

Planning Application SMD/2021/0700
Former Railway Line Barnfield Road, Leek

Regeneration Team Consultation Response
24/11/2021

The application is a re-application of SMD/2018/0092 approved 03/05/2018 which has expired and will include reinstatement of railway track, new platform and and replacement discretionary footpath, on former railway line between Cornhill, Leek and boundary of existing operational railway land at Leekbrook.

The purpose of the proposal is to reconnect Leek to the Churnet Valley heritage railway, enabling tourists, local visitors and rail enthusiasts to travel to/from principle town with Staffordshire Moorlands. This has been modelled by Mott MacDonald at an additional 30,000 visitors per annum, which would have an economic uplift of £1.17m per annum based on 2020 average day visitor spend (£39.90 per person per day).

It is recognised that this extension is essential in order to maximise economic benefits to Leek town centre from railway visitors as well as supporting increased passenger numbers which in turn will help finance long term sustainability of the heritage railway. It should also be noted that the existing Churnet Valley Railway supplements public transport with many residents using the route as a means of leisure access to the countryside and this will be significantly enhanced by bringing the terminus of the railway to the most populous town in the district.

The proposed track and platform are all being designed to Office for Road & Rail (ORR) standards, meaning that should there be a potential reinstatement of a passenger line, it can operate as a shared track. Moreover, the licence agreement between the Council and the Churnet Valley Railway Trust means that CVR is obligated to work with Network Rail or other organisations should a reinstatement of the passenger line come to fruition. The proposal does not inhibit any future development of a link road between A53 and A620 as the terminus of the railway will be immediately south of land required for the development.

The reinstatement of the railway line is identified within the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's Corporate Plan; (Aim 3: To help create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages) specifically the corporate plan states aim to support:

- "flourishing town centres that support the local economy" by facilitating increasing visitors numbers and spend on historic railway and at locations close to new stations
- "encourage and develop tourism"
- "support the development of improved rail links with Stoke

With the above in mind, the Regeneration Team is fully supportive of this application and would recommend it for approval.

Kind regards
Helen Pakpahan
Senior Regeneration Officer
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council