

# MINUTES OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 14 March 2023 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Suzannah Clarke (Chair), Peter Bernards, Will Cooper, Mark Ingleby, Jack Lavery, Aliya Sheikh and James-J Walsh

MEMBER(S) OF THE COMMITTEE JOINING THE MEETING VIRTUALLY: Councillors Jacq Paschoud, and John Paschoud.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: from Councillor Louise Krupski.

OFFICER(S) PRESENT IN PERSON: Head of Development Management, Senior Planning Lawyer, and Senior Committee Manager.

OFFICER(S) PRESENT VIRTUALLY: Planning Officer.

## 1. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee held on 6 October 2022 be confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

## 2. Declarations of Interests

No interests were declared.

## 3. HITHER GREEN RAILWAY STATION, STAPLEHURST ROAD, LONDON, SE13 5NB

- 3.1 The Committee received an illustrative presentation of the report by the Planning Officer, with a suggestion that it should agree the recommendation therein.
- 3.2 In considering the report, the Committee understood that the application was brought for consideration following the Council's consent to quash the earlier decision granted on 22 April 2022 relating to the proposals.
- 3.3 Councillor Suzannah Clarke, Chair of the Committee, invited the agent for the applicant to address the meeting, who introduced herself as the Business Development and Sponsorship Director of Network Rail for the Southern Region.

3.3.1 The agent for the applicant asked the Committee to approve the officer's recommendation in the report, and she outlined the rationale for, and benefits of the proposals as follows:

- That Network Rail was managing an on-going programme of railway station accessibility enhancements as part of the Government's wider transport improvement strategy.
- That in 2018, Hither Green Railway Station was prioritised as one of the 73 stations for accessibility and improvement funding, hence the application for planning permission to undertake the construction works.
- That Southeastern Railway, the operator of Hither Green Railway station had been involved in the process throughout the process, and that feedback from consultations with residents had been useful in the formulation of the proposals.
- That the bespoke design to be implemented, in consultation with landscape consultants and the local community, would be sympathetic to the environment.
- That the improvements would be implemented in ways to benefit existing and potential users of the station.
- That the proposals aimed to deliver an obstacle-free accessible route from the station entrance to the platforms, lifts, and ramps. The associated works would include a new foot bridge, nature reserves, and clear sign-postings to make connections and interconnections at platform levels easier for all passengers.

3.3.2 In response to questions raised, the agent for the applicant and her colleagues reiterated to the Committee that the aim of the project remained that the step-free improvement should be delivered in ways to benefit all users of the station, including those interchanging across platforms.

3.3.3 The Committee noted further responses by the agent to the applicant as follows:

- That observations had highlighted that about 20% to 25% of current users were experiencing some form of disability. Thus, it was likely that those users, and parents with small children would benefit substantially from the improvements.
- That the design allowed for the existing footbridge to be retained during construction works.
- The platform levels would remain as existing.
- That the proposed footbridge would provide access to all the train lines, and onto the platforms.
- That steps had been taken for a decision to plant saplings in specific areas on the proposed site in ways that would prevent leaves from clogging the rail lines.
- That the project plan included a decision to replace the foliage to make space for the construction to take place. However, as part of the improvements, saplings would be spread across the site, with

greenery on both sides of the embankment to enhance the biodiversity and the nature reserves at and around Hither Green Station environs.

3.4 The Committee also noted submissions made by two residents who informed that they were living in the Hither Green area and were in support of the proposals. The residents asked the Committee to approve the recommendation in the report, and they advised as follows:

- That most people living in the Hither Green area welcomed the proposed improvements because they were not car owners, and therefore relied significantly on the use of public transportation.
- That objections in the report about colour scheme should be considered as a personal preference and should be part of the planning application consideration.
- That the proposed step-free access would address major concerns expressed by passengers using mainline stations across the country relating to trips, slips, and falls on stairs, particularly those with physical limitations, those carrying various types of luggages, and parents travelling with young children.
- That residents were pleased to learn that the existing step would be retained, and that, together with the new ones to be erected, would help spread footfall across the different stairs, thereby providing ease of connectivity and inter-changes across the platforms.

3.5 Another resident who addressed the meeting echoed statements made in support of the proposals, advising the Committee:

- That she welcomed the fact that the proposed improvements would not only deliver a safe environment for all users of the station, but that reliance on the use of car would be substantially reduced.
- That she endorsed views that local people with relatives who had health and disability challenges, and parents with young children would benefit substantially after implementation of the works.
- That the passenger experience could be further enhanced if the following were considered as part of the proposals:
  - That Network Rail should arrange for regular in-person meetings with residents to enable them to voice any concerns they might have during construction works on the proposed site.
  - That the Network Rails should ensure the areas around the embankment benefit with as much greenery as would be possible.
  - That Network Rail should ensure a seamless blend of new and existing structures in the environmental surrounds.
  - That Network Rail should consider whether the original 'living' wall stipulation could be re-integrated into the project plan.
  - That Network Rail should take steps to ensure that implementation of the project provide clear pathways for passengers in and around areas with lifts.

3.6 In its deliberations the Committee:

- Welcomed clarifications by the agents to the applicant about the implementation of saplings, greenery, and the overall ecological and nature reserves aspects of the project to be delivered.
- Noted confirmation by the Planning Officer that the design quality would be secured by a condition.
- Expressed a view that it would be inappropriate for Members to add new conditions or review proposals related to a prior approval planning application request.
- Suggested that agents for Network Rail who were present at the meeting could consider ongoing collaborations with residents during the construction phase of the project.

RESOLVED unanimously

- To GRANT planning permission for prior approval to construct a new footbridge with lifts and staircases, new entrances to Fernbrook Road, and Springbank Road, SE13, together with the removal of existing footbridges and canopy infill at Hither Green Station, SE13, subject to conditions and informatives outlined in the report.