took 2 hours and 7 minutes to London and that this time has now extended to 2 hours 30 minutes. Also, with the population of Pershore slated to rise by a third over the next few years then “it can be done better”. In the past GWR have seemed to equate improvements to Pershore Station to the need to finish the double-tracking of the line throughout, but this is not yet a funded programme whereas the town needs now an hourly service with a consistent calling pattern. He also pointed out that, whilst connections with the Cardiff to Nottingham service were useful it still meant that passengers for other Cross Country Trains destinations would have to change at either Birmingham or Bristol, even though those same trains would pass through the new Worcester Parkway station – without, alas, stopping.

During the public Q and A session it was learned that some 100,000 people a year use the Pershore Station and that there are currently plans to extend the length of the platform at many stations on the Cotswold Line in time for the new December 2018 timetable. This is needed as the new trains are longer and carry more passengers than the elderly High Speed trains they are replacing.

#### THE MORE DETAILED RECORD:-

NOTES OF A PUBLIC MEETING HELD AT PERSHORE TOWN HALL ON THURSDAY 16 MARCH 2017 AT 7 p.m.

CHAIR:- Councillor Bob Gillmor, Mayor of Pershore.

PRESENT:- members of the Pershore Public Transport Group and around 75 members of the public.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:- were received from:- Harriet Baldwin MP, Nigel Huddleston MP and Lord Faulkner of Worcester

THE CHAIR said that it was his intention to separate the meeting into five different parts, namely:-

A short presentation by Great Western railway

A presentation by Worcestershire County Council

A presentation on Pershore Rail Services Past, Present and Future

The Pershore Station Car Park Saga

A public question and answer session, with priority being given to written questions.

FOR THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY, Commercial Director Matthew Golton said that some ten years ago Great Western had begun campaigning for fresh investments in the Cotswold Line and, up to date, some £70 million had been invested, principally in double tracking large stretches of the line. Nevertheless the remaining single track sections still exercised a deleterious effect on the kind of train service which could be operated. However, the advent of new trains from the end of 2018 would have some ameliorative effect and meanwhile the Railway wanted two key things from Government – more doubling of the track and a comprehensive re-signalling of the Worcester area railway lines. Since it was essential to make the best social and economic reasons for this expenditure – as the Cotswold Line was in competition with the rest of the country – it was also essential for rail users and local authorities to join in with the Railway in making the case for this money. In closing he also said that the Pershore Station Car parking saga had been “a journey of disappointment for all of us”.

FOR WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Ian Baxter ( former Chair of the CLPG) of SLC Rail, who were advising the Council, said that the County Council had a “strong approach and vision” for the railway in the County as a whole and that the new Worcester Parkway Station at Norton was an integral part of that vision. Worcestershire’s economy was valued at nearly £12 billion per year and also there would be some 45,000 new homes in the County by 2030, including some 22,000 in south Worcestershire in the next decade. Many people have to access rail services initially by using their private cars, around 40% did so locally as compared with some 20% nationally. Hence better car parking at stations was a paramount need. Inasmuch as the future development of the County was founded on rail access the Government now recognises that the railway is essential to the economic well being of the area. He reiterated the belief that Worcestershire is poorly connected by rail, not just via the Cotswold Line to London but also to destinations to the North and South of the County. As examples he pointed out that the goal of one train per hour on the Cotswold Line did not look so appealing when compared to two trains per hour on the Chiltern Line, accessed from Warwick Parkway, or 3 trains per hour on the West Coast Main Line accessed from Birmingham International. He also pointed out that six trains an hour ran from North to South across the County on services operated by Cross Country Trains and none of these currently stopped within the County. Added to this, he noted that the County of Worcestershire as a whole had only 437 car parking spaces at rail stations whereas the Chiltern Line alone had 1,514 car parking spaces available. He said that Pershore station generated 7% of the Cotswold Line demand, this has grown 50% in the last 5 years, some

100,000 journeys annually are made from the Station, and that there is “no threat” to existing Pershore train services.

However the future for rail services locally lies with the new station at Worcester Parkway, which will be at Norton just one mile from Junction 7 of the M5 and will be built with platforms capable of taking the new, longer, 10 Car trains which enter service next year. As well as offering ample car parking for the Cotswold Line there will also be platforms offering access to the North-South route and Cross Country Trains between Nottingham and Cardiff will also call at the new station when it opens in December 2018. The station will be fully staffed and expects to cater for between 600 and 700 return journeys per day (c.450 on the Cotswold Line and c.240 on the Cardiff- Nottingham line). This facility will thus remove 8 million miles of motoring off the road network. In the longer term he mentioned the possibility of the electrification of the Sheffield- Birmingham-Bristol line and well as “aspirational “ train services down the Line but starting perhaps in the Wyre Forest area and of through connections along the revived Oxford to Cambridge line, seen by Government as a key economic development area.

FOR THE PERSHORE PUBLIC TRANSPORT GROUP Councillor Julian Palfrey said that he was primarily speaking from personal experience as a long-time user of the rail services. He said that Pershore needs an hourly train service because it is the second largest town between Worcester and Oxford, that this is increasing as more houses are being built and that the town is also a railhead for other towns such as Upton on Severn. Despite minimal car parking space the station has seen strong passenger growth year-on-year and thus plays a vital role in the local transport network. He mentioned that, back in 2004 when the new Adelante trains were introduced, the journey time to London was 2 hours and seven minutes and every train stopped at Pershore and he regretted that nowadays the journey took some 2 hours and 30 minutes. Reiterating his earlier point about the population of the town growing by about a third, he said “it can be done better. Will we get an hourly service? We need one”. After recounting a brief history of previous threats to services on the Cotswold Line he said that it was important to push so that “Pershore does not get left behind again “. In conclusion he observed that Great Western Railway appeared to equate improvements to Pershore Station to the advent of double tracking, which was dispiriting as that was not yet in a funded programme.

FOR THE COTSWOLD LINE PROMOTION GROUP Phil Ralls recounted the “saga” of the Pershore Station Car Park which is a small 20 space area. Describing the discussions over the last 15 years, Mr. Ralls said that “it is, indeed, a saga”. Over the years no resolution has been possible despite the efforts of a land swap between the local landowner and Network Rail and the fact that grant money had been made available and despite the hard work of all concerned, including Wychavon District Council. Due to the intransigence of the landowner, the moment for agreement on increasing car parking on the south side of the Station had passed and the money once allocated was no longer available. It emerged in discussion that

the way forward now lay with the use of District Council land situated on the north side of the Station and that this would necessitate the building of a footbridge (alone estimated at around £3 million) and that, to date, some £30,000 had been spent on detailed studies of this new proposal. Concluding, Mr. Ralls observed that “For 15 years we’ve effectively stood still”.

THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION heard, in response to a question from Derek Potter, that GWR had no intention of increasing the frequency of the train service at Pershore in 2018 because of the advent of the new Parkway station at Norton. Questioners also asked why, when there were six Cross Country trains per hour passing through the County, only two were slated to stop at Parkway. What is happening to the four Cross Country trains that currently stop in Bromsgrove? Could they not also stop at Parkway? One person also observed that “the lack of a ticket machine at Pershore Station is frustrating. There are too many occasions when the train manager does not come round to sell tickets once passengers get on the train”. GWR promised to look into this concern. Other questioners asked whether it would be possible perhaps to link the Cotswold Line to Marylebone Station instead of Paddington, as Marylebone is much less congested, but were told that it would not be possible because of track constraints in the Oxford area. Several people observed that they currently used Warwick Parkway station for their journeys to London, precisely because of its’ superior car parking facilities.

The meeting closed promptly at 9p.m.