

Crossrail 2
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Dear CR2 Team

CROSSRAIL 2 PROPOSALS: CONSULTATION RESPONSE

You will remember that the Society wrote to you with views on the initial CR2 proposals in August 2013. The Society considered then that the construction of this major new rail infrastructure should not be seen as “just a railway project”, but this is still how it is currently presented. Instead, it has to be completely integrated into a new plan for the future of Wimbledon Town Centre, including a new approach to the basic road and transport structures. This southwestern part of the new CR2 plan should focus on the regeneration and revitalizing of the Town Centre, and the new strategic transport hub should be at its heart.

The Society’s views on how the future of the town centre should be planned for, are being set out in a forthcoming document.

Our comments on the current CR2 proposals are set out below in more detail.

WIMBLEDON STATION AREA

With the massive increase in the numbers of passengers and the greater opportunities for travel (both across the capital and out into the Surrey towns), a totally new station building of far greater size is needed.

With its strategic positioning, gathering together a number of important routes and public transport modes, this should not be seen as “just another station”. It needs to break new ground and also have a special image and character. It needs to be fully integrated with the Underground and Tramlines with step free connections, and also to a major new bus interchange. Separating the Tram stop from the buses and rail station as envisaged is a backward step. Trams should be an integral part of the whole public transport hub. The aim should be the seamless transfer between all modes, all under cover and with concourses that will be able to handle the complex pedestrian movements.

This transport hub needs to be accessible not just from The Broadway, but from all four sides – Queen’s Road, Alexandra Road, and from the new bridge across the tracks on the upstream side (see below).

In addition to the needs of passengers, toilets etc, provision needs to be made for cycle parking within the transport complex: some 300 would seem to be a first working figure.

The present single bridge crossing of the tracks (actually three parallel bridges of different ages linked together) needs to be replaced with a single modern span on a slightly different alignment, so as to facilitate the re-routing of traffic away from the present Broadway route, leaving this to be the pedestrian heart of the Town. Additionally, a single bridge (as now) would not be able to handle the needs of traffic (as well as being highly vulnerable in emergency situations). Accordingly, there should be another two new bridges across the rail tracks. One, across from Queen’s Road to Alexandra Road. The other a mainly pedestrian and cycle route (with perhaps a very small amount of localized service traffic) between Dundonald Road and Tabor Grove.

The foundations for a major commercial and residential development above the tracks, and extending from the Broadway eastwards up to the new bridge, should be facilitated as an integral part of the rail line constructional process. The aim would be to capitalize on the opportunity for increasing the size and physical extent of the defined town centre.

The increase in Wimbledon’s regional accessibility would be likely to generate a significant amount of development potential, and accommodating at least some of this within, and in association with, the station complex could provide a source of funding, as well as preventing over-development of existing town centre sites. It would also “knit” the transport hub into the rest of the town, rather than creating a gash, fragmenting the centre.

This major above-the-tracks development could have a significant amount of retail/commercial and pedestrian-friendly activities built around internal pedestrian malls, and connecting into the existing pedestrian concourses of the Centre Court development. Accommodating cultural and community facilities, returning parts of the civic presence to the Town centre, should also be considered, with residential and commercial above. No part of the development should exceed the height of the other local buildings.

The Dundonald Road Depot site contains the statutorily listed “sea-plane hanger” and this should be retained in the area and form part of the future proposals, perhaps for community sports use. The present pedestrian bridge crossings over the tracks at Alt Grove and Elm Grove should be retained, and adapted to have step-free access. The railway path between Raynes Park and Wimbledon should also be retained, and the highly disruptive steps at the eastern end (introduced in the 1980’s) eliminated.

RAYNES PARK AREA

The importance of this station, at a significant point where a number of lines converge, means that an overhaul of its design and function is over-due. The CR2 project now creates the opportunity to utilize this important station’s site properly. The inconvenient passenger routes extending over three levels should be reduced to two, and consideration given to having an extended ground level concourse. This could not only serve the station, but also link the two halves of the shopping centre. Currently, the bus (and the cycle) systems are only partly linked-in to the rail operations, and these should be improved and integrated with the rail lines.

The adjoining Rainbow Estate site is a land-locked triangle, with inadequate vehicular and pedestrian access: this has the potential for a far more positive role in the area, and perhaps for the operation of the CR2 itself. The future of the current level crossings to the South West of Raynes Park should be examined.

GENERALLY

At this time the Society has not come to a view about the two route options.

With the amount of engineering and construction work that this scheme will require, it will be highly desirable to have a permanent information office provided locally, for the public to be kept informed of progress, closures, service and access changes etc. It is presumed that at all times during the construction phases, rail, tube, tram, and bus services will be kept running at an acceptable level.

It will be essential that during the construction phases, the project does not cause significant environment damage to the wider area, and the local road system, given the sensitivity of the residential and historic environment. Many local roads will be affected including Hartfield Road, Broadway Place, Railway Place, Caroline Road, Goodenough Road, Cochrane Road, and access arrangements need to be put in place.

The delivery of materials, plant and operatives, the removal of excavated spoil etc, should all be via the rail system, to protect local roads and the residential/shopping environment.

Firms displaced by the need for working areas etc need not only to be compensated, but actively helped to relocate, ensuring that local services and employment levels are protected. For example, a milk delivery depot at Gap Road is a provider of a valuable local service.

It has been suggested locally that some commercial sites have been generating planning applications for the purposes of increasing their “compensation” value. The Society has no information on this, but it is something that may need study.

Householders affected, including those close to works that generate noise, need to be reassured that there are in place sufficient supports to meet reasonable needs. A body independent of the scheme promoters and that would ensure “fair play” in such issues should be considered.

Any use of open amenity space for working areas etc should be compensated for by not only full reinstatement and then enhancement, but also by a payment to cover the loss of an amenity enjoyed by the public.

SITES

The site plans showing proposed worksites do not have enough detail to be fully understood. However, they appear at first sight to have radical implications for a number of important existing developments in the Town centre, and this must be critically questioned. Alternative designs need to be explored and discussed, before an option is selected.

It appears that the current intention is to provide an additional pair of tracks to the south of, but at a much lower level than, the present running tracks, and passing these through the Town Centre before then ramping down further into the tunnel portals at Gap Road.

The consequences of this design approach appear to include:

Demolition of a recently built block of flats fronting Hartfield Crescent.

Demolition of the "Fridge on the Bridge" building (shops, offices, car park)

Demolition of the Conservation area containing the Prince of Wales Pub, shops etc

Demolition of the Centre Court shopping Centre and its car park

Retention of the present outdated and inadequate Station building, with minor works

Demolition of the Queen's Road Church and adjoining property

Probable loss of the railway-side path leading to the south west.

In the view of the Society, these are highly disruptive proposals, and should not be accepted.

Whilst many would be happy to accept the loss of the "Fridge", all the others would be likely to generate substantial opposition. It has to be remembered that Wimbledon Town Centre is by far the most economically significant location in the Borough. It has to continue to operate and attract its business, and the substantial damage and loss of floorspace in the current scheme would be very damaging to the local economy, as well as to the environment.

CONCLUSION

The Society has set out above some ideas for how the Crossrail 2 project could be properly integrated within the fabric of Wimbledon: indeed how it could act as a catalyst for the very necessary changes to the nature and development of the Town Centre itself.

It is clear though that at the detailed level, the present design concept is deeply flawed, and more positive and creative alternatives need to be explored.

The Society would be happy, as no doubt would other local groups, to work with the promoters of the project and the Council to explore how Crossrail 2 could not only become a major new player in London's public transport network, but also play its part in the enhancement and regeneration of Wimbledon.

Yours Faithfully

John Mays
Chairman, Planning Committee

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