



Homes  
England

Date: 24 June 2024

Our Ref: RFI4775

Tel: 0300 1234 500

Email: [infogov@homesengland.gov.uk](mailto:infogov@homesengland.gov.uk)

[REDACTED]  
By Email Only

Dear [REDACTED]

**RE: Request for Information – RFI4775**

Thank you for your request for information which was processed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

You requested the following information:

**The National Audit Office Report of December 2023 on its investigation into the East West Rail project states in paragraph 2 "Homes England... provides advice to EWR Co and DfT on the potential for housing growth in areas along the proposed route." Please provide me with copies of the advice you have provided to East West Railway Company Limited or the Department for Transport in relation to the East West Rail project since 28 January 2019, the date of issue of the first consultation document on the route of East West Rail.**

**Response**

We can confirm that we do hold the requested information. Please see enclosed Annex A which contains the only advice Homes England provided to EWR. However, we rely on Section 40 (2) of the FOIA to withhold some of the information from disclosure.

**Section 40 – Personal information**

We have redacted information on the grounds that it constitutes third party personal data and therefore engages section 40(2) of the FOIA.





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To disclose personal data, such as names, contact details, addresses, email addresses and personal opinions could lead to the identification of third parties and would breach one or more of the data protection principles.

Section 40 is an absolute exemption which means that we do not need to consider the public interest in disclosure. Once it is established that the information is personal data of a third party and release would breach one or more of the data protection principles, then the exemption is engaged.

The full text in the legislation can be found on the following link:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/40>

## **Right to Appeal**

If you are not happy with the information that has been provided or the way in which your request has been handled, you may request an internal review. You can request an internal review by writing to Homes England via the details below, quoting the reference number at the top of this letter.

Email: [infogov@homesengland.gov.uk](mailto:infogov@homesengland.gov.uk)

Information Governance Team  
Homes England  
Windsor House  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
42-50 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0TL  
United Kingdom

Your request for review must be made in writing, explain why you wish to appeal, and be received within 40 working days of the date of this response. Failure to meet this criteria may lead to your request being refused.

Upon receipt, your request for review will be passed to an independent party not involved in your original request. We aim to issue a response within 20 working days.

6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Windsor House  
42 - 50 Victoria Street, Westminster  
London, SW1H 0TL

0300 1234 500  
@HomesEngland  
[www.gov.uk/homes-england](http://www.gov.uk/homes-england)





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You may also complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) however, the Information Commissioner does usually expect the internal review procedure to be exhausted in the first instance.

The Information Commissioner's details can be found via the following link:

<https://ico.org.uk/>

Please note that the contents of your request and this response are also subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Homes England may be required to disclose your request and our response accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

**The Information Governance Team**  
For Homes England



Will Gallagher  
East West Rail Company Ltd  
One Grafton Mews  
Midsummer Boulevard  
Milton Keynes  
Buckinghamshire  
MK9 1FB

Sent by email only to [will.gallagher@eastwestrail.co.uk](mailto:will.gallagher@eastwestrail.co.uk)

27 April 2023

Dear Will

Homes England is an executive non-departmental public body and statutory corporation, sponsored by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), and created following the enactment of the Regeneration Act 2008 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011).

Homes England is a national agency committed to a place-based approach, working alongside civic and business leaders, combined authorities, county, borough and district councils and local enterprise partnerships. We use our land, money, powers, and influence to increase the pace, scale and quality of delivery. This accelerates the delivery of new homes in the areas of greatest demand and helps to create great places.

Our role is to ensure more people in England have access to better homes in the right places. To make this happen, we intervene in the market to get more homes built where they are needed. We accelerate delivery, tackle market failure where it occurs, and help to shape a more resilient and diverse housing market.

The statutory objects of Homes England are:

- to improve the supply and quality of housing in England;
- to secure the regeneration or development of land or infrastructure in England;
- to support in other ways the creation, regeneration, or development of communities in England or their continued well-being; and
- to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and good design in England, with a view to meeting the needs of people living in England.

The area between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge is a globally significant economic area. The area has the potential to unlock transformational economic growth, supported by delivery of new homes and infrastructure. In clear alignment with our unique remit as outlined above, the delivery of growth in this area provides the opportunity to deliver exceptional design and placemaking, underpinned by sustainable transport and environmental enhancement.

Homes England, 50 Victoria Street, Westminster, London, SW1H 0TL

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@HomesEngland

#MakingHomesHappen

East West Rail (EWR) are planning to provide a new direct rail connection linking Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge. The preferred route option for the section of the railway between Bedford and Cambridge was announced by the Department for Transport (DfT) in January 2020. Between March and June 2021, EWR Company (EWR Co) carried out a consultation on potential route options, including for the section of the railway between Bedford and Cambridge. The consultation identified several potential alignments for routes, including two emerging preferences, which would serve stations: at Bedford; at EWR's intersection with the East Coast Mainline (ECML) near St Neots/Tempsford; Cambourne; Cambridge South; and Cambridge.

The Spending Review 2020 and the National Infrastructure Strategy 2021 confirmed the Government's commitment in this area and whilst naturally priorities have evolved, *East West Rail has since been identified expressly as a key rail project in the Government's Growth Plan, published in September 2022*. Further acknowledgement to this infrastructure project was made in the Autumn Statement in November 2022 and Spring Budget in March 2023.

From the work published in the 2021 consultation, we understand that EWR Co used several assessment factors to evaluate the relative performance of choices made in relation to EWR. These were used in the consultation to compare potential alignments between Bedford and Cambridge and to identify a preference. One of those assessment factors considers the potential for stimulating housing and economic growth. EWR Co will also have regard to other relevant factors, including a town planning and environmental review of the relative performance of different EWR route alignment options. The outcome of the evaluation against assessment factors and other considerations will help inform EWR Co's recommendation to the Department for Transport on a preferred alignment. Sustainable development, high quality design and improving the supply of homes in England are all within the objectives of Homes England and are areas where we therefore have significant expertise and interest.

Where we are able and if is appropriate, Homes England will work with government agencies using our skills and expertise to assist with decisions that are aligned with our objectives e.g., housing delivery, sustainable development, design.

In terms of a route alignment for EWR and station locations, from our understanding to date, there are particular considerations affecting a choice of station in either the Tempsford area or the St. Neots area. This is important since the station location could provide a gravitational centre of a new settlement at either location and enhance sustainable travel choices for that community.

Having regard to our role, statutory objects, and based on professional expertise, Homes England's view is that the route alignment should include a stop on the East Coast main line at Tempsford for the following reasons.

### **Placemaking Factors**

#### **1. Local Distinctiveness**

Tempsford offers the potential for a coherent, stand-alone new settlement with its own town/village centre and distinct character, drawing on the heritage assets of the historic RAF Tempsford. A new development in this location could provide significant employment opportunities alongside new homes, with the potential to accommodate economic science, technology and food growth clusters of regional significance. There does not appear to be any discernible cue in terms of local distinctiveness to draw upon to create a character for a settlement

south of St Neots, so it is more likely that this would effectively become a suburb of the existing town.

2. Access to Services

Good connectivity to the existing town centre services in St Neots would be sought by both local politicians, businesses, and communities so as not to detract from the offer of the existing market town. This could effectively limit the appetite and potential to provide services and facilities in any development to the edge of St Neots within a distance easily accessible active travel modes, making it less likely that a sustainable and walkable settlement will be delivered as it could be at a development in the Tempsford area supported by an interchange station.

3. Landscape Form and Character

At a landscape scale, the existing landscape features for a Tempsford focused option that sits within a bowl, provides natural containment for a town scale settlement, thus avoiding the potential for urban sprawl or coalescence.

4. Strategic Coalescence

An EWR station at St. Neots would mean a southern expansion to the existing market town which is already undergoing significant growth to the east around the existing railway station. This could potentially double the size of St. Neots, resulting in a lack of containment in the absence of boundaries on the ground to limit expansion.

5. Severance

There is likely to be segregation of any development to the edge of St Neots by the proposed A428 road improvements currently being delivered. The new section of the A428 would be routed through any development in this location, necessitating bridges, underpasses and mitigation against noise and air pollution, in turn leading to significant placemaking challenges and further erosion of accessibility as outlined in point 2 above.

**Brownfield Land**

While both locations are similarly predominantly agricultural/arable land with very few areas of environmental/ historic value, Tempsford is comprised of a proportion of brownfield land (the former WWII airfield) whereas south of St Neots is wholly greenfield. The re-use of brownfield land is aligned to national planning policy and guidance which encourages the redevelopment and re-use of previously developed land.

**Delivery and Local Plans**

Tempsford has a substantial area with consolidated land ownership being promoted by the private sector who are working in partnership to bring forward proposals to develop a new settlement. Of the two landowners involved, one is a very experienced master developer and the other is keen to partner, with a very strong focus on long term legacy. This creates a better environment for long term stewardship to be built into the proposals from the outset to achieve a sustainable development which can provide benefits for the wider area.

Central Bedfordshire Council is currently reviewing their local plan and has previously indicated some support for economic led growth in this area, having included it as a potential growth location in an earlier draft local plan (2018). Given the local plan position and consolidated land position, development has the potential to start at an earlier date than St Neots, as Huntingdonshire District

Council are only just starting the review of their plan and have previously sought to expand the town to the east.

St. Neots has some consolidated land ownership, but engagement with landowners is needed to understand if there is a development proposition. We are not aware that it is being promoted for development at present.

While this does not make development at either location more preferable, for completeness, a proposal has emerged in the draft Bedford Borough Council Local Plan for c.4000 homes at Little Barford in a reasonable proximity to both locations. If allocated, this could form part of a wider settlement at either Tempsford or St. Neots.

**Conclusion**

Based upon our current understanding of the above, the professional opinion of Homes England is that a new development in the Tempsford area represents a better placemaking opportunity than a further extension of St Neots.

Yours sincerely

**s. 40(2)**

s. 40(2)  
Director - Strategic Development & Infrastructure  
Homes England

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