

## Community Grant to Langport Transport Group (Executive Decision)

Director: *Kirsty Larkins, Director of Service Delivery*  
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### Purpose of the Report

Councillors are asked to consider the awarding of a grant of £6,000 towards a Feasibility Study, Strategic Outline Business Case and Consultations for a new railway station for Langport/Somerton.

### Public Interest

Awarding grants is a key way that SSDC supports and helps to deliver community projects sponsored by parishes and voluntary community organisations in the towns and villages across the district.

The Langport Transport Group has applied to the Area North community grants programme for financial assistance with the costs of a Feasibility Study, Strategic Outline Business Case and Consultations for a new railway station for Langport/Somerton. The Locality Officer who is submitting this report to enable the Area North Committee to make an informed decision about the application has assessed the application.

### Recommendation

That Councillors recommend to the Chief Executive that a grant of £6,000 be awarded towards a Feasibility Study, Strategic Outline Business Case and Consultations for a new railway station for Langport/Somerton, the grant to be allocated from the Area North capital programme and subject to SSDC standard conditions for community grants (appendix A)

### Application Details

Name of applicant:	The Langport Transport Group
Project:	Feasibility Study, Strategic Outline Business Case and Consultations for a new railway station for Langport/Somerton
Total project cost:	£66,500
Amount requested from SSDC:	£6,000
% amount requested	9%
Application assessed by:	Adrian Moore

### Community Grants Assessment Score

The table below shows the grant scoring for this application. Applications must meet the minimum score of 22 to be considered for SSDC funding under Community Grants policies.

Category	Max Score available	Officer assessment score
A Supports Council Plan/Area Chapter	1	1
B Supports Equalities & Diversity	1	1
C Supports Environment Strategy	3	3
D Need for Project	10	8
E Capacity of Organisation	15	13
F Financial need	7	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>31</b>

## Background

Langport East and Somerton stations, along with four smaller stations, opened in 1906 when a new stretch of line was built to shorten the Paddington-Exeter route - which until then had been via Bristol. The stations closed in 1962 as part of the Beeching cuts, though the line remains in full service as a major rail trunk route.

This proposal is to seek support from SSDC for the reinstatement of a railway station to serve the towns of Langport and Somerton on the existing dual track Great Western Line between London Paddington and the South West.

An initial assessment of the case for provision of a new station has been made by the Langport Transport Group. To progress the scheme further, a feasibility study is required to examine the implications of constructing a new station to identify a suitable train service for the station and to assess the passenger demand and economic case, should a new station and train service be provided.

## Parish information

Parishes*	Langport and Huish Episcopi (excl Turn Hill)
Parish Population	3,400
No. of dwellings	1,600

Parish*	Somerton
Parish Population	5,700
No. of dwellings	2,700

\*Estimates based on 2011 census and subsequent new homes built to date

## The project

In February 2020, the Department for Transport launched an initiative for an 'Ideas Fund' to restore lost rail connections to communities and invited Members of Parliament, local authorities and community groups to propose how they could use funding to reinstate axed local services and stations. A proposal for Langport and Somerton was prepared by the Langport Transport Group and was one of 110 bids submitted in two rounds by June 2020. The scheme has the support of the local Member of Parliament.

An announcement was made on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020 that the Langport Transport Group was one of the 15 successful bidders. The success of the bid means that the Department for Transport will fund up to £45,000 to help fund a Feasibility Study, Strategic Outline Business Case and Consultations. Assuming a cost of no more than £66,500 for the feasibility study, the Langport Transport Group are therefore

looking to raise £21,500, with the balance to be made up by the Government. Langport Transport Group have approached local Town and Parish Councils for financial support with a high degree of success.

Langport Transport Group are now working with officials from the Department for Transport as well as District and County Councils together with Network Rail and Great Western Railway in order to take the project forward. A Steering Group with representatives from each of these organisations has been established. In addition, Somerset County Council have agreed to be a collaborative partner with the Langport Transport Group satisfying the s.151 responsible Officer requirements. Langport Transport Group - a working group of Transition Langport - remains the lead promoter.

Somerset County Council has a preferred contractor under a procurement framework agreement namely - WSP Parsons Brinkerhoff. In October 2016, Somerset County Council issued a brief to its contractors – WSP - to prepare a proposal for a commission to conduct a demand assessment. A lump sum proposal was subsequently prepared by WSP in October 2016 to complete a demand assessment, taking account of known development proposals and abstraction from existing stations. However, due to lack of funds at the time the commission was not executed.

Indications from Somerset County Council's initial engagement with WSP on the current project's behalf indicates it is prudent to allow for a budget estimated at £66,500 for the demand and economic assessment study and consultations. It is anticipated that the Feasibility Study, Strategic Outline Business Case and Consultations will commence in June or July 2021.

### **Local support / evidence of need**

The closure of Langport and Somerton stations in the 1960s left a 28mile stretch of the existing Great Western Railway line between Castle Cary and Taunton without a rail station. The dual track line is serviced by, on average, an hourly service throughout the day with a mixture of fast (stops at Reading only) and semi-fast services. Thus, although the market towns of Langport and Somerton are currently bisected by a working railway line the trains on that line do not stop at either of the two towns.

The opportunity is therefore for a new station and service on the existing working railway line to restore lost rail connections to the towns of Langport and Somerton and their surrounding communities. This would open up rail connections not only with the county town of Taunton but with other stations on the Great Western Railway network including Exeter, Bristol and London as well as with interchange to other rail lines at Castle Cary, Westbury and Reading.

The project has the support of local residents. The re-opening of Langport Station was one of the two top improvements Langport residents would most like to see (based on a consultation exercise conducted by Langport Town Council in 2012).

Further local community support was demonstrated in 2015 by the "Back on Track" campaign and petition run by the Western Gazette newspaper.

Over the years, ministerial support has been expressed by several Secretaries and Ministers for Transport, including Secretary for Transport Patrick McLoughlin in 2014 and Rail Minister Claire Perry who visited the station sites in 2016. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne mentioned a station in his budget speech of 2015. "The government will run a further round of the New Stations Fund with up to £20million in total available for projects, and consider proposals including any put forward for a new station between Castle Cary and Taunton".

Re-opening a local rail station in the Langport/Somerton area is consistent with local policies as part of a wider community transport project in the South West of England.

The scheme aligns with local plans and policies. The project is also in line with Government’s national rail transport policies. The Department for Transport’s strategy paper “Connecting people: a strategic vision for rail”, November 2017, states; “In the coming decade we will be expanding the network, selecting routes that benefit housing and economic growth, relieve urban congestion and meet future demand. We will fund the reopening of a number of stations closed in the 1960s, as well as building brand-new ones.”

The roads within the Somerset towns of Taunton and Yeovil are becoming increasingly congested, as are the interurban routes that serve them and other towns and cities in the South West corridor. A new station on the main line between London and the South West will assist in relieving pressure on both the urban and interurban road networks as well as supporting the ongoing growth in housing and development in Langport, Huish Episcopi and Somerton in terms of capacity, accessibility and sustainability.

With the nearest stations at Taunton, Castle Cary, Bridgwater and Yeovil Junction, all 12-15 miles away, Langport and Somerton lie in the centre of a large area of central Somerset denied easy access to the rail network. There is no bus to Castle Cary station or to Taunton station - (it is a half a mile walk from the bus station).

The County and District Councils have indicated their support for developing rail services throughout the region in their respective transport plans. Somerset County Council wrote in their passenger transport strategy up to 2026 - “We will work in partnership with the rail industry and other stakeholders to encourage more people to travel by train. We will support better services, facilities, security, integration and improvements in the way people see train travel.” In the local plan in 2018 SSDC noted that there are high levels of congestion in Yeovil, Crewkerne and Chard and that bus services in the district are very poor. This leads to a heavy reliance on the car for journeys to work and local services. SSDC has indicated that a strategic objective is to promote walking, cycling and non-car based transport. Local Town and Parish Councils have also indicated their support and in several cases have pledged financial support for the Feasibility Study, Strategic Outline Business Case and Consultations.

## Project costs

<b>Project costs</b>	<b>Cost £</b>
Feasibility Study, Strategic Outline Business Case and Consultations for a new railway station for Langport/Somerton (Estimate)	66,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>66,500</b>

## Funding plan

<b>Funding source</b>	<b>Secured or pending</b>	<b>Amount £</b>
Restoring Your Railway - Department for Transport	Secured	45,000
Local Town & Parish Councils (Martock, Somerton, Huish Episcopi, Curry Rivel, Langport)	Secured & Pending	15,000
Owns Funds	Secured	500
SSDC Community Grant	Pending	6,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>66,500</b>

## Conclusion and Recommendation

It is recommended that a grant of £6,000 is awarded.

## Financial implications

The balance in the Area North Capital programme is £134,125. If the recommended grant of £6,000 is awarded, £128,125 will remain.

Grants are awarded subject to all other funding being secured before the commencement of the project and are on a % basis of the full project costs. Payment of the grant cannot exceed the grant award and is proportionally reduced if full project costs are under budget.

## Council Plan Implications

Improved transportation links for our residents supports the work in the Council Plan themes and Areas of focus for 2021/22

### *Focus 1: High quality cost effective services*

- Transform customer services through technology.
- Provide access to services to suit our customers' needs
- Actively manage assets and resources to ensure the best financial or community return.
- Seek business opportunities for the council.
- Work with partners to achieve economies, resilience and influence.

### *Focus 2: Economy*

To promote a strong and growing economy with thriving urban, rural and land based businesses and improving productivity we will:

- Work with businesses and use our assets.
- Advise and support initiatives that ensure worker skills meet the employer's needs.
- Lobby for and support infrastructure improvements to enable growth.
- Capitalise on our high quality culture, leisure and tourism opportunities to bring people into the district

### *Focus 3: Environment*

To keep South Somerset clean, green and attractive we will work in partnership to:

- Promote recycling and minimise waste
- Promote the use of 'green' technology
- Maintain and promote access to our Country Parks and open spaces to promote good mental and physical health.
- Keep streets and neighbourhoods clean and attractive.
- Continue to support long term flood resilience.
- Promote a high quality built environment in line with Local Plan policies.
- Support communities to develop and implement local, parish and neighbourhood plans.

### *Focus 5: Health and Communities*

To build healthy, self-reliant, active communities we will:

- Support communities so that they can identify their needs and develop local solutions.
- Target support to areas of need.

- Help people to live well by enabling quality cultural, leisure, play, sport & healthy lifestyle facilities & activities.
- Work with partners to tackle health issues such as diabetes and hypertension and mental health.
- Work with our partners to keep our communities safe.

### **Area Chapter Implications for 2021/22**

Improved transportation links for our residents supports the work in the Area Chapters.

### **Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications**

As with opening of other new stations outside the main cities, much of the expected demand will arise from diversion of private car journeys. The environmental benefits will therefore be as a result of reduced road usage and congestion including reduced noise levels, greenhouse gas emissions, emissions of particulate matter and nitrogen oxides and road accidents, as well as overall energy savings.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

The project aims to provide for people across all age and interest groups in the local community.

### **Background Papers**

None

## Appendix A

### Standard conditions applying to all SSDC Community Grants

#### The applicant agrees to: -

- Notify SSDC if there is a material change to the information provided in the application.
- Start the project within six months of the grant offer and notify SSDC of any changes to the project or start date as soon as possible.
- Confirm that all other funding sources have been secured before starting the project, if these were not already in place at the time of the application.  
Acknowledge SSDC assistance towards the project in any relevant publicity about the project (e.g. leaflets, posters, websites, and promotional materials) and on any permanent acknowledgement (e.g. plaques, signs etc.).
- Work in conjunction with SSDC officers to monitor and share the success of the project and the benefits to the community resulting from SSDC's contribution to the project.
- Provide a project update and/or supply before and after photos if requested
- Supply receipted invoices or receipts which provide evidence of the **full** cost of the project so that the grant can be released.
- Note that they cannot apply for another community grant for the same project within a 3 year period of this award.

#### Standard conditions applying to buildings, facilities and equipment

- Use the SSDC Building Control Service when buildings regulations are required.
- Incorporate disabled access and provide an access statement where relevant.

#### Special conditions

None