

Email reply from David Hughes, Chief Executive of East West Rail Company – received 25th March 2026, regarding Bedford Borough Council’s Full Council Motion of 4th February 2026.

Thank you for your email of 17 March regarding the motion passed by Bedford Borough Council on the proposed site for the multi-storey car park. I also note the letter I received from Mayor Wootton dated 20 February, which shared Councillor Akhtar’s motion and set out the Council’s formal opposition, which I responded to on 27 February.

Colleagues also attended Thursday night’s meeting of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee and responded to councillors’ questions relating to the car park proposals. I was pleased to hear it was a constructive session and we look forward to further engagement with the Committee.

As set out previously by my team and as I reiterated to Mayor in my letter of 27 February, it is widely recognised that even without EWR, the central area of Bedford around the station is already heavily congested. As you highlight, traffic flow during peak operating times can currently be at a standstill even on a good day within the highway network around Ford End Road, Ashburnham Road and Prebend Street.

Given current congestion, our traffic modelling has found that while queues and delays vary by junction depending on car park location, the overall potential network impact of EWR is broadly similar across all the options we have considered. These initial assessments also show that several junctions around the station are likely to face acute future capacity issues even without the arrival of EWR services into Bedford. This is why concerns have been expressed about both our initial proposal to site the car park at Ashburnham Road and subsequent proposal on Ford End Road.

We believe it is therefore imperative that we seize this opportunity together to take a holistic view of traffic, transport and parking in the area around the station and develop long term solutions.

We would like to take a collaborative approach and could leverage our funding to leave a positive legacy for the future. I have committed my team to work closely with Bedford Borough Council officers in the coming weeks to develop long term solutions in the best interests of all. In these conversations, and as we progress our designs, we are very keen to consider suggestions put forward by Bedford Borough Council, including a smaller car park with fewer floors, or multiple car parks on either side of the station.

The motion requests East West Rail’s traffic modelling for Bedford. As the design and demand for the programme are yet to be fixed, we are currently unable to publicly share our transport modelling but are committed to publishing it alongside our Development Consent Order. We have already held numerous workshops with council officers to discuss our transport modelling, where we have shared insights on station demand,

projected traffic issues, and potential mitigations to receive feedback and help further refine our designs. We will continue to do so in our future engagement.

The motion also requests the rationale for relocating the multi-storey car park (MSCP) from its originally proposed location to the east of the station, accessed via Ashburnham Road, to the now proposed site to the west of the station by Ford End Road. Local stakeholders had asked us to consider alternative locations for the MSCP, including in Bedford Borough Council's response to EWR's third non-statutory consultation. Other organisations such as Historic England, also requested that a site other than Ashburnham Road be explored.

While the responses did not identify specific alternative locations, we engaged with representatives from Bedford Borough Council to discuss the proposals ahead of their inclusion in our You Said, We Did report, through meetings held on 15 August, 26 August, and 21 November 2025.

Ford End Road was considered as a potential location as it was previously in the scheme as a temporary car park site for the construction period. This new location would result in a reduced visual impact on Ashburnham Road and maximise development opportunities in the immediate vicinity of the station. We are committed to continuing engagement with the Council, and I know that colleagues are in ongoing dialogue with you and other officers on next steps.

As with my response to Mayor Wootton's letter on 27 February, and as the motion was agreed by the full council, I would be happy for this email to be shared with all councillors and made public.

Best wishes,

David