

Phil Harding address to B&NES Cabinet 3.12.2014

I am Phil Harding, Chairman of Saltford Environment Group. I should like to start by emphasising how grateful we are for the support we have received from B&NES Council, the Cabinet and from all three main political parties for our shared ambition to re-open the station on the existing site.

Demand for rail travel has grown at a national and West of England level in recent years. We can all now deeply regret the short-sighted decision to close the station in 1970, just before Saltford expanded to its current size. It is common sense and foresight that can now reverse that mistake and bring the station back as part of the Metro West project.

We remain convinced that reopening the station on its existing site is the best option.

For example, an out-of-town station on the Saltford-Keynsham border would be too close to Keynsham station for trains to operate efficiently. That option would therefore require closure of Keynsham station. But, in addition to its existing users, Keynsham station is ideally located for the new housing development of 700 dwellings at Somerdale. Any sustainable development assessment for the new housing at Somerdale must have taken into account the close proximity of the station.

Just as "last century" out-of-town shopping centres are now falling out of favour, a remote out-of-town station mainly accessed by vehicles would be counter to the key objective of transferring commuters from road to rail.

A new station west of the existing site would require new access roads, a significant loss of Green Belt land and incur higher construction costs. The Green Belt "gap" between Keynsham and Saltford would also be put under much greater threat of development.

Reservations concerning reopening the station at its existing site are primarily to do with parking and safe access from the A4 without causing congestion. These issues can be mitigated through careful design by highways experts. The station site is sufficiently large for over 140 car parking spaces while surveys of potential local users show that the overwhelming majority of residents will walk rather than drive to the station.

We welcome the inclusion of £250,000 in your 2015/16 budget for taking the station forward to Network Rail's project design stages GRIP 3 and 4. That is great news.

We ask that you maintain momentum by not letting the next stage of design and feasibility work be delayed by the Council elections in May. The contract with your transport consultants can commence well before then.

Good communications provide better outcomes. We therefore also ask that the Council and its consultants work closely with Saltford's community on the designs and proposals for the station and car parking before final decisions are made.

We all share a common desire to deliver a new station that will be welcomed as a positive transport facility fit for the 21st Century benefiting Saltford, Metro West and the wider community.

Thank you.