



The countryside charity  
Bedfordshire

## **CPRE Bedfordshire Briefing Document.**

### **East West Rail Non-Statutory Consultation (14 November 2024 to 24<sup>th</sup> January 2025): an unsustainable route choice**

#### **Purpose**

This Briefing Document has been produced to support residents and Town and Parish Councils wishing to respond to the current East West Rail (EWR) Non-Statutory Consultation. It outlines CPRE Bedfordshire's concerns and suggests some steps for action.

CPRE Bedfordshire believes that the wrong route between Bedford and Cambridge has been chosen and that there is an alternative which is both environmentally more sustainable and lower cost.

Action now could save the taxpayer up to £1 billion.

#### **What is proposed?**

Years of development chaos and huge costs are proposed as East West Rail plan to take the new Bedford to Cambridge railway north, through the centre of Bedford towards the hills of Clapham, and then east, across rolling open countryside to Tempsford on the A1 and from there to Cambridge.

#### **Twinwoods New Town**

The route enables the development of a huge New Town of 6,000 homes, including a Bedford North Parkway Station, between Clapham and Twinwoods.

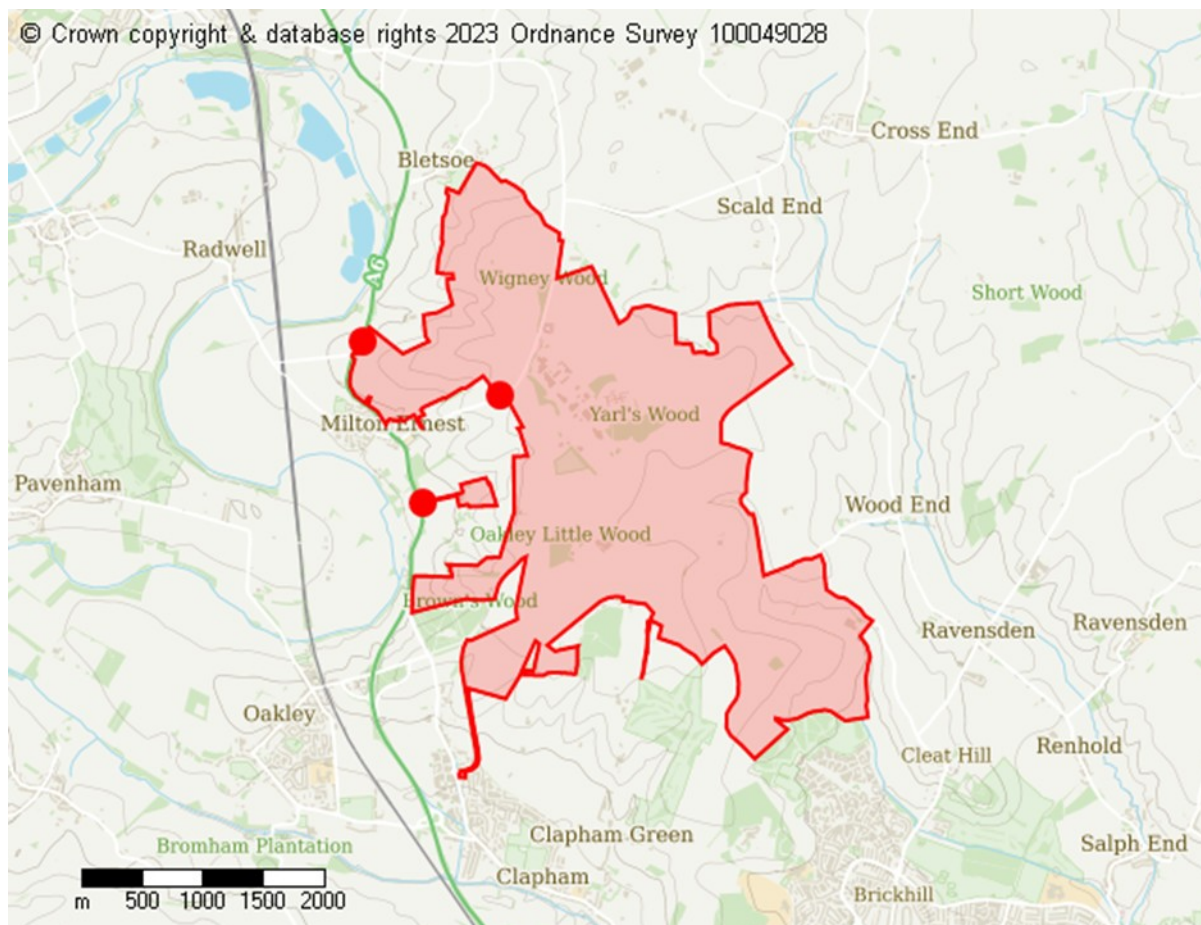
The proposed New Town (called "Twinwoods Garden Community"), was originally put forward by developers and landowners as part of the Bedford Local Plan 2040 call for sites. It was not taken forward by Bedford Borough Council (BBC) because the route of East West Rail was unclear at the time.

The New Town would start at the northern edge of Bedford (Brickhill), and go north through Clapham, Twinwoods and Milton Ernest on to the southern edge of Bletsoe.

It would be around 6km long and up to 5km wide, concreting over huge areas of important open farmland in the process which would be an environmental disaster.

It would have a major impact on communities for miles around, generating an enormous amount of additional traffic.

The map below illustrates the site. For more details see the separate developer's Vision Document (available on the CPRE Bedfordshire website) and <https://bedford.oc2.uk/form/883>



### **Other housing developments**

The chosen northern route, (Route E), will also open up the green fields and woodlands of North Bedfordshire from the A6, east across to the A1, to even more unsustainable new housing development. This would allow for the western expansion of St Neots.

### **Work needed to enable housing development**

To open up these areas for development, EWR will need to spend huge amounts of time and money in moving St Johns Station in Bedford, upgrading Bedford Station, demolishing homes in the Poets area and blighting others. An expensive viaduct is planned to be built across the A6 and River Great Ouse just north of Bedford and a massive cutting will be excavated through the Clapham hills and others elsewhere along this open countryside route to Tempsford.

The A6 and the Bedford western by-pass is already operating at capacity and faces a potential 1,000 additional homes east of Rushden, and 500 already agreed for Sharnbrook and 500 for Clapham. A new major East/West relief road would need to be constructed.

All this environmentally unsustainable development will be primarily on farmland which is needed to mitigate the impacts of climate change and to grow food. Nearby woodland is vitally important for nature as the UK is now one of the most nature depleted countries on the planet.

## Impact of the East West Rail northern route on residents of the Amphill Road area of Bedford

So far, little has been spoken of the impact that an upgraded East West railway will have on the residents to the east of Amphill Road who back on to the Bedford to Bletchley branch line. This quiet line will be replaced with an upgraded mainline railway with freight, travelling at twice the speed, and will be a much noisier and more invasive proposition.

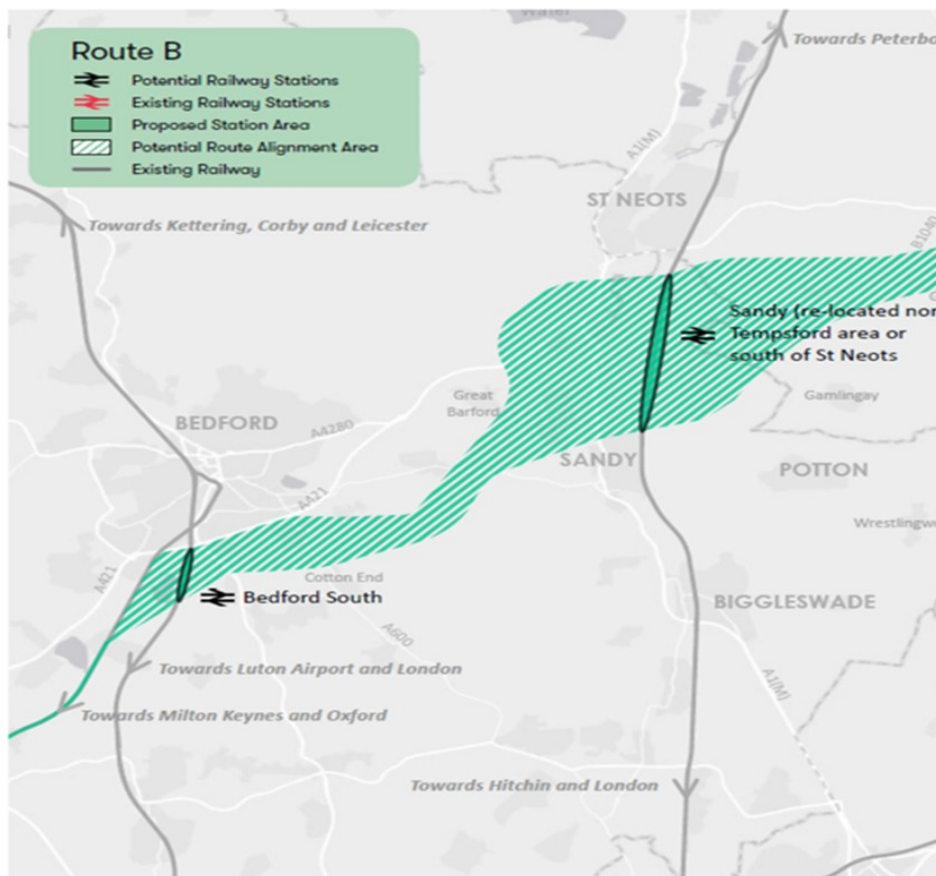
All this damage to both the urban and rural environments, and to people's lives can be avoided with a different route.

## Route B – The lower cost and more environmentally sustainable alternative

Route B (or a variation of it) has been estimated as saving the taxpayer and the Government between £500 million and £1 billion. The map below illustrates the southern route to Tempsford.

### ROUTE B

#### Bedford South – Sandy (re-located north) / Tempsford



## CPRE Bedfordshire is a strong supporter of the concept of East West Rail

We see it as a means of providing residents across the Arc with a sustainable transport option, reducing traffic congestion and taking freight off the road network. It will greatly improve East West connectivity. Most importantly, it will reduce the population's carbon footprint across the area.

However, we do not see it as a means of urbanising the countryside and farmland across the entire Ox–Cam Arc.

### **The Route B corridor would provide:**

1. A Bedford South Parkway Station with a large car park and with direct connectivity to Thameslink Services to Bedford and London. East Midlands Railway's mainline services would still be accessed from Bedford Midland Station. This would substantially reduce traffic heading to the centre of Bedford, unlike the current plans which will encourage a huge increase in traffic entering Bedford, creating traffic chaos on an unprecedented scale.

There is no other major centre of population along the currently proposed East West Rail route that wishes to see the railway go through its centre.

- Oxford will have an "Oxford Parkway" station.
- Milton Keynes will have Bletchley as its Parkway station.
- Cambridge will have "Cambridge South" as its Parkway station.

It should be remembered when looking at the EWR maps presented for the current Consultation, that the railway is expected to continue east to Felixstowe and west to Swindon and Bristol over the longer term.

2. The southern Route B would provide important sustainable transport infrastructure for existing communities where substantial housing growth of around 7,000 new homes is already planned. These communities include Wixams New Town, Shortstown, Kempston Hardwick, Wilstead and Great Barford.

3. No houses in the Poets area will need to be demolished.

4. There will be no impact on the residents of the Ampthill Road area.

5. Construction chaos in Bedford town centre and the Bedford Hospital area will be minimised.

6. Route B does not require the reopening of the Old Varsity Route and will not go through Priory Country Park, despite the claims of some detractors.

7. It will not require trains to reverse in and out of Bedford Station.

8. The current A421 can be expanded to take any further traffic generated by those wishing to access a new Bedford South Parkway Station. There are already plans to dual the Bedford western by-pass.

9. Importantly, the overall environmental impact, both urban and rural, will be substantially less than that generated by the currently proposed northern route.

10. Much lower construction costs due to a flatter terrain leading to significantly less invasive civil engineering projects, no viaducts over the River Great Ouse, fewer cuttings, embankments and bridges. Far less engineering work would be needed at Bedford Station and no relocation of St Johns Station or need for Bedford Station upgrades.

**CPRE Bedfordshire will be responding to the current East West Rail Consultation expressing our deep concern regarding the current route proposal through Bedford asking for:**

**1. A full and detailed independent cost comparison between:**

- a. The currently proposed route E going North through the centre of Bedford and then east across open countryside to Tempsford.
- b. The alternative of route B with a Bedford South Parkway Station and a route south of Bedford to Tempsford.

**2. A full and detailed independent Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) comparing the Northern Route E and the Southern Route B from Bedford to Tempsford. This should consider both the urban and rural areas through which the railway will run.**

**As far as we are aware, no such comparative Environmental Impact Assessment has ever been undertaken.**

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**Recommended actions**

CPRE Bedfordshire recommends that residents and Town and Parish Councils who share our concerns should respond to the current EWR Consultation accordingly.

We ask residents and Town and Parish Councils that respond to the Consultation to please send us copies of their responses so that we can follow them up with EWR.

CPRE Bedfordshire will also be making local MPs, BBC Councillors and the Government aware of our very serious concerns and the cost saving and environmentally more sustainable alternative.

CPRE Bedfordshire  
January 2025