

News

# CAMPAIGN: 'Government should pay for bridge or tunnel' Promise to push for cash to fund crossing solution



County councillors Michael Waine, Dan Sames, Les Sibley and Lawrie Stratford are pledging their commitment to pushing the Government for funding to build a tunnel or bridge at Bicester's London Road level crossing. Pic: Jon Lewis

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**A REAFFIRMED pledge from councillors will push the Government on a solution to the future of a busy level crossing.**

Bicester's county councillors have committed themselves in an open letter to bring about a bridge or tunnel at the London Road junction.

For years, plans have been in place for various rail upgrades which, in turn, could see the level crossing closed for up to 45 minutes each hour after increased usage once East West Rail services are introduced.

This has raised concern among residents and councillors that the crossing could ultimately be closed permanently and shut off a major route into town.

But this week the councillors joined together to reaffirm their plans to hammer the Government for funds to solve the issue.

The open letter, from councillors Michael Waine, Lawrie Stratford, Les Sibley and Dan Sames, said: "Resolving the London Road crossing problem has very much been to the forefront of our work at county and local level.

"The options of a tunnel or bridge are all well-rehearsed, but getting a national body to take responsibility, particularly

financial, is a different matter."

Current 'barrier down' times are about 14 minutes each hour. This 'down time' is expected to double to between 30 and 34 minutes with the introduction of the core East West Rail (EWR) service of four more trains each way.

Initial plans suggested it could rise to up to 45 minutes each hour.

Three solutions to keep road traffic flowing were drawn up by transport bosses including Network Rail in March 2017. They included two tunnel options costing up to £65m or a bridge at £44m.

The councillors' letter added: "In a major effort to move matters forward this summer, we called a meeting of all local lead players, including the county council, Cherwell District Council, the town council, and MP Victoria Prentis.

"The most important outcomes of the meeting were that

all shared the responsibility of working together to achieve the outcome of a financed tunnel or bridge, and perhaps most importantly, a commitment by council leaders to have a dedicated officer to prepare the case for a bid to Government through the Oxfordshire Growth Board.

"We believe that these commitments represent a crucial step towards ensuring London Road remains fully open and becomes fully accessible all the time every day."

In a letter to the Secretary of State regarding the East West Rail scheme, Langford Village Community Association (LVCA) has raised a number of concerns over increased usage.

LVCA group chairman Andrew Smith said: "While we note that the London Road level crossing is not included in the EWR2 scheme for consultation, it cannot be ignored.

"The LVCA wishes to highlight that the scheme will significantly impact on the crossing, increasing congestion and effectively cutting off residents south of the line from the town centre.

"A solution for London Road level crossing is needed now. It needs to be completed before 2023 when EWR2 is due to open. The £60+ million estimated cost of a bridge or tunnel is no doubt considerably more than it would have been, had it been implemented in 2015.

"It appears not to be funded. But if it is delayed the cost will sky-rocket."

## Plans for 344-room airbase hotel

A HOTEL with 344 rooms could be built at Bicester's former RAF base, if plans win approval tonight.

Cherwell District Council's planning committee will discuss proposals put forward by Bicester Heritage for the hotel to be built at the former Second World War bomber station.

The historic vehicle and aviation hub has been created at the site over the past five years, after Bicester Heritage brought it back from its derelict state.

The new hotel would be the latest addition to the project to restore old

buildings and is expected to have a four-floor glass atrium, restaurant, gym, spa and bar.

The designs are the work of British architects firm Dexter Moren Associates.

Bicester Heritage has previously said the 35 businesses at the site already contribute an estimated £25 million to £35 million a year to the local economy and a high-end hotel would add even more.

The meeting is at 4pm, at Bodicote House near Banbury. Search 18/01253/F at cherwell.gov.uk

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