

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING:	Cabinet	
MEETING DATE:	16th January 2013	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2471
TITLE:	Radstock to Frome Feasibility Study	
WARD:	Radstock	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix A – Terms of Reference		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 A report was completed in June last year into the feasibility of reopening the Radstock to Frome Railway line. This report outlines the conclusions of this report for Cabinet.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Cabinet notes the conclusions of the study as outlined in paragraph 5.11
- 2.2 The Cabinet note that the majority of the disused railway line remains protected within the Local Plan Policy D9 for ‘sustainable transport purposes’ which at the moment is represented by a cycle path, NCN 24.
- 2.3 The Cabinet ask that Halcrow are asked to review their conclusions in the light of the results of the 2011 Census and the likely growth in housing in the area promoted in the Core Strategy to ascertain if their conclusions remain valid in the light of this more up to date information.
- 2.4 Ask Halcrow to consider the merits of a simple shuttle between Radstock and Westbury to allow access to the wider rail network including intercity services both to London and the South West.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Halcrow feasibility review report cost £15k and was funded from Revenue Budget Contingency Reserve.

4 CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- *Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone*
- *Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live*

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 A high level feasibility review of the potential to re-open the Radstock to Frome Railway line was commissioned from Halcrow, the Council's term consultants, earlier this year. The detailed terms of reference for the study are attached at Appendix A.
- 5.2 As the report points out Radstock is 9 miles (14 km) south-west of Bath, 17 miles (27 km) south-east of Bristol and 8 miles (13 km) north-west of Frome. The railway connecting Radstock to Frome was closed in the 1980s. Passenger services ceased in November 1959 although the Radstock to Frome line remained in occasional use for traffic to the Marcroft wagon works until July 1988. A railway alignment still exists to Radstock, diverging from the Whatley Quarry branch (Frome).
- 5.3 The former railway line is now part of the National Cycle Network, Route 24 otherwise known as Colliers' Way, a national cycle route which passes many landmarks associated with the coal field; other local roads and footpaths follow the tramways developed during the coal mining years. The cycle route currently runs from Dundas Aqueduct to Frome via Radstock, although it is intended to provide a continuous cycle route to Southampton and Portsmouth.
- 5.4 The report (Section 2 & 4) assesses the likely demand for the railways based on 2011 census journey to work data and the existing bus based public transport network available to Radstock. The report then reviews (section 3) how a service from Radstock to Frome might connect into existing rail timetables or in the event of the Bristol Metro Project being successfully implemented how a service might connect with the improved train timetable that would then be in place.
- 5.5 The report highlights a number of practical difficulties for developing a business case for this project. Firstly, the distance from Radstock to Bath and Bristol, which are the main destinations for residents, are significantly longer by rail than by road. Secondly, bus timetabled journeys times are competitive when compared to likely times by any new rail service. Thirdly, there is no obvious train service pattern which a new service using the re-opened line could fit into. Fourthly, the capital costs of re-opening the railway line are significant (estimated at over £40m) and the likely cost of running a new services is likely to be prohibitive (estimated at between £0.6m to £1.3m). The estimated Capital costs include a significant amount of risk and contingency (44%) which reflects the tentative nature of the estimates and the fact that there are likely to be many hidden and unknown costs which would have to be met if the project were to be taken forward. This

percentage is set at a recognised and appropriate level for a project at this stage. An indication of the costs are set out in the table below.

Project Management & Contingency	Station Building		Rail Infrastructure	
	%	£	%	£
Project Management	15	£1.8m	15	£25.4m
Project Design & Development	10		15	
Interfacing/Commissioning	10		15	
Network Rail Costs	15		15	
Contingency Allowance	44		44	
Total	£27.2m			
Infrastructure costs	£1.9m		£12.2m	
Infrastructure Total	£14.1m			
Grand TOTAL	£41.3m			

5.6 One factor highlighted by the report is that a re-opened line would connect to the national network at Frome which does not have frequent rail services nor are these services well connected to the wider network. As a result it is difficult to see what the best destination for the Radstock service might be. Three options are considered:

- Radstock – Bath – Bristol utilising the new service which the Greater Bristol Metro Project is expected to deliver (a ½ hourly service from Bristol to Bath) running on to Radstock. This is the most expensive option to promote given the distance the service would have to run beyond Bath.
- Radstock – Frome Shuttle and
- Radstock – Westbury Shuttle: These latter 2 options would require passengers to change trains to travel further or for the service to potentially attach to existing services. In first case there is a significant cost in waiting times for passengers changing trains in the second there is complication for train operations and expense of increase staffing levels for running the service.

5.7 Finally the report briefly discusses the prospects for a Heritage Railway. Heritage Railways can be more economical to run when they do not connect with the National rail network and do not therefore have to meet industry standards for operational matters. However this would not be the case for this branch line which would connect onto an operational line at Whatley Quarry branch line.

5.8 The combination of these factors suggests that the business case for re-opening the railway line would be very challenging. The capital funds needed to re-open the line are not available, and unlikely to be available in the foreseeable future. When these costs (with the revenue support needed to run the actual service) are taken into account there is little prospect of a positive benefit to cost ratio being demonstrated – a key criteria for taking this project forward

5.9 Sustrans who currently own the alignment of the railway as part of the National Cycle Network have expressed concern with the potential impact of a re-opened railway on their well-used facility.

- 5.10 While Medip District Council did not comment on the Halcrow report Somerset County Council when consulted stated that:

“ the re-opening is not identified as a priority in Somerset’s Future Transport Plan or our other transport policies and the study provides no evidence to suggest the proposal should be afforded higher priority at present. Furthermore, the high costs and uncertain benefits it notes suggest the scheme is unlikely to compete effectively for funding. Therefore, based on the information available from existing technical work, we would not be in a position to support such a reopening at present, due to the requirement for ongoing subsidy. However, we remain keen to work with you to consider any new evidence that could change this situation and recognise that the scheme’s feasibility may change should development in the area alter demand. “

- 5.11 **Conclusions:** The report estimates that the capital costs of reinstating the railway line is likely to be in the region of £40m and that the cost of providing an additional rail service to be between £0.6m to £1.3m per year depending on the option considered. The likely revenue generated by users is unlikely to cover even the lower of these costs and would therefore require a significant revenue fund to support.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 The report author and Lead Cabinet member have fully reviewed the risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been completed at the present time. An assessment will be undertaken as part of the development of the Business Case for the re-opening of the station and will be more informed at that time.

8 RATIONALE

- 8.1 The capital and revenue costs of re-opening the Radstock to Frome railway line are significant as outlined above. There is no appetite within the Rail industry to develop the business case for this proposal. As a result no further action is recommended subject to the additional analysis outlined in paragraph 2.3 and 2.4 above which can be commissioned without significant additional expenditure and in any event within existing budgets.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 9.1 None.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 Cabinet members; Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer

10.2 Comments have been made on the report by George Bailey and are attached as Appendix 2 to this report with a response attached at Appendix 3.

11 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

11.1 Social Inclusion; Sustainability;

12 ADVICE SOUGHT

12.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

Contact person	Peter Dawson 01225 395181
Sponsoring Cabinet Member	Councillor Roger Symonds
Background papers	Radstock Frome Railway Feasibility Investigation – Halcrow Statement to Cabinet in October by George Bailey on behalf of the Radstock Action Group Response to Statement by Radstock Action Group
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	