

Shaping the Borough Waltham Forest Local Plan (LP1) – Matter 7

Hearing Statement - Graham Reeve and the Highams Park Planning Group (HPPG)

Introduction

I am a retired Transport Planner with experience in both the public and private sectors and this statement represents my views and the views of the HPPG, who prepared the adopted Neighbourhood Plan for the Highams Park area.

Summary

The Council has for many years supported the campaign to reopen the Hall Farm Curve (HFC), which was closed in 1967. This is a short stretch of track linking the Chingford to Liverpool Street line at the Coppermill Junction with the Lea Valley line to Stratford line. The track bed is still in existence. It has recently been renamed the 'Meridian Line' by campaigners as the Chingford line broadly follows the Greenwich Meridian.

The HFC would allow direct services connecting Chingford, Highams Park, Wood Street, Walthamstow Central and St James's Street stations with Lea Bridge and Stratford stations.

The HFC would provide much improved links between Central Waltham Forest and North Waltham Forest with the Stratford City and Queen Elizabeth Park growth areas and other major regeneration areas in the Lower Lea Valley for employment, education and leisure opportunities. It would also provide a direct link to the key public transport interchange at Stratford, which provides access to the National Rail Network, the Docklands Light Railway (DLR), TfL Overground lines, the Central and Jubilee Underground lines and, later this year, the Elizabeth line.

Despite it being an important scheme which aligns with one of the Council's 'Six Golden Threads', 'Ensuring growth is sustainable and supported by infrastructure', the Council only identifies this link as a long term aspiration (para 15.20 of KD1).

Also, KD1 Policy 3 - 'Infrastructure for Growth', which identifies priorities for key infrastructure projects, does not include the Hall Farm Curve and Local Plan document LPE11 'Transport Topic Paper' does not mention the link at all.

Therefore to support the Council's commitment to introduce improvements and priority for sustainable modes of transport and to improve air quality in the Borough, reopening the Hall Farm Curve should have greater priority in LP1, and should be included in the list of projects in Policy 3 and in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

Current Public Transport links to Stratford.

There are currently three possible train routes to take between the Chingford line and Stratford which all require difficult interchanges:

- Overground to Hackney Downs and change to the Overground from Hackney Central to Stratford,
- Victoria line to Tottenham Hale and change to the Lea Valley line to Stratford, and

- Overground to Liverpool Street and change to the Central Line or National Rail to Stratford.

The most obvious route is via Hackney Downs and Hackney Central and the TfL journey planner, shows the scheduled time between Chingford and Stratford via Hackney Downs/ Central is about 35 minutes, using the pedestrian link between the stations at Hackney and changing onto the North London Line to Stratford. Often with delays, it can be much longer and the North London Line services are often overcrowded.

Passengers changing from the Chingford line towards Stratford only require one flight of stairs or using the lift, but in the opposite direction the interchange is very poor with 5 flights of stairs.

The other possible route using the Victoria Line to Tottenham Hale requires two interchanges, at Walthamstow Central and at Tottenham Hale. The Victoria line and Tottenham Hale stations are often overcrowded and the interchanges at both Walthamstow Central and Tottenham Hale are not easy, they are not cross platform, and require the use of multiple escalators or stairs.

The third possible route using the Overground to Liverpool Street and then Network Rail or Central Line to Stratford adds unnecessary journeys to the busy central London terminus.

The estimated time between Chingford and Stratford using the HFC is likely to be about 20 minutes, so there would be significant time savings.

While time savings are important, the key point is that there is currently no direct service between the Chingford Line and Stratford and the interchanges are not convenient. Direct trains using the HFC would also reduce overcrowding between Hackney Downs and Liverpool Street. None of the current routes are satisfactory for passengers and increase overloading on congested routes and stations.

It currently takes between 60 and 90 minutes to travel by bus from the north of the Borough to Leyton or Stratford. The same journey by car outside peak hours would take half of that, so it is likely that people will currently chose to travel by car for these journeys. The introduction of the HFC, providing a reliable, direct and quick service, would make public transport much more attractive and lead to a modal shift away from the car.

Growth Projections

There has been a 20% rise in population in the Borough in the last decade, which is higher than the London average. Policy 2 in KD1 identifies a growth of 27000 new homes between 2020 and 2035. This will add say 60000 or so additional population to the Borough, another increase of over 20% above the current population of 275,000.

Central Waltham Forest and North Waltham Forest are Strategic Growth Areas and 7600 homes are anticipated in Central Waltham Forest (KD1 Policy 10), including around Walthamstow Town Centre and Wood Street. 3400 additional homes are anticipated in North Waltham Forest, which includes North Chingford and Highams Park District Centres (KD1 Policy 11). All of these additional households will require transport and access to employment and most will be within easy reach of a station on the Chingford line and would benefit greatly from direct train services to Stratford and its employment opportunities.

Crossrail 2

KD1 (page 47) assumes that in the longer term, some areas in the north of the Borough would benefit from having improved transport access via links to Crossrail 2 stations in Enfield to the west. The planning and development for Crossrail 2 has recently been suspended so it is unlikely that it will be completed within the plan period. This provides an additional reason why the construction of the HFC is needed compared with when KD1 was written.

Infrastructure Delivery Plan- Part 2- Physical Infrastructure

Paragraphs 3.133 and 3.134 explain that the Council is considering reinstatement of the HFC. However, they state that significant constraints to delivery exist including providing for additional platforms at Stratford and that the proposals would also significantly restrict the Highams Park level crossing capacity for vehicular traffic.

However, the proposed HFC has been assessed by SYSTRA on behalf of LBWF in 2016 and they believe that, making allowance for existing train paths, a two trains an hour (tph) service can be provided from Chingford to Stratford without the need for additional platforms at Stratford. This scheme would assume the use of platforms 11 and 12 at Stratford Station, currently used for the train service from the Lea Valley line.

Overall, the Systra analysis concluded that a two tph Chingford – Stratford service can be accommodated in platforms 11 and 12 at Stratford during off peak times and is possible, with some operational adjustments, during the peaks.

Additional trains through Highams Park are not considered to be a major issue for traffic capacity at the level crossing and the implementation of HFC has local support as reported in the adopted Highams Park Neighbourhood Plan (Para 7.7). In Annex 1 of the Neighbourhood Plan, in support of Policy TRP1: Development shall aim to support and contribute towards enhancing the provision of sustainable modes of transport,' the Annex states, the transport infrastructure of the Area could be improved by '*A direct rail link to Stratford by reinstating the Hall Farm Curve, linking the Liverpool Street – Chingford line with the Lea Valley line, in addition to maintaining existing services to Liverpool Street...*'

Other Stakeholders

The Hall Farm Curve proposals are not currently supported by the Department for Transport (DfT) or Transport for London (TfL). The Mayor of London wrote to a local petitioner in 2017 outlining their reasons. Their letter, (which is attached), stated that additional platforms would be required at Stratford and the cost would be in the region of £400million due to the acquisition of non-railway land and the need to bridge over existing rail infrastructure to reach the site.

However this cost was based on requiring the construction of new platforms at Stratford which as explained above is probably not necessary. The Mayor also suggests that the pedestrian link between Hackney Downs and Hackney Central, which was opened in 2015, has improved connectivity between the Chingford line and Stratford, but as discussed above it is not a convenient route.

Systra strongly recommended that the reinstated connection should be built as double track. Network Rail (NR) estimated the costs of reinstating the Hall Farm Curve at £22 million (single track) and £30 million (double track) in 2014.

Raising the NR figure with inflation would bring the estimate to about £45 million at current prices for double tracks, and clearly a fraction of the costs assumed by the Mayor .

Stratford is in the neighbouring Borough of Newham, and they have consistently supported the implementation of the HFC as they recognise its benefits to both Newham and Waltham Forest.

Funding Sources

The Council's Infrastructure Delivery Schedule 2020 – 2035, sets out the projects that the Council is supporting during the plan period and provides estimated costs and funding sources. As examples, the Walthamstow Central Improvements are shown at £41.5 million with a £40million shortfall and the proposed Ruckholt Road Station is shown at £25 million with no funding allocated.

The HFC is shown at £40 million with no funding allocated. This estimate is presumably assuming that additional platforms at Stratford are not required and contradicts the Council's statement mentioned above in paragraphs 3.133 and 3.134 of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

Funding sources have not yet been found for HFC, but this is no different to many of the projects in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, including at Walthamstow Central and Ruckholt Road. Funding sources have not been identified for the HFC, but could be funded in the same way as the station schemes; namely TfL Growth Fund and Developer Contributions. Not entirely by the Council, as suggested by the Council in para 3.134 of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

With the much reduced cost of not providing additional platforms at Stratford, the HFC would provide a cost effective and relatively simple project to construct. The HFC would provide benefits right across the Borough and is likely to be better value than the single station improvements at Walthamstow Central and the proposed Ruckholt Road station.

In the absence of the major investment in Crossrail 2, and the construction difficulties and major cost overruns with the Elizabeth line, constructing the HFC would provide a cost effective and relatively simple project to construct while conforming with the policy requirements of the Local plan.

Conclusions

- Existing rail links between the North and Centre of the Borough and Stratford are poor and require inconvenient interchanges.
- Reinstatement of the HFC would provide a direct service and reduce overloading on existing rail lines and existing interchange stations.
- Stratford will increasingly provide major employment and cultural / leisure facilities of a world class nature.
- The HFC would also provide a direct link to the key public transport interchange at Stratford.

- The HFC would provide increased public transport links for a number significant growth areas in the Borough and is likely to be better value than the single station schemes which have higher priority in LP1
- The HFC would satisfy one of the 'Six Golden Threads' in the Draft Local Plan; namely: 'Ensuring growth is sustainable and supported by infrastructure'.
- SYSTRA consider that a 2 tph can be introduced without the need for new platforms at Stratford
- The costs assumed by the Mayor of London are many times higher than the costs of the scheme recommended by SYSTRA.
- To support the Council's commitment to introduce improvements and priority for sustainable modes of transport and to improve air quality in the Borough,
- Funding streams, such as the TfL Growth Fund and Developer Contributions should be pursued by the Council,
- Reopening the Hall Farm Curve should have greater priority in KD1, and should be included in the list of projects in Policy 3 and in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

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