

# TECHNICAL NOTE

**Job Name:** Sharpness Vale  
**Job No:** 332210067  
**Note No:** TN01  
**Date:** 18 June 2021  
**Prepared By:** ██████████  
**Subject:** Sharpness branch line – restoring passenger railway services

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Sharpness Development LLP, the promoters of the Sharpness Vale proposals included as a strategic allocation in Stroud District Council's (Stroud DC's) Draft Local Plan under policy proposals PS36, are fully supportive of the Council's aspirations to re-establish passenger railway services on the existing Sharpness branch line.
- 1.2. The line is currently operational, but only used by freight services associated with the former nuclear power station at Berkeley, and so the possibility to reintroduce passenger railway services, which operated up to the 1970's, would make use of an existing significantly under-utilised public asset.
- 1.3. Stroud DC have submitted a funding bid to develop an Outline Business Case for the scheme as part of the DfT's 'Restoring your Railway' initiative (RyR), using much of the technical evidence and assessments undertaken by Sharpness Development LLP in support of the Sharpness Vale proposals. This work considered the potential patronage that could arise from the re-provision of passenger services, with many of these trips emanating from the new development, but a proportion also coming from the existing population who would benefit from a passenger railway service again.

## 2. Scheme description

- 2.1. The scheme would deliver two distinct passenger services:
  - Timetabled scheduled services between a new station at Sharpness Vale and Gloucester to serve the growth point development in the current plan period of 2,890 new homes (PS33 - 120 homes, PS34 - 300 homes, PS35 - 70 homes and PS36 - 2,400 homes), increasing to as much as 5,490 new homes in the subsequent plan period allowing for further growth at Sharpness Vale, and
  - Tourist and heritage services, at weekends and holiday periods, to allow the Vale of Berkeley Railway (VoBR) to establish itself as a tourist attraction alongside other attractions in the area.

### DOCUMENT ISSUE RECORD

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- 2.2. The RyR submission proposes that a series of interventions will be required to deliver the service:
- upgrading the track on the branch line
  - re-providing stations suitable for the services
  - improve the signalling at the junction with the mainline, and
  - potentially improve the signalling at Gloucester station to accommodate a second hourly service.
- 2.3. Sharpness Development LLP can confirm that, insofar as these interventions would require land to be made available within the development area, that this can be accommodated, and, indeed, has already been taken account of in the indicative masterplan for the Sharpness Vale scheme.
- 2.4. A comprehensive vision document has been prepared, and the technical sections of an Outline Strategic Business Case, as part of the support for the Sharpness Vale allocation. These now need to be refined and have relevant governance and management cases added to allow the proper consideration of the scheme by DfT - and that is the purpose of the RyR bid currently submitted.
- 2.5. There are a series of aspects to the proposals:
- establish a station at Sharpness Vale and introduce the capability for a once per hour scheduled service to Cam & Dursley and Gloucester (weekdays and Saturdays)
  - establish heritage services between the VoBR site near Sharpness Docks and a reinstated halt at Berkeley
  - develop the heritage offer over time, with a replacement of the station at Sharpness (as it used to be, close to the docks) and potentially with further services to a new halt closer to the mainline, and
  - expand the scheduled service to a twice per hour service (weekdays, Saturdays and with some service on Sundays) to Gloucester.
- 2.6. It should be noted that the VoBR heritage proposals pre-date both the Local Plan process and the Sharpness Vale scheme and so the re-introduction of passenger services to the branch line has been planned with both the current freight services and the delivery of VoBR's heritage services in mind.
- 2.7. It should be noted that the VoBR heritage rail services will operate mainly during weekends and school holidays and they can be interwoven with the scheduled services on the branch line. Sharpness Development LLP has been in liaison with VoBR and the parties together provided information to Stroud DC to support the RyR bid. Sharpness Development LLP is keen to work together with the charity to ensure that both aspirations, for a heritage service and a scheduled service, can be delivered as part of the railway re-establishment proposals.
- 2.8. As part of the work undertaken to support the re-establishment of passenger services, Sharpness Development LLP commissioned a detailed Timetable Study for the proposed scheduled services, which has subsequently been signed off by Network Rail, and which demonstrates that the services can be accommodated.
- 2.9. The scheme will require:
- construction of station facilities: at Sharpness Vale for scheduled services, and reinstating buildings for the heritage services at Sharpness and Berkeley

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- 4 miles of track improvements to allow higher speed passenger trains running and passing loops
- signal improvements between the mainline and the branch
- potential future signalling improvements on the approach to Gloucester station, and
- re-construction of the platform at the former Berkeley station to create a 'halt'.

2.10. The Sharpness Vale development will ultimately need to be served by a new accessible station. It is envisaged this would be roughly midway between the sites of the original Berkeley and Sharpness stations, sitting at the heart of the new development, and already included in the indicative masterplan as part of the market centre within the scheme.

### 3. Delivery overview

- 3.1. The proposal at Sharpness has been under development since February 2020 and so a considerable amount of work has already been undertaken.
- 3.2. Sharpness Development LLP contributed, through the development of the strategic approach to the project, including commissioning and providing the Timetable Study and undertaking the preliminary work on the Outline Strategic Business Case that sets the context for the next stages of more detailed work.
- 3.3. As the RyR funding bid towards the development of a business case is dependent on match funding, Sharpness Development LLP has agreed to meet the costs of the additional funds needed should the bid be successful. This ensures the potential to complete the Strategic Business Case during 2021 (assuming RyR funds are available this year).
- 3.4. VoBR have developed their heritage proposals, including taking a lease on land at the northern end of the line and achieving consent to undertake works to the railway there and at Berkeley.
- 3.5. The business case work undertaken to date provides details of the forecast usage of the line and outlines the various elements of infrastructure that would need to be undertaken. It highlights the benefits and opportunities that the scheme could provide and also quantifies these benefits where appropriate.
- 3.6. The output from the RyR funded study would be a Strategic Business Case that could be submitted to secure funding for the project and a clear programme and delivery strategy that would be applied. It would also outline where particular responsibilities lay for delivery and make clear how the project was to be promoted and by whom.
- 3.7. It is intended that, should the funding be secured, a project Steering Group would be established, led by Stroud DC, and with invitations to the key stakeholders:
- Network Rail
  - Gloucestershire County Council
  - Vale of Berkeley Railway Trust
  - Sharpness Development LLP
  - Train operators - DRS (freight) and passenger operators (both existing and potential independent operators)

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- Gfirst LEP, and
- Nuclear South-West (as lead of the 'Fusion' bid for the South-West)

3.8. Sharpness Development LLP can confirm that they would be pleased to take an active part in the activities of the Steering Group, making time and resources available from their own team to ensure that the railway project was successful.

### 4. Wider implications

- 4.1. There is a synergy with the Stroud DC Local Plan process, as this provides the basis for the Sharpness Vale strategic growth point allocation. The current draft Local Plan is progressing towards an Examination in Public in early 2022.
- 4.2. There is also an overlap with the potential bid by Nuclear South-West for the 'STEP (Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production) Fusion Power Generation Project' which has been submitted to Government for consideration. The potential Berkeley site is very close to Sharpness, and so the upgrading of the branch line would provide the opportunity for sustainable transport to the potential STEP site for both employees and materials.
- 4.3. The STEP bid requires information on the way that sustainable transport would be provided to the potential site and so the upgrading of the Sharpness branch line, especially to accommodate passenger services, forms a significant aspect of this proposal.

### 5. Strategic overview of the proposal

- 5.1. The Sharpness area has seen a decline in its economic fortunes in recent years. The closure of the nuclear power station and shift of the docks to the movement of mainly bulk goods has seen the economic significance of the area reduce. Although there are new occupiers at the nearby former power station site, notably Gloucestershire Constabulary and the SGS Berkeley Green UTC, the regeneration of the site has been stifled by the lack of sustainable access.
- 5.2. Therefore, Sharpness Development LLP fully supports Stroud DC in developing a draft Local Plan that, in identifying the need for a strategic growth point for the district to accommodate planned and necessary housing growth, has identified Sharpness as a suitable location. This is a change of strategy from the previous approach of successive urban extensions, which have not delivered the highest quality places or the sustainable communities that were intended.
- 5.3. Sharpness Vale creates the opportunity for a large-scale growth point, straddling the next and subsequent plan periods with a comprehensive, mixed land use settlement designed for local living, in a sustainable way. The high potential for local living, with a mix of employment activities within striking distance, offers a more sustainable approach to planning for Stroud, whilst facilitating travel further afield through the use of the existing, operational, railway asset.
- 5.4. Hence, Sharpness Development LLP strongly believes that re-establishing passenger services on this branch line would make use of an underutilised, but perfectly serviceable, asset to achieve sustainable growth for Stroud and Gloucestershire.
- 5.5. This proposal dovetailed with the proposals of VoBR to reinstate passenger services on the line for tourism and heritage purposes. In the short term, this could help lead growth in the local rural economy by attracting new tourists to the area and by encouraging existing tourists to remain for longer.