

Is it Time to Re-open Saltford Station?
Notes from Saltford Environmental Group (SEG) Public Meeting
Saltford Hall 26.07.11 19.30 hrs

Present	Chair. Dick Bateman.	Note taker. Sheila Bateman.
SEG	Current Chairperson. Ben Eve.	
SEG	Transport Spokesperson. Chris Warren.	
Saltford Parish Council	Vice Chair. Cllr. Duncan Hounsell. (Lib Dem).	
B&NES	Cabinet member for Transport. Cllr. Roger Symonds. (Lib Dem).	
Audience	133 other people.	

The Chair, Mr Dick Bateman, opened the meeting by saying that he was not a member of Saltford Environmental Group (hereafter SEG) but had been asked by the Group to chair this meeting as an independent Chairperson. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the poster statement "Electrification of the line means the time to re-open Saltford Station is NOW!" but he preferred to re-phrase this as a question. The question should be

"Is it Time to Re-open Saltford Station?"

He explained that Saltford Station was opened in 1841, four months after the GWR line was opened, and it was closed on 5th January 1970, following Dr Beeching's cuts, and went on to show the front page of the Bristol Evening Post of Thursday, 30th June 2011 to the audience and say that when a serious newspaper has Saltford station on a map of a possible future rail network of the Bristol/Bath area, it is time to consider this question. To discuss the question there was a panel of four interested parties. He had hoped for five and on Thursday, 21st July he had telephoned Network Rail to invite a representative to this Panel and was promised that this request, referenced 2882800, would be considered, but did not hear from them. (At the time of writing, the Chairman has just emailed Network Rail with that reference number to ask why he did not hear and has offered to send a copy of these notes to them.)

Each panel member then spoke to the question for 2 minutes or so.

1. Mr Ben Eve spoke about the exciting opportunity possible now. SEG was set up following the Saltford Parish Plan consultation of 2010. It was clear that the congested A4 causes pollution and inconvenience to residents. SEG's aim is for Saltford to reduce its carbon footprint and to increase sustainability, and Mr Eve referred to the 'Peak Oil' concept and the network of sustainability groups seeking to prepare for a future less dependent on petroleum products. SEG's first public appearance was during Saltford Festival in June 2011 when there was a very good response. An empty unused station with much infrastructure already in place could not be ignored, hence this meeting, which had today gained publicity on Radio Bristol. He ended with an appeal for people present to join SEG and to leave their email addresses to receive information.
2. Mr Chris Warren started by recognising how well the issue has been supported. The Government had announced the electrification of the London to Cardiff line through Bath and the recent change of administration at B&NES was likely to mean more emphasis on rail transport. Even if it takes 5 years to re-open Saltford Station, how much might car fuel prices have gone up to by then? Buses are very expensive, too. Car parking and access onto the A4 road could be a problem, but many Saltford residents could walk to the station and visitors to Saltford could come by train instead of by car, especially if there was an hourly service, helping to reduce visitor car parking in the village. Mr Warren's discussion with a local Estate Agent had even suggested that a station could enhance house prices. That so many people had come to this meeting showed a need and desire for a station. He

felt that Saltford has a vital asset in this station and should do everything it can to have it re-opened.

3. Cllr. Duncan Hounsell had been returned to the Council in May 2011 and had heard the new leader of B&NES (Councillor Paul Crossley) mention Saltford Station. Consequently, the new Parish Council had resolved to ask B&NES to include Saltford Station in any future transport studies. Although the Parish Council is currently neutral on this issue, as an individual he supports a railway station for Saltford and will be asking the Council to support it also.
4. Cllr. Roger Symonds thought the transport brief is often considered a "poisoned chalice", as there is no 'silver bullet' solution to B&NES's traffic problems but he feels that rail should play a greater part than it does now. The number of people using trains at Bath and surrounding stations is increasing and now is the opportunity to lobby Government to shift money from road to rail. He suggested that SEG should link this campaign with Corsham, who had a plan to re-open Corsham Station dropped in the 1990s but are now lobbying to have it restored. Cllr Symonds referred to the millions spent on roads without any benefit and that massive road projects were a thing of the past. There would be no money available after electrification and so now was the time to fight for a station in Saltford.

The Chairman then invited comments and questions from the floor to which the Panel could respond. So that the note taker could take accountable notes, speakers were asked to give their names.

1. Phil Harding encouraged everyone to support this move as energy prices rise, and the age of cheap energy was over. The world was halfway through its oil reserves so the community needed to show its resilience and campaign for a station.
2. Cath Munn then asked if the A4 traffic would really change if the station opened. Might it get worse? Cllr. Symonds replied that a station is not the only solution. It would not solve the problem at a stroke. A collection of smaller initiatives was needed too. Bus fares could not be tackled because the buses are in private ownership. Cllr. Hounsell agreed and pointed out that a bypass is only an aspiration in the local Transport Plan till 2026 and may never happen. A station is a real possibility. Mr Eve could not guarantee that a station would cut traffic but that it would give people options. Mr Warren then added that fuel prices could be up to £10-12 per gallon in the next five years so car use is likely to reduce. The junction from Bath Hill into the station yard could be improved. Ms Munn then pointed out that as she lives on The Shallows, she could see The Shallows becoming a giant car park, especially if a station car park charged fees, so residents of The Shallows should be fully involved.
3. Lesley Cook said that the bypass had not materialised and was swept away. Why wait 5 years? Why weren't Network Rail here? Does this meeting have any force? Mr Warren responded that if the people of Saltford provided momentum he undertook to work as hard as he could, and it could be both achievable and affordable. Everyone pays council tax- what do they get? This issue needs support. Mr Eve acknowledged it could be a fight, but that SEG will channel the momentum. Cllr. Symonds felt that this meeting was a good start. Portishead was almost open again and Severn Beach managed to stay open. When B&NES meet with Network Rail they can include Saltford in that discussion. Plans for a Metro published recently include Saltford. It is imperative to keep going despite setbacks.
4. John Davies queried Who do you ask? Who makes the decision? Cllr Symonds said the

Department of Transport is funding electrification and is asking B&NES what it wants. If Saltford is included within the franchise then B&NES should be able to apply pressure. Mr Warren pointed out that any decision is political. B&NES is now likely to give political support, whereas Portishead did not have such support from North Somerset Council.

5. Tim Warren, Conservative Transport Spokesperson on B&NES pointed out from the floor that for once he agreed with his opposite number!
6. Brian Cooper asked for clarification, as it is the Great Western line that will be electrified, not the South Coast line. Mr Warren replied that at least Saltford residents could get on a train to Bath and Bristol. Saltford needed its own dot on the map. Cllr Hounsell added that the main line strategy for the next 9 years does talk about a shuttle from Bath to Bristol, maybe even Avonmouth, so Saltford needs to be included.
7. Sheila Linfield, a long time Saltford resident, spoke of the changes she had seen and how things can change so fast. She would willingly dispose of her car if there was a train service, and she knows all her neighbours agree. Mr Warren described the Beeching cuts as the worst ever political decision, but the Chair, playing Devil's Advocate, pointed out how some rural lines had become uneconomic with the advent of the car. The problem was that then there were no Richard Bransons to build new lines on new routes.
8. Tony Pascoe could remember the old station and was excited at the thought that it could re-open, but was worried about The Shallows becoming an overspill car park. However, Freshford had clearly benefited from its station reopening. He had heard the possibility of a business park on the station site which he did not favour, so he hoped the Parish Council would support a station. Cllr. Hounsell pointed out that several parish councillors were present so could hear the strength of the views. Mr Warren said he had mentioned the possibility of the yard being used as a business park, or amenity area, but thought industrial units would not suit.
9. Fred Blampied, from The Shallows, thought that a station would generate more train traffic. Cllr. Symonds said there would be the same number of trains but travelling more quickly. Mr Warren thought that the new GPS signalling could increase capacity.
10. Dave Waters asked how to capture the arguments for and against, and about a risk assessment. Mr. Warren suggested that if people were interested they should get involved; campaigns need funding, community support and enthusiasm. Mr Eve pointed out that no-one on the panel had opened a station before, so needed to find their way. When Mr Waters asked if there was a website, Mr Eve replied that SEG were hoping to set one up. Mr Warren added that people were needed to knock on doors, and gather a petition, and that good publicity was necessary. The Chair then took a straw poll which showed pretty unanimous support for a station and only 4 against a campaign.
11. Noel Dawson said it was too soon; the arguments were not yet well developed. Traffic and parking on the High Street was already swollen by people parking then cycling to Bristol or Bath. He pointed out that since car parking charges at Keynsham station had risen, previous amenity land by the river had been engulfed by parking. The same could happen in Saltford. It could also affect amenity use of The Shallows. Residents might need parking permits. Mr Eve pointed out that a large and thorough feasibility study would be needed, as current access is dangerous, so consultation would take place at each stage. SEG would be crazy to ignore other impacts, and would need to weigh all views. Mr Warren reiterated his view that as cars become more expensive to run, more people would use the

train. Lesley Cook pointed out that parking at the village shops had not diminished despite attempts to encourage cycle use.

12. Alison Hermes felt rail was the right idea but could be just as expensive, and Suzanne Sutherland asked about our representation in Parliament. Mr Warren will be writing to the local M.P. Jacob Rees-Mogg and there could be a letter campaign. Cllr. Francine Haerberling, from the floor, pointed out that she and Cllr. Paul Crossley had monthly meetings with both local M.P.s so the issue could be raised then. Cllr. Symonds advised contact with the West Wilts M.P. too, referring to Corsham. Ms Sutherland then remarked that the Park and Ride at Newbridge was always full at Christmas. Would Saltford be full too? Cllr. Symonds pointed out that the Park and Rides were often full so it would be better not to have to wait 5 years. Mr Warren said that Bristol and Bath had the third highest CO2 emissions in the country. High bus fares cause people to drive to Newbridge Park and Ride to get on a bus that then chases the X39 into Bath!
13. Andrew Jones queried emergency vehicle access to The Shallows, especially when it was busy. Mr Eve acknowledged the size of the problem, especially because of the variety of users. Perhaps a parking permit for limited times of the day could help residents. The High Street was often congested too, and parking and congestion is a problem everywhere and needs to be dealt with separately from the issue of a station.
14. David Marshall asked whether the use of the site is safeguarded in the local plan. It would need formal registration for the core strategy. Mr Warren hoped that both councils could ensure that this happens. The Chair added that a solution for bicycle security needed to be found, if people were encouraged to cycle to a re-opened station.
15. Ian Kelly, a Keynsham resident, pointed out that parking in Keynsham is already saturated, and with new building in the pipeline, pressure will grow. Residents of east Keynsham would then drive to Saltford if it were open.
16. Kath Munn queried light emissions since The Shallows is quite dark at night and should stay that way. Also there was potential noise pollution from doors slamming and trains tooting at their approach to the station. Residents need to know. Mr Warren replied that new lighting at the tennis club was high technology with virtually no light spillage. He couldn't be sure about noise though.
17. Nicki Reeves thought it was a great idea, but pointed out that parking is a major issue needing to be addressed whether or not the station re-opened. The Chair said that SEG needed to include solutions for all such negative problems. Kath Munn added that she would use the station if it re-opened but valued her home environment and didn't want it spoilt.
18. Trevor Rumbold used to work at the M.O.D. so told the meeting that the environmental impact of any government project would be thoroughly researched.
19. Tim Warren asked whether an electrified service would stop at small stations. Railway operations are not democratically controlled, but if Saltford was a stop before then why not now? Mr Eve pointed out that the high speed trains would not stop at local stations.
20. Brian Cooper then asked if and when B&NES would press the business case for a station. Cllr. Symonds replied not yet, but that it would be part of feasibility planning and should not be too difficult.

The meeting closed at 8.55pm.