

Area West Committee – 21st March 2012

## **Motion Submitted by Cllr. Andrew Turpin**

*It is worthy of note that*

- *Wellington station has been included in Taunton Deane's Core Strategy even though no viability studies have been carried out.*
- *Protection for Chard Junction's use as a freight rail head is already included in the South Somerset District Wide Local Plan.*

## **SSDC Core Strategy Proposal**

**Because of the benefits to future generations, there is a need to protect Chard Junction as a public transport interchange and as a potential freight rail head.**

**It is therefore proposed that in view of Taunton Dean's policy, SSDC's Area West Committee either**

- a) **requests the District Executive to include the protection of Chard Junction in its Core Strategy and / or**
- b) **seeks partnership funding for a viability / feasibility / sustainability appraisal**

Through its Community Plan, drawn up through public consultation by the Residents Action Group, Tatworth and Forton Parish Council made the decision that the aspiration to re-open Chard Junction Station should be included. The plan for Chard Town completed by the 'Action for Chard Town' (ACT) group and recently reinforced by the Chard Regeneration group agreed with this aspiration. The reason for both teams to include this aspiration was that 'it enhances the sustainability of the regeneration plans for Chard and its neighbouring parishes'.

Following lobbying of the local MP at his surgery, 40 local residents achieved a meeting (using two representatives) with the then Rail Minister. He confirmed his total support for the station reopening and that reopening of stations was part of Government policy. A Steering Group embracing Network Rail, South West Trains, SCC, SSDC and the two supporting MPs – David Laws and Oliver Letwin was set up. The group was abandoned after the administrative change at County Hall.

This aspiration has recently been confirmed by Chard Town Council in the form of a planning application recommending refusal of a cement works on the site. 'Chard Town Council will recommend refusal of this application in the light of the SSDC Core Strategy and the future expansion of Chard and the necessity to reduce individual journeys by car to combat green house gas emissions. The development of this site would prejudice the reopening of Chard Junction Station.' The decision was unanimous.

Tatworth and Forton Parish Council responded in a similar vein and moved separately to request that the station be protected for passenger use and as a 'freight rail head'.

For those drawing up Neighbourhood Plans, it is implicit in the Localism legislation that the purpose of a Sustainability Appraisal is to 'appraise the social, environmental and economic effects of the plan. In so doing, it helps to ensure that decisions are made that contribute to achieving sustainable development'. Ref. 'How to shape where you live: a guide to Neighbourhood Planning'. NALC CPRE publication.

That there is public demand for the reopening of this station is not in question. Such a Neighbourhood Plan held through the Localism Act would undoubtedly have the support of residents in the whole of Chard and district locality, including communities over the border in Dorset and Devon.

Despite huge public demand, there is clearly a gaping hole in the evidence base for any re-opening of the station. It would appear that despite many years of talk no robust viability study has ever been commissioned and therefore any policies have been effectively written within a vacuum.

It would appear that there **has** been a political will but no real steer.

A Rail Consultant who provided a viability study in BANES and Warwickshire, where stations have and are being investigated for reopening, is suggesting that such a study at Chard Junction would cost £10,000.

It is possible that £500 could be raised from the Railfuture fighting fund and other sources of funding may be available.

Andrew Turpin