

Wixams Station Pre-Planning Public Engagement

27 June to 24 July 2022

You Said, We Did: Update to Respondents

Introduction

Bedford Borough Council with the support of the rail industry and L and Q Estates, is bringing forward plans for Wixams Station, located in Station Quarter at the western boundary of Wixams. Situated on the Midland Main Line between Bedford and Flitwick stations, Wixams Station will offer access to the local and national rail network. Wixams Station will be served by up to four Thameslink trains per hour in each direction.

Outline planning permission for Wixams Station was granted in 2013, this application from the Wixams developers established permission, in principle, for a railway station development at the proposed location without any design detail. A four-week pre-planning public engagement exercise ran from 27 June 2022 to 24 July 2022, providing an opportunity for residents, businesses and other stakeholders to find out more about the station project and have their say ahead of the further submission of planning applications providing more detail about the station in late summer 2022.

Engagement summary

Bedford Borough Council used a variety of publicity materials, delivery methods and material formats to promote and encourage engagement participation including:

- A promotional poster was included within the June 2022 Wixams Newsletter, delivered to over 2,500 businesses and homes within the Wixams settlement.
- A stakeholder mailing to over 50 named stakeholders from outside the project team, contacted directly by Bedford Borough Council via e-mail, post or a 'Contact Us' web page
- A press release was carried on local media channels including Bedford Today, Bedford Independent, BBC and Bedfordshire Live from 22 June to 24 June 2022.
- A social media campaign on Bedford Borough Council's Facebook had 24,395 impressions (views on screen) and 927 engagements (shares, likes and clicks); Twitter posts were viewed 1,717 times and 52 engagements, and Linked In posts were viewed 618 times.
- Posters promoting the pre-planning public engagement were circulated within Wixams to be put up on village noticeboards and at Bedford Station.
- Two drop-in engagement events at Wixams Retirement Village on 27 June and 28 June 2022 attracted 200 attendees. The drop in engagement events offered an opportunity to discuss the proposals with officers from Bedford Borough Council and other members of the project team.

Bedford Borough Council received 165 written responses either through the online Response Form, by e-mail or paper form completed at the drop-in engagement events. Responses received via e-mail or completed on paper copies of the Response Form were manually uploaded to the online Response Form to enable them to be captured for analysis and reporting purposes. 78% of those who submitted feedback identify as living in Wixams, 10% live in the rest of the Bedford area and 7% in Central Bedfordshire.

At this stage of project development some of the detailed design of the station, including such elements as the cycle parking, landscaping and lighting will be the subject of planning conditions set by the local planning authority, these will need to be discharged by the local planning authority prior to installation.

You Said We Did

Your responses have been carefully considered by the project team. This report provides an overview of the key responses ('You Said') and how these have influenced (and continue to influence) the designs and supporting surveys and assessments prior to the submission of planning applications to Bedford Borough Council ('We Did').

Accessibility

Consultees asked whether the station will be accessible, in particular with regards to the following facilities:

- Real time passenger information (information screens)
- Induction loops
- Public realm - access between the station building, car parking, bus stops and taxi ranks
- Blue badge parking - size of the parking bays
- Toilets
- Lifts
- Car parking entry/access and ticket arrangements

The station is being designed in line with Department for Transport guidelines for inclusive mobility and accessible railway stations. The following facilities will make it easier for those with accessibility requirements to use the station:

- Tactile paving
- Accessible toilet
- Covered seating on the platform and a waiting room in the station building
- Footbridge with stairs and lifts to provide access between the platforms
- Blue badge parking
- Passengers drop off / pick up
- Provision for taxis / bus stops
- Real time passenger information
- Audio frequency induction loops for station announcements
- Step free access between the station building, car parking bus stops and taxi ranks.

The car park is being designed in accordance with Bedford Borough Council's Parking Standards for Sustainable Communities Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (2014). The SPD provides detailed guidance on locations, layouts and dimensions for disabled parking.

The detailed design of the car park payment system is yet to be developed and is anticipated to be subject to a planning condition requiring details to be submitted and approved prior to installation.

Bus services

69 consultees ranked connecting with public transport as very important although consultee responses suggested only 4% of journeys to and from the station would be undertaken by bus. There were general concerns raised about bus services in Wixams in terms of frequency and destinations. Consultees also requested further information on the design of bus shelters and whether these will include real time bus passenger information (electronic information boards with real time bus service information).

The project is unable to directly influence bus service provision. Your feedback has been shared with Bedford Borough Council's Sustainable Transport Team and will inform discussions with bus operators about services in Wixams.

The station design includes provision for bus stops, the design of the bus stops and whether they will feature real time passenger information will be determined by discussions with bus operators as the project progresses and is anticipated to be subject to a planning condition.

Design

Consultees requested some further information about a number of design features:

Electric vehicle charging – consultees asked how many electric vehicle charging bays would be provided. The car park will provide parking for up to 350 cars. 5% percent (i.e., 24) of the spaces will be allocated parking bays for electric vehicle charging. In addition, there is passive provision for additional charging points to be installed as and when demand requires.

Covered areas - consultees requested further information on the extent of covered areas within the station in the event of bad weather. The station design includes a station building with waiting room, shelters on the station platforms and a covered roof area around the station building.

Size of car park - consultees queried the basis for the number of car parking spaces, comments ranged from the car park being too large to too small. The number of parking spaces has been informed by car parking demand assessments and in line with Bedford Borough Council's Parking Standards for Sustainable Communities Supplementary Planning Document (2014) and national guidance for car parking standards.

Operational

Consultees requested some further information about a number of operational matters:

Waiting period - consultees asked whether there will be a waiting period for vehicles using the drop off / pick up? We are working on the assumption that the drop-off bays will have a 20-minute waiting period in line with those at Bedford Station.

Ticket machines - consultees requested further information on the ticket purchasing facilities at the station. The station will have self-service ticket machines.

Impact on local road network

Consultees indicated that 31% of journeys to and from the station would be undertaken by car either as a passenger (12%) or as a driver (19%). Consultees were concerned that the station would result in an increase in traffic and congestion in the local area.

The station will undoubtedly generate additional traffic movements in its vicinity. The station has always been envisaged as providing a facility not just for Wixams residents, but also from those attracted to it from across a wider catchment area as part of promoting a modal shift from the car to the train. However, the 350-space car park will provide an upper limit to the number of vehicles travelling to the station. In addition to this, the Council will be proposing a controlled parking regime around the station to prevent non-residents from parking on-street.

Parking (neighbourhood)

There were concerns raised about the anticipated impact of the proposals on availability of parking for residents. A number of residents requested more information on how street parking would be controlled. Bedford Borough Council is considering the measures that will be required to prevent overspill parking on surrounding roads. These measures will be the subject of a separate consultation.

Location

Consultees asked why the station was being located at the proposed site. The Wixams Station has always been planned for the currently proposed location, and outline planning permission for a station at the site has already been granted previously. A location further north, if one could be found, would not provide a convenient facility for the residents of the Wixams who will be its principal users.

Pedestrian and cycle access

87 consultees ranked connecting with cycling and footpaths as very important. Consultees indicated that 55% of journeys to and from the station would be undertaken on foot (39%) and by cycle (16%). Consultees suggested a number of opportunities for connectivity with the existing cycle network and / or provision of new links. Bedford Borough Council is committed to supporting active travel with opportunities to cycle and walk to Wixams Station. Your feedback on cycle routes has been forwarded to Bedford Borough Council's Sustainable Transport Team and L&Q (Wixams Masterplanner) for their consideration.

Consultees provided feedback on the facilities they would like to be provided within the cycle hubs including tyre pump and repair, and parking provision for non-standard, accessible and e-bikes. The cycle hubs will be designed in line with Bedford Borough Council's Parking Standards for Sustainable Communities Supplementary Planning Document (2014). The facilities to be provided

within the cycle hubs are likely to be subject to a planning condition requiring details to be submitted and approved before installation. Your comments on the facilities will feed into this process.

Consultees sought clarification on whether the cycle and walking routes in the station were segregated. The cycle paths and pedestrian routeways are segregated within the public realm / turning circle.

Other

Cost - consultees asked whether the costings for the station had factored in inflation. The project team has undertaken a cost planning exercise, this includes estimating allowances to take account of inflation.

Programme - consultees asked if the project delivery timescale was achievable. Bedford Borough Council's ambition is for Wixams Station to open to passengers by the end of 2024. We will be posting regular updates on the project progress on our website www.bedford.gov.uk/WixamsStation.

Coffee shop - 74 consultees regarded the station having a coffee shop as very important. The proposals for the station include a coffee shop.

Retail - 77 consultees ranked a retail outlet as very important. In addition, within the free text responses, 42 consultees specifically requested a retail / small supermarket shop in the vicinity of the new station. We have shared your feedback regarding a retail establishment with L&Q (Wixams Masterplanner).

Support for Wixams Station - at the drop-in events all attendees expressed their support for Wixams Station. In addition, 20 consultees explicitly mentioned being supportive of the new station with a number describing the station as being the reason for their moving to / living in Wixams, there were also requests for the station to be open as soon as possible.

What next?

We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to provide written feedback about Wixams Station. Two planning applications will be submitted to the local planning authority (Bedford Borough Council) in late Summer 2022. Once the planning applications have been submitted, the application paperwork including supporting surveys and plans will be available to view on the Borough's planning pages at <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-applications/search-plans-page/>.

A statutory consultation process will allow residents, businesses and other stakeholders an opportunity to comment on the proposals prior to determination.

A Statement of Community Engagement will be submitted as part of the planning application, this will describe in more detail the public engagement process and the feedback received.

Future updates on Wixams Station will continue to be posted to the project's website at www.bedford.gov.uk/WixamsStation.