

Railfuture Infrastructure & Networks Group
Garden Towns and Villages and Opportunities for Rail

Government Policy

On 2nd January 2017, the Department of Communities and Local Government announced a list of 14 ‘garden villages’ and three new ‘garden towns’ in England to which they had allocated funding for further development of the proposals <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/first-ever-garden-villages-named-with-government-support>, following the expressions of interest made by councils since the scheme was announced in June 2016. Garden villages are defined as between 1,500 and 10,000 new homes, while garden towns are defined as having more than 10,000 new homes. The numbers quoted locally appear to be broad estimates and presumably depend on the willingness of the private sector to respond to the encouragement to build in these locations. The timescale for full implementation is up to 20 years.

In policy terms, the concept is designed to encourage new housebuilding in well-designed developments with, as far as possible, local support. Further funding may be available to help, along with some relaxation of planning constraints if required.

The announcement is for funding for further development and does not guarantee start of work, or timescale. Indeed, it is worth recalling a similar initiative on eco-towns almost ten years ago, which, in retrospect, had relatively little impact.

Planning Issues

The local authorities concerned have some details on their websites, and some proposals are quite well developed, while others remain embryonic. In general, quite a lot of attention has been paid to planning and environmental issues. Whilst the need for supporting transport infrastructure is acknowledged, there is little detail, and what exists is almost exclusively focussed on the need for links to the primary road network.

It is important to recall that, even though the towns and villages are designed to be self sustaining, with both jobs and housing, in practice, we know that the presence of new and affordable homes always generates outward commuting trips and for the sites in the South East, this will include large numbers of long distance rail commuting trips to London.

The Garden Towns

Aylesbury. 15,000 new homes are proposed around Aylesbury, accommodating perhaps just over an additional 29,000 people, which would represent a 50% increase in the town's population. The new development focuses usefully on sites around Aylesbury Vale Parkway, south Aylesbury (straddling the line to Princes Risborough) and Stoke Mandeville. Other sites are to the east of the town, near the former line to Cheddington, but remote from the current rail network. The possibility of a station for south Aylesbury might be worth analysis, and with such a huge increase in population, it would seem likely that some investment in enlarging the capacity of Aylesbury station itself might be required in the future.

Harlow and Gilston. 15,000 new homes are also planned here, mainly around Gilston Park, to the north of Harlow Town station. This implies a 44% increase in the town's population and can be expected to result in a significant increase in commuting trips to both London and Cambridge, where residential property prices are high.

Taunton. 8,000 new homes are proposed based on the suburban villages of Comeytrowe/Trull, Monkton Heathfield and Staplegrove, none of which are rail connected. The implied population increase of the town is 30%, which will, again, put pressure on the existing station which has, however, seen major improvements in capacity and facilities over the last decade. Bus links will need attention here as the bus station is around a mile from the railway station, and more buses may need to be routed via the station.

The Garden Villages

The basic facts are set out on the attached spreadsheet for all 14 sites. This note analyses those that might have rail potential and form the basis of future campaigning. The analysis is based on input from branches (where I have this).

Rail Links

Bailrigg – worth further evaluation as the garden village, combined with the adjacent Lancaster University site with its student population of over 13,000 might provide a base of demand sufficient to justify a new station on the WCML near the site of the former Galgate station (closed 1939). Would clearly abstract from Lancaster, but the size of the demand coupled with chronic traffic congestion in Lancaster may make this a worthwhile scheme.

Culm – Just on the other side of the line (and the M5) from Cullompton where a reopened station is being considered by Devon CC as part of Devon Metro. The new village will certainly improve the case for this.

Dunton Hills – this is between Brentwood and West Horndon stations and both are likely to be used by commuters from the new village. This is a sizeable development with a notional population of 11,500, and given the likely social profile of the new population is likely to generate large numbers of car trips to the two stations with implications for capacity of trains, stations and car parks. Crossrail should help with capacity via Brentwood, which is likely to be the principal railhead for the development.

Infinity (Derby) – near Stenson Junction and capable of being served by future passenger trains on the Castle Donington route on which East Midlands branch has been campaigning. May be complicated by being in the administrative areas of both Derby City and South Derbyshire councils.

Longcross – well placed site alongside the Waterloo – Reading line near Longcross station.

Long Marston – former rail connected MoD site near Stratford-upon-Avon and served by freight-only line from Honeybourne. Could be a significant benefit to add to the value of restoring the Stratford – Honeybourne line.

Oxford Cotswold – site north of Eynsham and easily accessible to Hanborough station which might require investment to handle the additional numbers and could form part justification for increasing capacity on the remaining single track section from Charlbury to Wolvercote Junction. Eynsham station on the former branch to Witney and Fairford was to the south of the town, about the same distance from the garden village site as Hanborough.

Welborne (Fareham) – probably the site with the greatest potential. This is a large development with a notional population of over 14,000 (a 34% increase on the town's current population). The site is adjacent to the Eastleigh – Fareham electrified line, close to the former site of Knowle Halt. It also straddles the formation of the Meon Valley line and is just south of the former Wickham station. The line between Botley and Fareham is single track, but three miles of the five could be re-doubled if required to accommodate the additional station. It is likely that some investment at Fareham itself would also be required, and part of the justification for a new station at Knowle would be to relieve pressure on the existing station.

Bus Links. A number of the villages are going to require good bus links to the local station, but are probably not going to justify any rail link extension or new station to serve them. These include:

Deenethorpe - the other side of the town from Corby station, and no nearby former railway formations. Relatively small development.

Halsnead – just south of Whiston with potential for a good bus link. Likely to generate demand for trips both to Liverpool and to Manchester.

North Cheshire – the other side of the A34 from Handforth station with no closer access points. Could bring some more volunteers for the excellent station adoption group there, though!

St Cuthberts – included because details of the site and size are sketchy. It is quite close to the WCML, but there are no local services on this section of the route that could serve a new local station. Unclear at this stage whether so many new residents would be travelling just to Carlisle or further afield, say to Newcastle. To be reviewed in the light of further information.

Spitalgate Heath – relatively small development fairly close to Grantham with no alternative access point to the rail network

West Carclaze – to the north of St. Austell and the northern edge of the development would be some three miles from Bugle. Relatively small development, probably best served by bus to St Austell.

Chris Austin

Head of Infrastructure & Networks

9 January 2017