



**BURY ST EDMUNDS**  
**TOWN TRUST**  
conserving buildings of historic interest

The future of  
**Bury St Edmunds**  
**Railway Station**

**Part I**  
**Report**

October  
2015

# The future of **Bury St Edmunds Railway Station**

NOTE: This report is in two parts: Part I – Report (this document) and, Part II – Existing and Proposed Site Layout and Photographs.

## FOREWORD

Bury St Edmunds Town Trust (BTT) has prepared this report with the sole intention of encouraging all those who have an interest in the successful future of Bury St Edmunds Railway Station to grasp what is a unique opportunity to conserve the station buildings for future generations. BTT believes it to be essential that this process is combined with the no less urgent need to create a true commuter hub for the town and to enhance rail services between Ipswich and Cambridge, as well as upgrading the line from Bury St Edmunds to Cambridge. As the report demonstrates the statistics speak for themselves. Now is the time for all interested parties to cooperate to improve both the station and the railway service that it offers.

## SUMMARY

This report has been prepared at a time when the East Anglia Railway franchise is out for tender. It examines:

- the urgent need for the repair of the historic fabric of this listed station (Section 3)
- finding new uses for the unoccupied parts of the station buildings (Section 4)
- moving the railway station car park to the north of the station (Section 5)
- improving pedestrian access from the town centre to the station (Section 6)
- enhancing the immediate setting of the station (Section 7)
- improving passenger services between Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge (Section 8)
- line improvements between Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge (Section 9); and
- makes an assessment of the above against the tender requirements for East Anglia Franchise Bidders (Section 10).
- The report concludes that not only are the above items well justified in their own right but, when checked against the tender specification will also be a requirement for the successful East Anglia Rail Franchise bidder.

# The future of **Bury St Edmunds Railway Station**

## **1 INTRODUCTION – NOW IS THE TIME**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to draw attention to the serious state of disrepair of parts of Bury St Edmunds Railway Station (Listed Grade II) and to explain the urgent need, in combination with undertaking essential repairs, to take a holistic approach to resolving the many problems connected with the station – and make the most of the important opportunities which they present.

1.2 In the foreseeable future there is unlikely to be a better time than the present (Autumn 2015) to resolve the many problems that beset the station. Planning application decisions are pending in relation to sites immediately to its south. There need to be urgent talks with the developers to prepare an integrated scheme for the station’s approach and south front – which both enhances the setting of the station and station-master’s house and integrates them with the proposed development, to the benefit of both.

1.3 Not least, the Department of Transport is currently seeking tenders for the East Anglia rail franchise. The operational objectives and sustainable development proposals in the prospectus urge station enhancement of the type proposed here. Now is the time (in combination with the other proposals in this report) to move and enlarge the current station car park to the north of the station, and create a proper “commuter hub”<sup>1</sup> from Bury to both Cambridge and Ipswich – the provision for private car parking currently being seriously inadequate.

## **2 NORTHGATE RAILWAY STATION**

2.1 Northgate Railway Station, as Bury station has been known since its completion in 1847, is listed Grade II on the statutory register (see photograph 1). In the Tudor style, with twin ‘Free-Renaissance’ towers, it is included in

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, “commuter hub” means a centre where people may transfer from one form of land based transport to another with adequate provision being made for setting down and collecting those using public transport and the parking of private cars, motorcycles and bicycles for those changing transport mode.

the Victorian Society's original "Schedule of (60) Notable Stations"<sup>2</sup>. The two major elevations, north and south of the lines, act in part as support to the high embankment on which the railway runs at this point. In a sense it is almost 'stage-set' architecture, albeit of a high order, the two elevations being in the main only a single room deep.

### **3 THE URGENT NEED FOR THE REPAIR OF THE STATION**

3.1 In recent years, while the main built element of the front (south) elevation, the station entrance (photograph 1), has been generally well maintained, its western section which comprises the station-master's house, although repaired in the 1990s, is now once again in a state of disrepair and in need of urgent attention (photographs 2 – 4). The north elevation, which is of equal architectural merit to the south, is in a state of serious disrepair and has suffered vandalism (photographs 5 – 9). No major repairs have been carried out to it for two decades. Both the station-master's house and the north elevation now need urgent temporary work to them to prevent further damage prior to full repair and conservation so that they may once again be used.

3.2 The cost of the necessary work should not be underestimated. It is understood that preliminary estimates have been obtained of between £1.5 to 2 million for the station-master's house and the main building on the north side of the station (north elevation). The current Franchisee has a 99 year full-repairing and insuring lease of the station. The new Franchisee will assume responsibility for the lease on the award of the franchise. It will be essential to ensure that "assuming responsibility" means meeting the proper "maintenance, repair and renewal obligations" as set out for the management of stations under the terms of the new franchise.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note however, as is explained below, that conserving the station buildings alone will not be sufficient to secure the long term future of this important site.

### **4 FINDING NEW USES FOR THE UNOCCUPIED PARTS OF THE STATION BUILDINGS**

4.1 One of the keys to the success of conserving historic buildings is finding satisfactory long term uses for them once the necessary repair and conservation work has been completed. It is unlikely that expecting possible tenants effectively to fund the backlog of neglected repairs to the buildings will succeed. To the south, the cost of essential repairs to the station-master's

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<sup>2</sup> As updated by Lloyd and Insall in 1977.

<sup>3</sup> East Anglia Invitation to Tender – Clause 5.4.1, Items ii and iii.

house is considered to be too great to saddle a tenant with when its current exceptionally poor setting and access are taken into account. The lesson of the past and the failure of the restaurant in the station-master's house in the 1990s need to be remembered. It is possible, however, that the currently proposed Community Rail Partnership use could succeed (in conjunction with the other improvements described below), particularly since, if well run, it would significantly help to publicise the rail routes passing through Bury St Edmunds and make the line potentially more attractive to rail users. While it would not in our view be reasonable to burden such a use with the cost of neglected repairs, a use of this type may be able to attract grant-aid funding which could be of real assistance in getting such a project under way and making it a success.

4.2 On the north side of the station, the problem is potentially even greater with the whole of the principal elevation in need of extensive repair (photograph 5). Even if the prospective tenants are able to find the funds for the repair of the ground floor rooms which they propose to take on lease, the successful Franchisee will need to repair properly the upper floors and the extensive areas of high walling to the west of the building (photographs 7–9), all of which form part of the listed structure.

## **5 MOVING THE RAILWAY STATION CAR PARK TO THE REAR (NORTH) OF THE STATION**

5.1 As noted above, conserving the station buildings alone will not be sufficient to secure the long term future of this important site. Other improvements are considered essential for Suffolk's third busiest station. At present there are 22 public car parking spaces, 2 disabled spaces, space for motorcycles and bicycles, and 3 staff car parking spaces in front (south) of the station buildings. There are also a taxi drop-off/pick-up point and a bus stop with a shelter. Annual passenger numbers (station footfall) at the station in 2013-14 were 578,007<sup>4</sup>, an increase of 2.1% on the previous year. On this basis, and given the daily number of people commuting to Ipswich and Cambridge alone, the existing car parking provision is seriously inadequate.

5.2 When considering provision for car parking for those commuting by rail to Cambridge it is also necessary to take into account traffic on the A14. The Department for Transport (DfT) states that "as a rough approximation, the A14 from Cambridge to Ipswich was used by around 50,000 vehicles every day in 2014 (from 69,000 at Cambridge to 35,000 at Kentford). This is an increase of nearly 20% since 2000". Reports commissioned by DfT have found

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<sup>4</sup> Abellio figure - <https://www.abelliogreateranglia.co.uk/about-us/station-footfall> - downloaded 21.10.15.

that “the A14 operates above capacity at peak times, leading to congestion with economic, environmental and social costs”.<sup>5</sup> Finally there is likely to be substantial future growth in the Bury St Edmunds area alone up to the year 2031, with sites for around 5,000 additional dwellings proposed for this period.<sup>6</sup> The above figures point to the serious need to address the question of commuter car parking at the earliest opportunity.

5.3 An initial assessment of the land owned by Network Rail to the north of the station indicates that it is significantly under-utilised. The access road (which rises steadily from the highway as it extends westwards – see photograph 11) is exceptionally poor and various areas to its north are let in an apparently haphazard fashion. Several have ‘portacabin’ type buildings dispersed within what are, to the eye, undefined individual sites. The top of the incline is reached at the western end of the Ipswich platform. At this point there is a gated entrance to Network Rail’s Maintenance Depot. Still further west, beyond the Depot, lies an under-utilised area of former rail sidings from which the railway lines have largely been removed. A careful assessment needs to be made of these sites with a view to their rationalisation and the designation of an appropriate area as a car park (see Proposed Site Layout diagram).

5.4 If the general area suggested proves to be acceptable in principle a new car park should be formed. Initially it could be designed to provide for current need, with space to expand as commuting grows. The existing internal access road would need resurfacing. Access to and from the proposed car park is off the Fornham Road (A1101) between the railway bridge and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church where visibility is good in both directions (see photographs 12 & 13).

5.5 The proximity of the proposed car park itself to the gated entrance at the western end of the Ipswich platform (see photograph 10) would give good pedestrian access to the station at this point (including disabled access) and avoid the need to walk down to the public highway and then under the railway bridge and up to the main station entrance. By comparison with many other stations, even if it was necessary to go down to the ticket sales office, the proximity of the car park would still be excellent.

5.6 Without a new and enlarged car park along the lines described, the station cannot properly be considered to be a commuter hub (see definition in

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<sup>5</sup> Traffic data from <http://www.dft.gov.uk/traffic-counts/cp.php>. - downloaded 21.10.15.

<sup>6</sup> See: SEBC Bury Vision 2031, adopted September 2014, para. 5.12.

footnote 1) - a hub, the need for which is already urgently required and which is rapidly becoming imperative, as is all too apparent from the statistics.

## **6 IMPROVING PEDESTRIAN ACCESS FROM THE TOWN CENTRE TO THE STATION**

6.1 Pedestrians walking from the town centre to the railway station, when they reach the lower end of Ipswich Street, have to cross the A1302 at the point where there is an exceptionally busy roundabout before they can walk up Station Hill to the station. At peak traffic periods this is currently dangerous. There is an urgent need to provide a suitable pedestrian crossing at this point whether or not any work takes place at the Station.

## **7 ENHANCING THE IMMEDIATE SETTING OF THE STATION**

7.1 Once public car parking has been moved, the next step is to enhance the area in front (south) of the station. This needs to incorporate the restoration of the original garden to the station-master's house linking it properly with the existing car parking area to its east and the area of land which runs south from this point up-hill to the Station Hill public highway (see Proposed Site Layout). The Trust is aware that interested parties are already involved in discussions about improving this area and only needs to emphasise how important arriving at a successful design will be to the long term enhancement of the station and its setting. Without a completed, high quality, landscaping scheme, there is a significantly increased likelihood that the station buildings not used for railway purposes will fall into a state of disrepair again at some time in the future.

## **8 IMPROVING PASSENGER SERVICES BETWEEN BURY ST EDMUNDS AND CAMBRIDGE**

8.1 In line with the need to provide additional car parking, there is a peak period need to increase the frequency of trains between Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge from hourly to every half-hour. An interval of one hour between trains is too long at peak commuting periods. It puts off potential customers, as does the fact that, in school term-time at least, existing trains are often overcrowded with standing room only. This item is linked with the next one.

## **9 LINE IMPROVEMENTS BETWEEN BURY ST EDMUNDS AND CAMBRIDGE**

9.1 Not only is there a need to provide additional trains between Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge at peak periods, but the current, regular delays and late arrival of trains point to the need to make track and/or signalling improvements. Without improvements delays will increase if there is a half-hour service - if indeed, as things stand, this is possible. If this much needed service improvement is not within the Franchisee's powers to provide because it involves work to the track, or the acquisition of extra land, the appropriate authority is urged either to carry out the required work or to seek the necessary powers to enable it to do so. It is clear from the combination of current rail passenger footfall and the very high level of traffic on the A14 that, if required, this work needs to be put in hand as soon as practicable.

## 10 ASSESSMENT OF REQUIRED WORK AGAINST TENDER REQUIREMENTS FOR FRANCHISE BIDDERS

10.1 This section assesses the work required and improvements needed to Bury St Edmunds Station against some of the Key Objectives and Requirements of the companies bidding for the East Anglia Rail Franchise.

10.2 The Rail Executive and Passenger Services objectives (in Part C) places "Tackle capacity constraints, grow new markets and support wider housing and economic development plans" at the top of its list. Between Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge there are already real capacity constraints both on the A14 and on the railway at peak periods. In Bury there is significant housing growth proposed – with some 5,000 dwellings up to 2031, and planned economic growth to match. In the future, there will be increasing pressure on both Cambridge and Bury St Edmunds as the region is expected to continue to expand rapidly.

10.3 Turning to Sub-Plan 2.1, Stations, section (A) REQUIREMENT, includes a number of factors of which three are particularly relevant. The criteria are quoted below with a brief commentary following each quote:

**ii. *Assuming responsibility for the 99-year full-repairing and insuring leases at Stations ...***

For the reasons given in paragraph 3.2, above, a Franchisee would be in breach of this "requirement" if Bury St Edmunds Station were not to be properly repaired and conserved.

**iv. *Targeting the provision of services at each Station according to the volume and characteristics of passengers at the relevant Station.***

On the basis of passenger footfall and the number of existing car parking spaces at Bury St Edmunds, the station clearly needs the provision of the extra services requested in this report in Sections 5 (car parking), 8 (improving

passenger services between Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge), and 9 (line improvements between Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge) above.

*v. Making investments that improve the Station environment and facilities for passengers, including making adequate provision for car parking and access.*

As Section 5 (Moving the car park to the rear/north of the station) of this report explains, moving it is a prime requirement for the creation of a proper commuter hub at Bury. Without a new and extended car park “adequate provision for car parking” will not have been made. Similarly, as explained in Section 7 above, enhancing the immediate setting of the station is a necessary investment to “improve the Station environment” and thereby help to improve the long term viability of those parts of the station which are not in railway use.

## 11 CONCLUSION

**11.1 It is clear from the findings of this report that the**

- **essential repairs to the listed station buildings;**
  - **providing extra car parking at the station;**
  - **enhancing the setting of the station, and**
  - **improving rail services between Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge**
- are not only items that are well justified in their own right, but will also be a requirement for the successful East Anglia Rail Franchise bidder.**

**11.2 Bury St Edmunds Town Trust prepared this report in order to draw attention to the needs of Bury St Edmunds Railway Station and those who use it, at a time when there is a rare opportunity to secure its future. All interested parties are urged to cooperate to improve both the station and the railway service that it offers.**

**John Popham**

Chair

**Bury St Edmunds Town Trust**

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