
Theale Railway Station Upgrade Scheme

Options Assessment Report (December 2019 *updated May 2020*)



HM Government



Thames
Valley
Berkshire
LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP

GWR



West Berkshire
C O U N C I L

Options Assessment Report for Theale Railway Station Upgrade Scheme

1. Introduction

Context

- 1.1 This Options Assessment Report has been written to support the development of the business case and scheme details for the Theale Railway Station Upgrade Scheme. This is a joint project between Great Western Railway (GWR) as train operating company (TOC), and West Berkshire Council (WBC) as local highway authority, which seeks to provide enhancements at Theale Station to improve sustainable transport interchange, increase Park and Rail capacity and enhance customer facilities.

Background

- 1.2 Both WBC and the local community groups have held long aspirations to improve passenger facilities and access to the main platforms at Theale station.
- 1.3 One of the main issues affecting the station is that there is no means of step-free access from the station entrance and current ticket office to either of the main platforms. Network Rail are committed through the “Access for All” project to delivering a new footbridge with lifts during its Control Period 6 (2019 – March 2024). Once complete, this will allow the station platforms to be fully accessible to all rail users for the first time, and is a key component of the Theale station upgrade project.
- 1.4 In addition to the current lack of access to the main platforms, the station fabric and passenger facilities at Theale are largely out-dated and in need of refurbishment. The existing forecourt arrangements are unattractive and can result in conflict between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.
- 1.5 This project will enable the opportunity to commission the new station building that was provided through the Reading Urban Area Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) in 2014.
- 1.6 The station also supports access to the several industrial estates and the Arlington Business Park, all of which are within easy walking distance. This includes assisting several active workplace travel plans in terms of reducing single occupancy vehicle journeys and promoting sustainable travel.
- 1.7 There has also been significant investment by the rail industry on the Berks and Hants line passing through the station as part of the wider Great Western upgrade. This has seen completion of electrification of the line as far west as Newbury and the provision of new electric and bi-mode rolling stock on services calling at the station, which have brought an increase in customer capacity and comfort.
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Purpose of Report

- 1.8 The purpose of the report is to set out the strategic case for the upgrade scheme proposed at the station, including the process of identifying the need for the interventions and the process of option development and selection that has informed the decision to proceed with the identified scheme. Following acceptance of this report by both GWR and WBC, an Appraisal Specification Report (ASR) will be produced to set out the assessment methodology for the Full Business Case.
- 1.9 This report is structured into the following sections:
- **Strategic Context & the Drivers for Transport Intervention** – Providing background information and evidence regarding Theale station and the local area it serves, plus identifying the problems and challenges that act as drivers for change. It also highlights the national and local policy context that has governed the development of the bid and the project so far. The section concludes by outlining the key objectives that will guide the project as well as the key stakeholders.
 - **Strategic Option Appraisal** – Outlining the options that have been developed for the project. These have been assessed against the key objectives and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (TVB LEP) strategic priorities for infrastructure investment outlined in its Strategic Economic Plan and emerging Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy. The appraisal process concludes with an assessment of the deliverability of each of the options.
 - **Conclusions** – A brief resume of the option assessment process and identification of the preferred option that should be taken for the Full Business Case.

2. Strategic Context and the Drivers for Transport Intervention

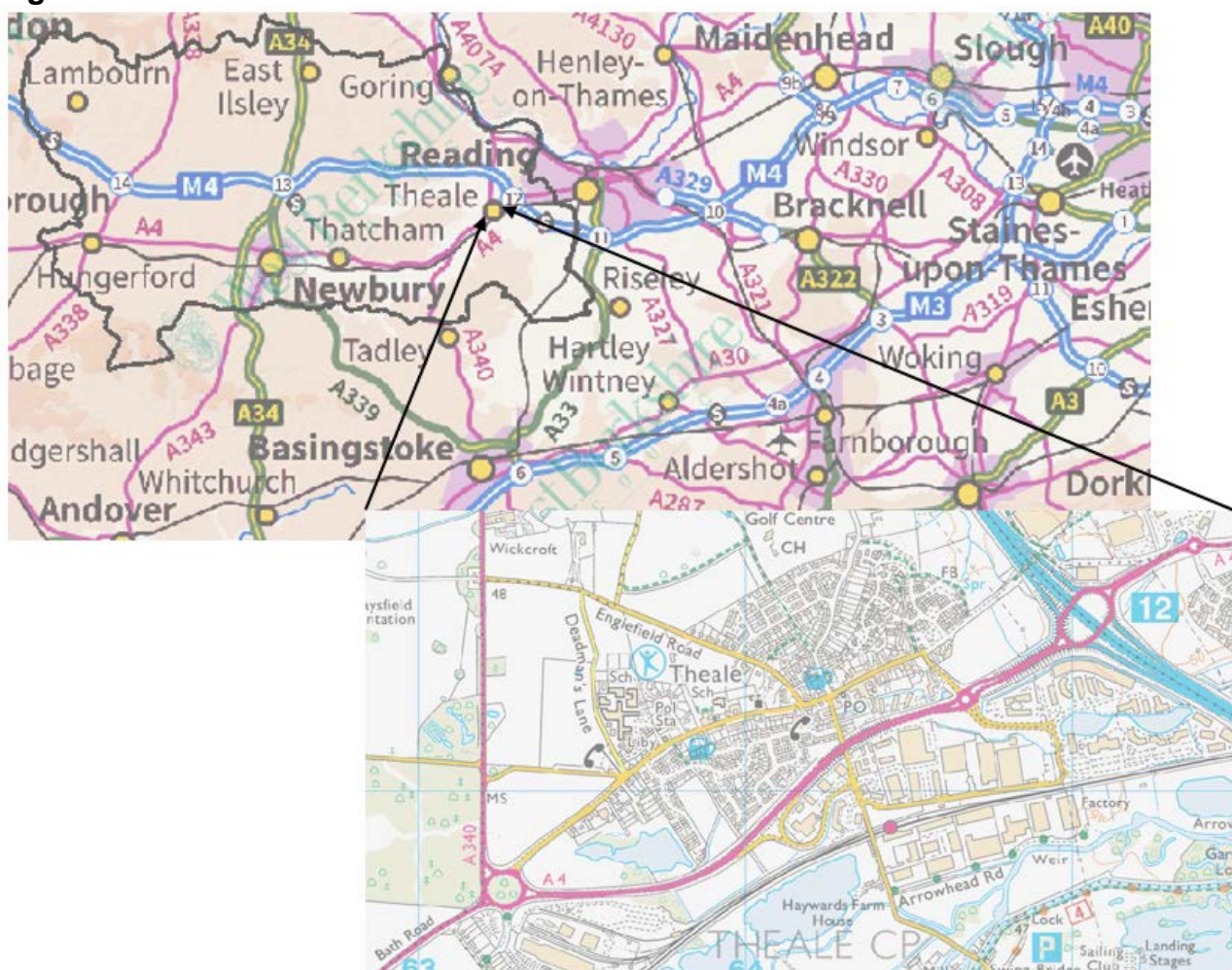
Introduction

- 2.1 This chapter describes the strategic context and key drivers for intervention that are behind the rationale for the Theale station upgrade project. It provides an outline of the area surrounding and within the station, the importance of the railway to the local community and businesses and the policy background that has acted as the driver for change and supports the development of the project.

Area Description

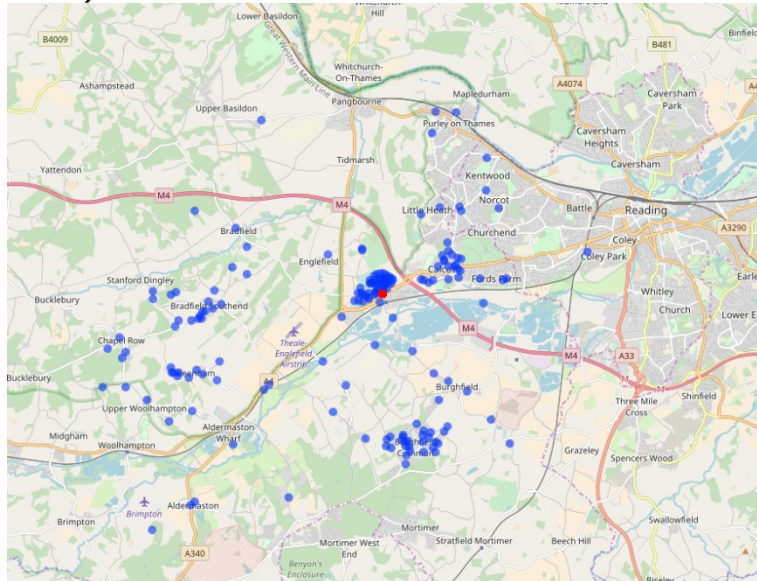
- 2.2 Theale Railway Station is located to the south of the village centre, separated from the village by the A4 dual carriageway. The station sits alongside the industrial and business premises on Brunel Road, plus the Arlington Business Park and Arrowhead Industrial Estate lie within a short walk of the station. The location is shown in Figure 2.1 below;

Figure 2.1 – Theale Station Location



- 2.3 The station also acts as a railhead for the local communities in the Theale area, with passengers travelling to the station from surrounding rural communities to use train services from Theale. The catchment area for the station can be seen in Figure 2.2 below which indicates the location of season ticket holders travelling from Theale station.

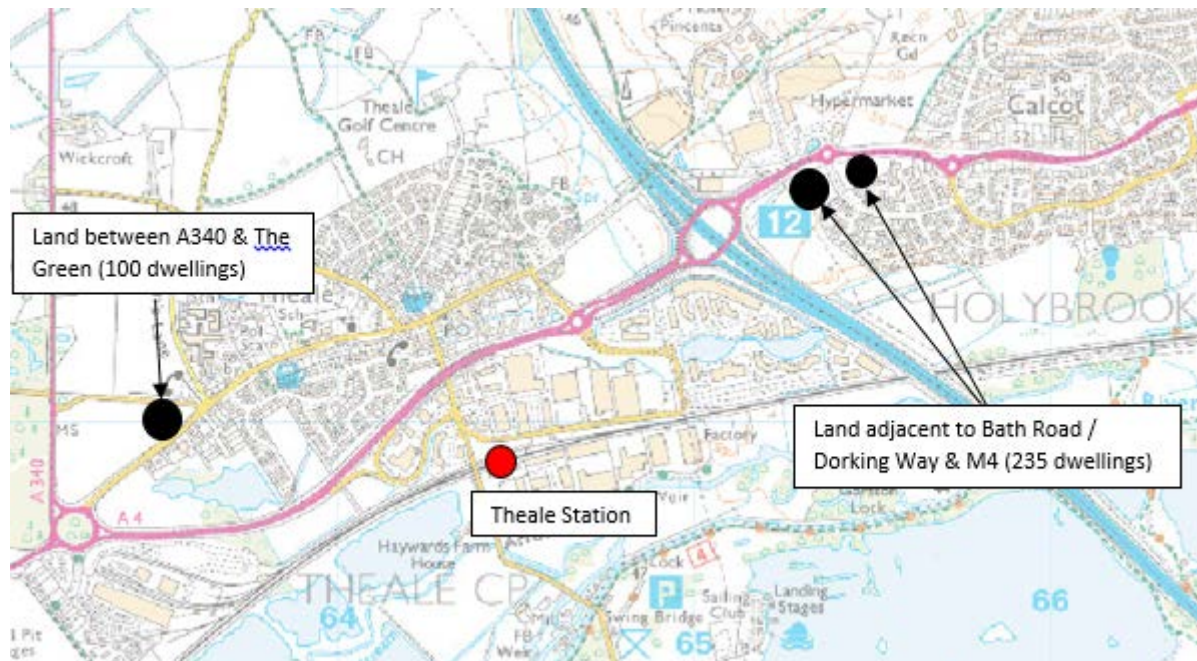
Figure 2.2 – Location of season ticket holders from Theale Station (source: GWR)



- 2.4 Figure 2.2 also indicates that some season ticket holders are using the station who are based in the residential areas of Calcot and Tilehurst which lie to the east of the M4 on the western edge of the wider Reading urban area. Residents from these areas are able to access the station by the pedestrian/cycle route which crosses the M4 just west of Junction 12 and feeds into Theale High Street, or via the A4 if travelling by car or using the Jet Black1 bus service which calls in Theale High Street.
- 2.5 The main pedestrian and cycle access route between the station and the centre of Theale is via Station Road, which passes under the A4 bypass with pavements on either side. However, this pedestrian route also needs to cross Brunel Road to access the entrance to the station. Brunel Road is the access road for the station car park and to the industrial and warehouse premises in the local area. As there are no formal crossing points on Brunel Road, this brings the risk for conflict between pedestrians and cyclists wishing to access the station with vehicles using the road (including large goods vehicles).
- 2.6 At present, there are no bus services that directly serve the station (although rail replacement buses use the car park when required). The main bus service through Theale, the Reading Buses Jet Black1 Reading-Newbury service passes through Theale High Street, with stops close to the Station Road junction. However, bus access to Theale station is constrained as there is a physical width restriction on Station Road at the underpass beneath the A4 bypass, plus there is a structural weight restriction on the canal swing bridge on Hangar Road to the south of Theale which prevents bus connections to communities such as Burghfield Common.
- 2.7 The parish of Theale has a population of 2,939 (source: ONS mid-year population estimate 2016), although the Figure 2.1 indicates that the station has a much wider catchment area. Theale has been identified as a site for housing allocations in the current West Berkshire Local Plan (2006-2026) and referenced in the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD). Land between the A340 and The Green, Theale has been identified for up to 100 dwellings. The site is around 1.4km walk or cycle from the station.

2.8 Further housing site allocations have also been identified within the catchment area for the station. These include sites in nearby Burghfield Common which could cumulatively provide around 160 dwellings and would be within easy driving distance of the station, and further sites close to M4 J12 at Calcot. Figure 2.3 outlines the proposed Local Plan development sites in the Theale and Calcot area

Figure 2.3 – Proposed Local Plan Development Sites in Theale/Calcot



2.9 The station also has an important role in assisting workplace travel plans achieve their targets for promoting sustainable travel and reducing single occupancy vehicle journeys for staff and visitors. There are several active travel plans in the surrounding area which encourage the use of travelling by rail via Theale station. These include sites close to the station on Brunel Road and the Arlington Business Park, as well as other sites in the local area such as the IKEA store at Pincents Lane, Calcot.

Theale Railway Station

2.10 Theale Railway Station is managed by Great Western Railway (with Network Rail being the landlord); the train operating company responsible for operating services under the Great Western Rail Franchise. In terms of Theale, these relate to Outer Thames Valley passenger services towards Reading and London Paddington to the east, and Newbury and Bedwyn to the west. A summary of the pattern of rail services from Theale station as at December 2019 is shown in Table 2.1 below;

Table 2.1 – Rail Services at Theale Railway Station (December 2019)

Destination	Journey Time (minutes)	Peak Frequency	Off-Peak Frequency
Reading	6-10	3	2
London Paddington	33-41	2	1
Newbury	12-20	3	2
Bedwyn	28-31	1	1

- 2.11 Ticket sales data published by the Office of Road and Rail indicates that Theale Station had in excess of 495,000 entries and exits made during 2016/17, representing a 3.8% increase on passenger numbers compared to the previous year.
- 2.12 General trends demonstrate that rail patronage is increasing nationally across the rail network year on year, and Theale is likely to be no exception to this. Growth forecasts prepared by GWR for the next 10 years from 2018 anticipates a 17% increase in journeys from Theale. This equates to over 10,200 additional journeys.
- 2.13 The recent electrification of the Berks and Hants line between Reading and Newbury has enabled the introduction of faster electric trains on the rail services calling at the station. These new trains not only result in faster services, but also provide a significant increase in seating capacity, thus making rail a more attractive choice. Future improvements to come such as the introduction of Elizabeth Line services from Reading direct into central London and the proposed Western Rail Access to Heathrow scheme are likely to further increase the attractiveness of travelling from the station.
- 2.14 The main entrance to the station for all users is accessed off Brunel Road, immediately adjacent to the roundabout with Station Road. It is the main access point for pedestrians and cyclists from Theale and the majority of the surrounding industrial estates and business parks. Pedestrian access to the two main platforms from the current station ticket office and car park are via the flights of steps from the Station Road overbridge.
- 2.15 The station car park is located on the north side of the station, accessed via the main station entrance off Brunel Road. This is also used as the main drop-off and pick-up point, although there is no defined area. The current forecourt and car park layout has no dedicated marked pedestrian or cyclist space which can potentially result in conflict with vehicles manoeuvring in the car park or the drop-off area.
- 2.16 There are currently 215 car parking spaces (including 11 disabled bays) at the station. The car park is subject to parking charges, with a charge (as at October 2019) of £5.40 for a full weekday and off-peak rate of £3.30 (for arrivals after 10:00 and at weekends). Weekday occupancy levels suggest that the car park operates at or close to capacity. The car park is currently managed by APCOA on behalf of GWR.
- 2.17 At the present time, there are no electric charging points for plug-in vehicles in the car park.
- 2.18 On-street parking is severely restricted on the local road network in the vicinity of the station. Brunel Road has parking restrictions along its entire length, while Station Road has some time-limited and resident parking bays to the north of the A4 underpass. This means that there are no nearby alternative locations for parking when the station car park is full, other than public car parks in the centre of Theale, which are somewhat remote from the station.
- 2.19 Cycle parking at the station is limited, with five uncovered Sheffield stands plus five key operated cycle lockers (equating to 15 cycle parking spaces). These are often full and over capacity, with a waiting list for the secure cycle lockers.

- 2.20 The current station ticket office and ticket vending machine are located at the western end of the station, in the corner of the car park at the bottom of the steps leading up to the Station Road overbridge, which then connects with the steps down to the two main platforms. The ticket office is staffed at peak times, opening in the mornings only (Monday-Saturday until 13:00). The station does not currently have other customer facilities such as toilets, WiFi or taxi ranks.
- 2.21 A new station building with ticket counters, toilets and space for a retail unit was provided in 2014 as part of the Reading Urban Area Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) project to help make the station an attractive park and rail option for journeys into central Reading. The new building is located towards the eastern edge of the car park, further along Brunel Road.
- 2.22 The new building has remained dormant since it's installation due to uncertainty surrounding the provision and potential location of the new Network Rail "Access for All" footbridge outlined in paragraph 2.23. However since installation, changes to rail industry accessibility standards mean that a number of modifications are now necessary before the building can be brought into use. This project proposes to undertake these modifications so that the building is compliant with these current standards.
- 2.23 The current configuration of the station means that access to both main platforms being solely dependent on the use of steps down from the Station Road overbridge. This results in there being no step-free access to the platforms. However, this is to be addressed by the station due to benefit from a new footbridge with lifts to be provided by Network Rail via the Department for Transport's "Access for All" project. Once complete and operational, this will allow the station platforms to become fully accessible for the first time. It is intended that the new footbridge will be located further east down the platform at the far-end of the car park, close to where the new station building is located. NR is committed to deliver the footbridge scheme in the current NR Control Period 6, with current project timescales indication completion by September 2022. The new footbridge is key to the upgrade project in terms of improving accessibility for customers and is a focus for the reconfiguration of the station area and the opening of a DDA compliant ticket office in the new station building.
- 2.24 The opening of the new station building and the provision of the "Access for All" footbridge would shift the focus of pedestrian, cycle and vehicle movement to the eastern part of the car park. As a result, there would be a need to provide a new vehicle access point on Brunel Road to reflect the reconfiguration of the station forecourt area and route to the platforms. This project takes into account these changes, both in terms of the layout and circulation of the car park and on the local highway network on Brunel Road.

Problems Identified and Options Considered

- 2.25 The electrification of the rail line plus the introduction of new faster electric rolling stock with an uplift in seating capacity increases the attractiveness of rail travel. However, customer facilities at Theale station have not undergone any significant improvement in response to this. At present there are no customer toilets, WiFi, retail facilities or adequate cycle parking at the station. This project will aim to address some of these issues through bringing into use the new station building

provided through the Reading LSTF project as part of a new multi-modal interchange at the station.

- 2.26 The nearby Arlington Business Park is a significant and well-placed location for business in the Thames Valley area. However it has highlighted the poor facilities at Theale Railway Station and drab feel around the station as a barrier to attracting new companies. Whilst there is car parking within the business park, the parking demand for some buildings can be greater than the supply, plus there is a desire through its site travel plan for there to be a greater use of sustainable transport modes for access to the business park. The proposed options to upgrade customer facilities and improve the public realm at Theale station will help transform the appearance of the station and so make the business park a more attractive package which will help overcome the barrier to attracting businesses to the local area. The owners of the Arlington Business Park are supportive of the project to improve facilities at the station, including those providing better pedestrian and cycle access.
- 2.27 The new station building was delivered on site as part of the LSTF project for the wider Reading area in 2014. However, there have been numerous changes in legislation pertinent to the rail industry, such as the DfT code of practice for accessible railway stations, which have been introduced since 2014. A recent diversity impact assessment has identified that a number of modifications will be required to enable the station building to be compliant with current rail industry standards before it can become operational. Therefore, the project will seek to undertake the minor modifications and remedial works to allow the new building to be brought into use.
- 2.28 As mentioned previously, Network Rail is to deliver a new footbridge with lifts towards the eastern end of the station through the DfT's "Access for All" programme. The new footbridge will also be located close to where the new station building has been constructed at the eastern end of the car park. Once these become operational, the focus of access and movement within the station car park will shift away from the current ticket office and steps to the platforms, and instead be focussed over at the eastern end of the car park. This will require the project to reconfigure the surface of the car park area to take account of this and to provide a safe walking and cycling route through the station car park.
- 2.29 There is no step-free access onto each of the two main platforms, which prevents usage for wheelchair users and causes considerable difficulties for other users with prams, heavy luggage or mobility impaired passengers. These issues will be resolved with the provision of the "Access for All footbridge". The proposed modifications to the station building will enable it to comply with current rail industry disability and access standards. These will include the provision of a DDA compliant ticket office and accessible toilet. There will also be a need to provide a safe, clearly marked walking route between the new station building and the new accessible footbridge.
- 2.30 It is also likely that following the opening of the new station building and footbridge, that the pedestrian/cycle routes through and vehicle circulation within the car park will need to be reconfigured. New vehicle entry and exit points onto Brunel Road close to the new building are to be provided, which will complement the existing pedestrian entrance provided as part of the new station building. The provision of new entrances would present an opportunity to examine the linkages on the local

highway network in the vicinity of the station to ensure that they provide direct and safe pedestrian and cycle routes to Theale village centre and the employment areas along Brunel Road and the Arlington Business Park. This would help encourage sustainable and active travel modes to the station.

- 2.31 At present, there are no marked taxi ranks or short stay drop-off parking spaces within the station area, which can cause problems and safety issues within the car park. Options to provide such facilities as part of the re-ordering of the car park area and as part of a forecourt area around the new station building have been explored. The creation of an attractive forecourt area, along with improvements to station lighting will help to improve the public realm around the station area, thus improving on the current drab feel to the appearance of the station area.
- 2.32 The current cycle parking facilities at the station are limited, often being full and over capacity. If sustainable access to the station by bicycle is to be promoted, then secure cycle parking spaces, including CCTV coverage, would need to be increased. A review of cycle parking at the station undertaken by GWR based on the DfT's "Propensity to Cycle" tool based on local Census data, suggests that around 2% of journeys are made by bicycle (equating to approximately 70 cyclists). This is broadly comparable to similar stations on the GWR network and the proportion of passengers arriving at the station by bicycle. Using this data, a 100 space cycle hub is considered a suitable provision to cater for existing customers and to enable potential future growth. In addition, the Arlington Business Park have expressed enthusiasm for increase in the number of secure cycle parking spaces at the station for their business users to cycle to the station, leave their bicycle and access rail services.
- 2.33 Reading Borough Council's current transport strategy for the wider Reading urban area includes a number of park and ride sites placed at good access points for key routes into the centre of Reading. Theale is one of these identified locations to intercept journeys from the south-west of the Reading area, with Park & Rail being identified here rather than a conventional bus-based Park & Ride site in order to make best use of the infrastructure in place. This project presents an opportunity to deliver on this element of the strategic plan for improved access to the centre of Reading and for onward journeys. Reading Borough Council have indicated their support for this project.
- 2.34 The increased attractiveness of the newly electrified rail services and resultant increase in travel from Theale, along with the potential promotion of the station as a Park & Rail service for central Reading will result in increased pressure on the car parking availability at the station. There is currently significant demand for car parking for rail users at Theale, with occupancy surveys indicating that the existing car park frequently operates at or near to capacity. Occupancy statistics from GWR indicate a 2% increase in car parking occupancy between 2015/16 and 2017/18. Modelling assessments based on travel demand forecasts have also been undertaken to determine the number of additional car parking spaces that will be required in order to provide sufficient capacity over forthcoming years. The modal choice assessment undertaken suggests that an additional 98 car journeys to Theale station are likely to be made in the AM peak period particularly including with the station having a role as a park and rail facility.
- 2.35 It is not possible for the car parking area to be expanded beyond that currently within the defined station lease area, nor is there any land available in close

proximity to the station that could provide an additional parking. However, the options to reconfigure the station area through the new “Access for All” footbridge and opening of the new station building would provide an opportunity to explore options for increasing car parking capacity at the station by the provision of additional car park deck(s).

- 2.36 As part of the expansion of the car parking area, there is a need for the project to recognise the role outlined in the Government’s “Road to Zero” strategy for railway station’s car parks to have in terms of providing charging infrastructure for plug-in vehicles. As part of the improvements to car parking at the station, there presents an opportunity for electric vehicle charging points to be provided. This project would deliver four charging points, along with the passive provision for the additional installation of further charging points, thus allowing the station to be reactive to future demand if required.
- 2.37 The project also provides an opportunity to improve the existing pedestrian and cycle linkages between the station and the centre of Theale. These measures will aim to complement the measures to encourage sustainable travel to/from the station by undertaking enhancements and improvements to Station Road and Brunel Road. There will also be opportunities to improve the existing Wayfinding signing.

Impact of No Change

- 2.38 If a “do nothing” approach were to be adopted, it would mean that the current level of provision and quality of facilities at Theale railway station would remain relatively unaltered. As a result, the poor level of interchange facilities at the station (such as limited and partially uncovered cycle parking, lack of WiFi, limited car parking and confusing car park layout) would remain, and result in a poor quality customer experience. Furthermore, with no investment in terms of providing secure cycle parking this is likely to act as deterrent in terms of rail users choosing to cycle to the station.
- 2.39 A “do-nothing” scenario at the station would undermine the major investment made by the rail industry in the electrification of the railway line to Newbury and the introduction of new electric rolling stock. The poor level of station facilities and customer experience may prevent the local community and businesses from capitalising on the enhanced travel opportunities offered by the new train services. In addition, a poor quality and tired looking station is not in-keeping with the vision of neighbouring business tenants, particularly the Arlington Business Park.
- 2.40 Without investment, the new station building would be unable to be commissioned for use as it is not compliant with current rail industry standards. If no corresponding investment at the station followed the installation of the new “Access for All” footbridge the current ticket office, ticket vending machine, blue badge car parking spaces and cycle parking would be remotely located, away from the new passenger footbridge and lifts to the main platforms. This would result in users having the inconvenience of having to traverse from the car park to access the footbridge from the station ticket purchase point, and without a demarked walking route could potentially lead to conflict with vehicles moving in the car park. For mobility impaired users in particular this is not an attractive proposition.

- 2.41 Current observations have indicated a growth in demand for car parking at the station, with the car park often at or near capacity on most weekdays, with no on-street parking or other public car parks within a convenient distance. A lack of available car parking would not be able to satisfy the predicted future passenger growth and would also curtail the ability of the station to be an effective Park & Rail option particularly for journeys in to central Reading and further east.
- 2.42 Without improvements, it is highly unlikely that electric vehicle charging points and associated infrastructure will be able to be installed in the car park for the foreseeable future. This would prevent the station from fulfilling the role identified in the Government's "Road to Zero" strategy for railway station car parks to provide charging points.
- 2.43 In addition, a "do-nothing" approach is likely to result in impacts within the wider Thames Valley area. For example, this could contribute to increased demand for car journeys along the M4 corridor around Reading and towards London where congestion already currently occurs.

Strategic Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2019

- 2.44 The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
- 2.45 Section 9 of the NPPF provides a specific focus towards promoting sustainable transport, which includes an objective (paragraph 102 d.) that "opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued".
- 2.46 NPPF paragraph 110 considers that applications for development should:
- a) Give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second ... to facilitating access to high quality public transport, ... and appropriate facilities to that encourage public transport use;
 - b) Address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport;
 - c) Create places that are safe, secure and attractive – which minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, avoid unnecessary street clutter, and respond to local character and design standards;
 - d) Allow for efficient delivery of goods, and access by service and emergency vehicles; and
 - e) Be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.
- 2.47 This project has been developed to take account of these by promoting sustainable access by walking and cycling to the station, as well as providing an interchange with safe walking routes and secure cycle parking at the station. It will also provide

a higher quality level of passenger facilities at the station to encourage greater use of the new electric train services calling at the station and include the provision of electric vehicle charging points.

Thames Valley Berkshire Strategic Economic Plan (2015/16 – 2020/21)

- 2.48 The project will contribute to the delivery of the following elements of the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (TVB LEP) Strategic Economic Plan (SEP);

SEP Objective 3 – Labour Supply: Address congestion / Bring forward planned housing

The scheme seeks to relieve congestion on key routes into central Reading by being promoting the use of the station as a park and rail scheme. The scheme also brings benefit to employment sites within the vicinity of the station by providing an enhanced facility for encouraging sustainable travel opportunities for staff and visitors.

SEP Objective 6 – Functioning Towns: Infrastructure within towns / Infrastructure between towns

The scheme will improve connectivity to London and the economic heart of the Thames Valley. Investment in the park and rail offer will support access to local employment centres.

SEP Implementation Plan Package 6 – Access to London Heathrow; Access to London via motorway and rail;

The scheme directly links to the benefits being realised with the recent electrification of the Berks & Hants line, by providing faster journey times to Reading and London, and to Newbury. These linkages will be further enhanced with the delivery of wider proposed strategic rail projects such as the commencement of Elizabeth Line services and the construction of the Western Rail Access to Heathrow scheme.

SEP Implementation Plan – Promote local sustainable transport networks

The scheme supports multi-modal access to the station by sustainable transport, including walking and cycling.

The project has a strong fit with the SEP's Infrastructure (transport, communications and place-shaping) programme with alignments with the following packages;

Package 2 – Enhancing urban connectivity

The station upgrade project will improve connectivity and increase travel choice for residents and businesses in Theale. The upgraded customer facilities and interchange at the station afforded by the project, combined with the recent electrification and provision of new rolling stock, will boost connectivity between Theale and key centres in the TVB area, most notably Reading and Newbury.

The extra car parking also provided by the project will help the station to become an effective park and rail facility for journeys in to central Reading.

TVB LEP Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (2020-2030).

- 2.49 TVB LEP is currently developing a Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (BLIS). A locally approved version of the BLIS was published in October 2019, which sets out the LEP's priorities for local economic growth across the TVB LEP area for the period 2020 to 2030. This has been developed to take into account the five "Foundations of Productivity" set out in the Government's Industrial Strategy.
- 2.50 The BLIS contains a Vision to be *"the best of both global and local"*, and contains six Overarching Policies for Berkshire to be delivered through the BLIS. Of these, three are concerned with the activities of businesses in the TVB LEP area, with the remaining three being broader in scope, describing the place that Berkshire is determined to be.
- 2.51 The Theale station project contributes to the following BLIS overarching priorities;

Overarching Priority: Building vibrant places and a supportive infrastructure

- ...by accelerating a shift to more sustainable transport modes, both generally and in relation to the planning of new development (Infrastructure Action A)
- ...by supporting the delivery of TVB's Energy Strategy (Infrastructure Action E)

The station upgrade project will help improve connectivity and help increase travel choice for residents and businesses in Theale and the surrounding area. The upgrade facilities and interchange at the station afforded by the project, combined with the recent electrification and provision of new rolling stock, will boost connectivity between Theale and key centres in the TVB area, most notably Reading and Newbury.

The initiatives contained within the project to minimise energy consumption will contribute to the wider aims of the TVB Energy Strategy.

Overarching Priority: Making Berkshire an inclusive area where aspirations can be realised

- ...by accelerating a shift to more sustainable transport modes, both generally and in relation to the planning of new development (Infrastructure Action A)

The station upgrade project with the associated provision of the NR footbridge with lifts will deliver a fully accessible, safe and appealing station which will encourage opportunities for travel for all those seeking to use it. The project will also deliver improved connectivity between the station and the centre of Theale by improving pedestrian and cycle linkages to encourage sustainable travel choices.

Overarching Priority: Ensuring that economic growth contributes positively to Berkshire's environmental performance, recognising the need to respond to the climate crisis

- ...by accelerating a shift to more sustainable transport modes (Infrastructure Action A)
- ...by supporting the delivery of the TVB Energy Strategy (Infrastructure Action E)
- ...by securing better access to Heathrow Airport by sustainable travel modes (Infrastructure Action F).

The station upgrade project will encourage sustainable travel by promoting rail travel as an attractive alternative to car trips along the M4 (including to Heathrow),

and by acting as a park and rail facility for journeys into central Reading. The improvements to interchange facilities to the station, in particular the provision of the new covered, secured cycle parking area will encourage sustainable journeys to be made to/from the station.

The provision of electric vehicle charging points (and further passive infrastructure), plus options to incorporate photo-voltaic panels into the station will contribute to the wider need to reduce the carbon footprint.

Overarching Priority: Building places and a supportive infrastructure

- ...by supporting the role of Berkshire's towns as cultural and economic hubs (Place Action A)

Local Transport Plan for West Berkshire (2011-2026)

- 2.52 The Local Transport Plan (LTP) sets the framework for the delivery of all aspects of transport and travel for the West Berkshire district. A number of sections and policies within the LTP reinforce the desire to improve rail, pedestrian, cycle, accessibility and interchange facilities;
- 2.53 Section 4.4 (Transport Issues & Challenges) states that: *"Cycling is also an environmentally friendly form of travel, and is ideally suited for shorter journeys in built-up areas, including for regular commuting and to school/college....However, current levels of cycling are low. There are issues that dissuade people from cycling".* These include: *"Lack of secure cycle parking facilities, particularly in town centres and railway stations".*
- 2.54 Section 4.6 (Transport Issues and Challenges) comments: *"Rail services from West Berkshire stations have become increasingly popular over recent years....There are a number of issues and challenges that have been raised which the Council will look to address where possible. Some improvements will require changes to be decided nationally and others could be achieved by working in partnership with Network Rail and the train operating company. The improvements that would help to address some the issues are....Improvements to passenger interchange facilities and pedestrian/cycle connectivity to stations.*
- 2.55 Section 6.4 (Transport Vision for the Eastern Urban Area, paragraph 6.4.13) states that *"As well as links between the station and the village, the environment and accessibility of the rail station and its facilities will be enhanced. This will involve working with Network Rail and the train operating company to improve cycle and car parking facilities, improve station safety and security, and to make the station fully accessible for all rail users. Opportunities for significant improvements to provide a transport hub and 'park and rail' facility focussed around Theale railway station will be explored".*
- 2.56 There are several policies in the LTP which support the Theale station upgrade project, as outlined in Table 2.2 below;

Table 2.2 – Local Transport Plan key policy linkages to the Theale station upgrade project

<p>Policy LTP KT4 – Accessibility (equality, disability and inclusion)</p>	<p>The Council will work with partners to improve access to transport services and infrastructure for those with a disability (as defined in the DDA) To achieve this, the Council will focus on the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Working with transport organisations and providers to improve transport infrastructure such as pavements, crossing points, bus stops and rail stations to reduce barriers to travel.
<p>Policy LTP PT3 – Rail Travel</p>	<p>To continue to encourage the use of rail as an attractive and viable travel choice, the Council, in partnership with Network Rail and the train operating company will seek:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The provision of safe, integrated, affordable and efficient rail services that facilitate easy interchange with bus services and other modes of transport and that meet the travel needs of rail customers. ii. The improvement of...rail stations in West Berkshire to make these accessible for all customers.
<p>Policy LTP PT6 – Infrastructure and Interchange</p>	<p>The Council with local transport operators will seek to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Facilitate provision of appropriate facilities and transport interchange locations including rail stations and coachways, at individual bus stops and at other nodes on the public transport network in accordance with a prioritised programme. ii. Enable development of pedestrian, cycle and bus routes to deliver good opportunities for travel within and between urban areas including linking to rail stations. iii. Deliver adequate, easily-understood signage to assist customers when using interchanges.
<p>Policy LTP PT7 – Park and Ride</p>	<p>To explore the opportunity and benefits that park and ride may bring to the West Berkshire community, the Council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Explore opportunities with the train operating company and Network Rail for a transport hub focussed around Theale rail station and to provide a good quality transport interchange and serve as a park and rail facility for access east and west along the Kennet Valley line.

West Berkshire LTP – Passenger Transport Strategy (November 2014)

2.57 This is a supporting document to the main LTP outlined above which provides further details as to how the Council will look to deliver the LTP policies. It contains a separate Passenger Rail Strategy which reinforces the requirements for improvements to passenger facilities at stations, such as Theale.

2.58 With reference to LTP Policy LTP PT6 (Infrastructure and Interchange), Section 6.6 (Interchange with other modes) states: *“The Council will look to work with its partners to improve interchange facilities at rail stations for the better safety and convenience of rail passengers. This includes clear pedestrian and cycle routes, secure cycle parking, improved connectivity with bus services, bus stops and waiting areas, taxi ranks, and car drop-off points”.*

2.59 Section 6.5 (Park and Rail at Theale Station) states: *“The Council, in partnership with Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils, submitted a joint large project bid for the DfT’s Local Sustainable Transport Fund in December 2011. The development of a park and rail facility at Theale station was included as part of this bid. Such a facility would bring benefits to the wider Reading area by providing a fast, convenient passenger transport link to Reading town centre from areas to the west of Reading, and would help to alleviate congestion on the A4 Bath Road to the east of M4 J12”.*

Great Western Franchise Agreement, 2015

2.60 The current franchise agreement between the Secretary of State and First Greater Western Limited dated 22nd March 2015 under the current Direct Award 2 (DA2), GWR operate the franchise until 31st March 2020.

2.61 Schedule 6.2 (Specific Provisions) clause 5.7 states that “The Franchisee at all times during the Franchise Term will fully and effectively cooperate with the Secretary of State, Network Rail and any other third party in the development of plans and proposals to enhance existing stations”. It also states: “The obligation to co-operate pursuant to this....shall include the Franchisee carrying out in a timely manner all activities and actions at a station including meetings with the Secretary of State, Network Rail, a Local Authority or a relevant third party (as the case may be)”. In terms of this project, this can include working with WBC and NR in the design and delivery of a Local Growth Fund supported scheme.

Objectives

2.62 Four main objectives have been defined to directly address the key problems and issues identified by the project, and to guide the desired outcomes. They have been developed to align with the local policies of WBC as co-scheme promoter, the TBV LEP Strategic Economic Plan, and the Government’s national planning and transport policies.

2.63 Table 2.3 below provides an indication as to the desired outcomes for each of the four objectives;

Table 2.3 - Draft Objectives and Desired Outputs & Outcomes for the Theale Station Upgrade Project

Objective	Desired Outputs & Outcomes
1) Improve passenger interchange facilities and enhance the appearance of the station.	<p><i>Outputs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake works to allow new station building to be brought into use and to ensure that it is compliant with current rail industry standards. • Provision of new retail facility at the station. • Delivery of new covered, secure cycle parking facility for up to 100 bicycles with improved CCTV. • Improved interchange with drop-off zones and clear, safe walking/cycling routes through the station car park. • Delivery of improved local walking and cycling routes to the station, including improvements to Wayfinding signing. <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening of new ticket office building (including retail space) • Increased number of walking and cycling trips to the station.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased safety on Brunel Road and Station Road, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. • Sustain local business parks by providing a more attractive and user-friendly station. • Achieve improved passenger satisfaction levels with station facilities.
2) To enable the station to be a gateway for journeys to central Reading.	<p><i>Outputs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of increased level of car parking spaces to accommodate increased demand. <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To enable the station to become a Park and Rail facility for access to regional service centres. • Assist in relieving congestion on the M4 and key routes into central Reading.
3) To provide a fully accessible station that allows ease of access for all rail users.	<p><i>Outputs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modifications to new ticket office to include facilities for disabled customers. • Provision of a clearer, safer walking/cycling route through station car park to/from new station building and new "Access for All" footbridge. • Enhanced station lighting to current standards. <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables station to become fully accessible for all rail users. • Improved safety through better segregation of vulnerable users. • Greater assurance for rail users in terms of personal safety.
4) Deliver enhancements that minimise the carbon footprint of the station.	<p><i>Outputs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of infrastructure (including passive provision) to support the charging of plug-in vehicles. • Incorporation of solar panels as part of the improvements to the station. <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rail users with plug-in vehicles will be able to charge their vehicles at the station. • Enables the station to become part of the UK's ULEV charging network in line with the "Road to Zero" strategy. • Contribute to reducing the carbon footprint of the station and the wider rail industry.

Stakeholders

2.64 The following are identified as stakeholders for the project:

- Great Western Railway (co-promoter)
- West Berkshire Council (co-promoter)
- Network Rail
- Reading Borough Council
- Arlington Business Park
- Theale Parish Council
- Local residents and people who work in and around Theale

3. Strategic Option Appraisal

Introduction

3.1 This chapter outlines the strategic appraisal undertaken on the options developed for the station upgrade project. The assessments undertaken have been based on professional judgement, background policy context, knowledge of the study area and informed views on the delivery requirements associated with each option. The purpose of the Strategic Option Appraisal process has been to determine the most suitable option in terms of undertaking enhancements to the station so that it can best serve current and future needs of the residents and businesses in the local area, as well as contributing to the economic growth and sustainable transport priorities of the Thames Valley Berkshire area.

3.2 The structure of this chapter is as follows:

- Options identified for strategic appraisal
- Assessment against objectives and desired outcomes
- Option deliverability assessment
- Strategic option assessment conclusions

Options Identified for Strategic Appraisal

3.3 A range of options were formulated for the Theale station upgrade project. The options considered are set out as follows:

- **Do Nothing (DN):** Assumes no work is undertaken other than that associated with the Network Rail “Access for All” project, the delivery of which is independent from this project.
- **Do Minimum (DMin) Open Ticket Office only:** Undertake basic work to bring the LSTF-provided ticket office in to use regardless of whether the “Access for All” project is delivered.
- **Do Medium (DMed) Improved facilities with “Access for All” project:** This will see the new station building brought into use with the necessary modifications to make it fully accessible, along with the NR “Access for All” project. The option also includes interchange improvement measures in the station car park through the provision of a compliant marked walking route and improved cycle parking.
- **Do Enhanced (DEnh) station upgrade:** As DMed above, but also includes providing a forecourt around the new station building to provide multi-modal interchange and enhanced public realm, additional car parking capacity to enable the station to be promoted as a Park & Rail facility, including plug-in vehicle charging points and photovoltaic panels, and improvement to local pedestrian and cycle connections to the centre of Theale.

Assessment against objectives and desired outcomes

3.4 Options have been considered to deliver a package of measures to upgrade and enhance interchange, passenger facilities and accessibility at Theale station. These options have been developed to fit with the four objectives for the project specified in paragraph 2.52.

Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership Strategic Economic Plan (2015/16-2020/21)

3.5 The TVB LEP SEP identifies six packages for infrastructure investment with the following strategic priorities:

1. Unlocking housing development
2. Enhancing urban connectivity
3. Encouraging vibrant town centres
4. Positioning Thames Valley Berkshire for a digital future
5. Foundations for future growth
6. Enhancing the strategic transport network

3.6 Table 3.1 below compares the four options for the station upgrade project (as highlighted in paragraph 3.3) against the packages for infrastructure investment outlined in the TVB LEP SEP:

Table 3.1 – Assessment of Theale station upgrade project options against Strategic Economic Plan priorities for infrastructure investment

Options		Do nothing	DMin	DMed	DEnh
TVB LEP SEP Packages					
1.	Unlocking housing development	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
2.	Enhancing urban connectivity	--	Neutral	++	+++
3.	Encouraging vibrant town centres	-	Neutral	Neutral	+
4.	Positioning TVB for a digital future	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	+
5.	Foundations for future growth	---	Neutral	+	++
6.	Enhancing the strategic transport network	---	+	++	+++

Strategic Objectives for the Theale station upgrade project

3.7 The four main strategic objectives that have been defined to address the identified problems and issues of the project are highlighted in paragraph 2.56. A qualitative assessment for the four options for the project is shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 – Station Upgrade Project Option Assessment and Project Objectives

Strategic Objective	Do Nothing	DMin	DMed	DEnh
1. Improve passenger interchange facilities and enhance the appearance of the station.	Forecasted passenger growth occurs, but poor passenger facilities, interchange arrangements and lack of car & cycle parking remain.	Provides some improvement through the opening of the new ticket office building. However, no other improvements are made to wider access to the station are made.	New station building enhanced to current standards with TVMs and linkage with A4A footbridge. Better linkage with local highway network and links to local business parks.	As per DMed, but also delivers forecourt area with multi-modal interchanges around new station building. Additional car parking will include drop-off points
Score	--	+	++	+++
2. To enable the station to be a gateway for journeys to employment, education and service centres.	The existing level of car parking spaces will remain. No improvement to passenger facilities,	Some benefit through new ticket office and retail space. However, no increase in car parking spaces, and poorly laid out car park area.	Enhanced cycle parking with new cycle hub and pedestrian linkage to new bridge. May however result in the loss of approximately 20 parking spaces, thus increasing pressure on car parking capacity.	As per DMed. Also seeks to improve car parking capacity to allow the station to become an effective park and rail facility. Complemented with signage from road network.
Score	-	Neutral	+	++
3. To provide a fully accessible station that allows ease of use for all rail users.	Whilst the new NR footbridge + lifts will enable step-free access to platforms, this may be remote from current ticket office building. No improvements within the car park or ticket office for disabled users.	Facilities in the new station building would not be compliant for disabled users. Lack of clear and safe pedestrian route through station car park.	Works to improve new station building facilities for all users and improved, safe pedestrian/cycle route through car park will complement new Access for All footbridge.	As per DMed. Also provides new forecourt and additional car parking with required number of disabled spaces. New vehicle access to station forecourt from Brunel Road and local pedestrian improvements.
Score	--	-	++	++
4. Deliver enhancements to minimise the carbon footprint of the station	No improvements are made that will help minimise the carbon footprint.	No improvements are made that will help minimise the carbon footprint.	Options to be considered to install PV panels.	Charging points for plug-in vehicles (plus further passive infrastructure) in car park. New car park and station buildings will allow opportunities for PV panels to be installed.
Score	--	--	+	++

Option Deliverability Assessment

- 3.8 The Theale Station Upgrade Project involves a series of improvements that require careful and co-ordinated delivery in order to fulfil the objectives of the project. Therefore, an assessment focussing on the main issues that are likely to affect the deliverability of each option has been undertaken to determine whether the preferred option for the project is realistic, affordable and achievable.
- 3.9 Each of the options for the project were assessed against the following criteria:
- **Engineering Feasibility:** The level/complexity of engineering required.
 - **Operational Feasibility:** The extent to which delivery is dependent on operational issues for both the railway and local highway network, plus those of supporting parties.
 - **Complexity:** The statutory processes that will affect the delivery of the project (e.g. planning permission, station change process, new or revised traffic regulation orders, stakeholder engagement).
 - **Stakeholder Acceptance/Support:** The likelihood of whether the scheme would be able to secure stakeholder and public acceptance/support.
 - **Environmental Impact:** The extent to which the scheme will impact on the environment and, in particular, contribute to carbon reduction targets.
 - **Affordability:** Whether the likely scale of funding sought is within parameters acceptable for LEP funding, and whether alternative sources are available.
 - **Timescales Feasibility:** The extent to which the delivery programme is achievable in terms of when, if the bid is successful, external funding would be made available.
- 3.10 Each of the options (excluding the 'Do-Nothing' option) developed for the project were qualitatively assessed against each of the deliverability criteria outlined above. A score between 1 and 4 was awarded, with 4 being the best in terms of deliverability and having a low risk.
- 3.11 The Option Deliverability Assessment is shown in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3 – Deliverability Assessment for Theale Station Upgrade Project

Evaluation Criteria	Do-Minimum Improvements	Do-Medium Improvements	Do Enhanced Station Upgrade
Engineering Feasibility	Primarily focussed on straightforward works for bringing the new station building into use. Limited works to connect to services etc.	Involves bringing the new station into use, plus making necessary alterations so that it is able to be used by all users. Would also require works within car park to create secure cycle parking and provide safe walking/cycle route. May require some minor alterations on Brunel Road.	Would require same works as with the “Do-Medium” option. Also would provide a new forecourt area around new station building and the enlargement of the station car park by providing a second deck, to also include electric vehicle charging points.
Score	4	3	2
Operational Feasibility	Unlikely to have any major impact on the railway. May require connection to services in the highway.	Unlikely to have a major impact on the operation of the railway, although there may be works required affecting the car park which may result in a temporary reduction in car parking spaces. Also works to local highway network on Brunel Road may be required.	The provision of a decked car park may have an operational impact on the railway sidings access during the installation process. The new forecourt and car park works may also result in a temporary reduction in car parking spaces. Also works to the local highway network on Brunel Road to provide new accesses near to the new station building.
Score	3	3	2
Complexity	Relatively straightforward works to make building operational, and if required, on the highway. Unlikely to require any statutory permissions that could potentially hold up delivery.	Changes within car park and cycle hub likely to require NR landlord consent. Will need to be planned with the delivery of the NR footbridge.	As per Do-Medium. In addition, new car park deck likely to require prior approval application. Also NR asset protection or Landlord’s Consent will be required for new station forecourt. Work to improve pedestrian access and safety on local highway network.
Score	4	3	3
Stakeholder Acceptance/ Support	Likely to receive support from local residents and businesses in opening the new building for passenger use. However, scheme may not be acceptable for support from the LEP.	Likely to receive support from local residents and businesses. However, scheme may not be acceptable for support from the LEP.	Likely to receive support from local residents and businesses, plus Reading BC as the station would be more conducive to being a park and rail facility. TVB LEP likely to be supportive of the project as it fits with the LGF and some key objectives of the LEP SEP and the BLIS.
Score	1	1	4

Environmental Impact	Neutral	Neutral - May have a limited benefit in encouraging more local journeys to the station by walking and cycling.	Provision of PV panels and charging points will help to reduce the carbon footprint of the station. Any localised impacts of increased vehicle trips likely to be offset by wider area impacts.
Score	1	1	2
Affordability	Straightforward works that on their own would be of insufficient value to be included as part of a LGF bid, and could only be delivered via funding from other sources.	Scheme may be of insufficient size to be included as part of a LGF bid, which would mean that it could only be delivered via funding from other sources.	Option is of sufficient size to be considered by the LEP for LGF funding and would contribute to the wider objectives of the LEP SEP and the BLIS. However, there may be a risk that the complexity of the project in terms of the car park deck could result in an uplift in costs.
Score	1	1	3
Timescales Feasibility	Providing that funding would be available; it would be relatively easy to schedule the works into GWR's delivery programme. However, no funding for this has been identified.	Would need to be scheduled following the construction of the new NR footbridge. Delivery should be reasonably straightforward; it would be relatively easy to schedule the works into GWR's delivery programme. However, no funding for this has been identified.	Some possible risk to delivery timescales due to seeking permissions and/or possession on the freight siding in order to construct the car park deck. Construction may also be dependent on the prior delivery of the NR footbridge. Any highway works would form part of WBC's Highways Programme.
Score	2	1	3
Total Score	16	13	19

Option Appraisal Conclusions

3.12 The strategic appraisal of the options developed for the Theale station upgrade project has provided a sound basis that has enabled a preferred scheme to be taken forward for development and full business case analysis.

3.13 The strategic options appraisal concluded:

- **Do-Nothing** – The poor level of facilities at the station would remain with the existing ticket office adjacent to the steps up to the Station Road overbridge, with the new LSTF-provided station building remaining unused. Should the Network Rail “Access for All” footbridge be delivered at the eastern end of the station according to committed timescales; the station building will be badly-placed for passengers, who will be required to walk across the station car park. A do-nothing approach will also mean that no safe walking route through the car park will be provided.

- **DMin (Open Ticket Office only)** – This option would see the new ticket office building come into use, although this would only be the basic connection works. However, the building would not be compliant current rail disability access standards. There would not be any complementary works taking place in the car park and to the building itself to make it fully accessible and user-friendly for all users. This option would also fail to increase the number of cycle parking spaces which will negate the ability of the project to encourage sustainable trips to/from the station by bicycle. The size of the scheme would also be insufficient to attract LEP support and funding, and therefore is likely to be dependent on either future local authority or rail industry funding. This in the current financial climate is extremely unlikely.
- **DMed (New ticket office with further accessibility and interchange improvements)** – As with the DMin option, the new station building would be brought into use, but would also undertake the necessary modifications required to make it DDA compliant. Interchange improvements will be delivered through a new covered, secure cycle parking area and the creation of a safe clearly marked walking and cycling route through the car park. However, this would result in the loss of approximately 20 car parking spaces will further constrain the station's capability to be a park and rail facility and to satisfy the predicted future increased demand for car parking. The size of this scheme option would also be insufficient to attract LEP support and funding, and therefore is likely to be dependent on either future local authority or rail industry funding. This, in the current financial climate, is extremely unlikely.
- **DEnh (Enhanced station upgrade)** – This option opens the new ticket office building and secure cycle parking area outlined in DMed above. There would also be the delivery of an interchange forecourt area around the new station building, with new access points from Brunel Road, which will provide safe access to the new NR footbridge, taxi ranks, bus stops and drop-off areas. Additional car parking capacity will be delivered through the addition of a car park deck above the existing car park, which will enable the station to become an effective park and rail facility for journeys into central Reading and other destinations. Safe walking and cycling routes through the car park will be provided, improved pedestrian access will be provided on the local footway network on Brunel Road and Station Road. This option will also look to provide photo-voltaic panels and charging points for plug-in vehicles (along with passive infrastructure for further points according to future demand) to help minimise the carbon footprint of the station. There may be some risk associated with cost regarding providing an additional car park deck. The size and scope of this option would be significant enough to potentially attract LEP support and contribute to objectives in the TVB LEP SEP and the new BLIS.

3.14 The Do-Minimum option would only open the ticket office, and whilst being easy to deliver, would be unable to deliver the wider benefits accrued by the Do-Medium and Do-Enhanced options. Furthermore, without undertaking the modifications to make the building DDA compliant, GWR may not be able to bring it into use.

3.15 The Do-Medium option would bring the new station building into use and enable access to the new station footbridge. However, it would not deliver the wider objectives of the project, and would in fact reduce the ability of the station to act as a park and rail facility as a result in the loss of car parking spaces. This would

prevent this option from providing a greater contribution to local and strategic objectives, including those outlined in the TVB LEP SEP and new BLIS.

- 3.16 In terms of costs, the Do-Minimum and Do-Medium options are of insufficient size for a LGF bid and would need to be funded by WBC or the rail industry. This is unlikely to be affordable to both parties. The enhanced option would be of a sufficient size for a bid to the LEP for Local Growth Funding to be made.
- 3.17 The Do-Enhanced option would deliver the outputs and outcomes to meet the main objectives for the project, as well as contributing to national and local transport policies as well as the TVB LEP SEP and new BLIS. Although more complex in terms of engineering complexity and deliverability, the appraisal process has suggested that this (the Do-Enhanced option) should be taken to the next stage for consideration and provide the basis for the development of a Full Business Case.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 This Options Assessment Report has examined the options that have been put forward for consideration for the Theale Station Upgrade Scheme. These options have been developed to take forward the investment made through the Reading LSTF project of the new station building and that forthcoming through the Network Rail “Access for All” footbridge scheme. These projects will alter the focus of interchange and movement within the station area. In addition there is a recognised need to upgrade the level and quality of customer facilities, as well the physical appearance and public realm at the station, to maximise the investment already made in electrification and new rolling stock, and to accommodate the anticipated growth in rail travel.
- 4.2 The assessment has included a “Do-Nothing” option, along with other options ranging from small-scale improvement works through to more complex proposals that involve a wider range of improvements that would fulfil the objectives of the project. Each option has been assessed the TVB LEP SEP’s priorities for infrastructure investment, how they contribute towards the objectives for the project and their deliverability.
- 4.3 Upon consideration of the assessments; it is concluded that the Enhanced Station Upgrade (**DEnh**) be selected to fulfil the project’s objectives. It is considered that this option, although more complex in terms of deliverability, will have the potential to deliver the greatest benefit for all rail passengers and the local community served by Theale station, and allows the station to fulfil the role of a Park and Rail facility as part of the local transport strategy for the wider Reading area. This option also would deliver the greatest benefits that align with the TVB LEP SEP key strategic objectives.
- **Do-Enhanced Station Upgrade**) – *Enhanced improvement to interchange facilities to complement the new NR “Access for All” accessible footbridge through the opening of the new ticket office building, provision of covered, secure cycle parking area, attractive forecourt area around new station building offering enhanced multi-modal interchange with clear linkages to new footbridge and improved connectivity with local footway and highway networks. This option also includes the provision of an additional car park deck to increase capacity to allow the station to become an effective park and rail facility which will also include the provision of charging points for plug-in vehicles (plus passive infrastructure to allow for easier retrofitting) and the installation of photo-voltaic panels to help minimise the carbon footprint of the station.*
- 4.4 Therefore it is recommended that this option be taken forward for submission as part of the full business case for the project.