

Summix FHS Developments LLP

Fulford Hall Farm, Solihull

West Midland Rail Aspirations Study

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1 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 This report has been produced by Vectos on behalf of Summix FHS Developments LLP in relation to the potential increased opportunity for rail travel from Fulford Hall Farm as a result of the West Midlands Rail Executives (WMRE) aspirations. The WMRE is a combination of West Midland Local Authorities who direct and influence the right local decisions regarding train services. They do not operate the trains, but work with them.
- 1.2 This document provides an overview of the existing nearby Northwest Warwickshire Railway (NWR) Line including the key local stations. This document reviews the WMRE Policies and Warwickshire County Council Policies regarding enhancing and developing the line.
- 1.3 Using the available information, a robust assessment regarding the emerging potential of enhanced rail travel from Fulford Hall Farm for commuting and other purposes has been undertaken.
- 1.4 This document takes into account the changes in travel patterns which have occurred in 2020 as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. Whilst 2020 did see a marked reduction in the number of rail passengers and rail use, this is expected to be a temporary position.
- 1.5 The continued importance of the rail network to deliver key government objectives is demonstrated by the continuation of the HS2 scheme¹, which will directly benefit Birmingham and the immediate surrounding areas such as Tidbury Green. In addition, recent policy announcements from the Government during the pandemic², and the introduction of short-term emergency recovery measures demonstrate the long-term importance placed on the rail network,
- 1.6 The roll out of a COVID vaccine, which started in December 2020, should also lead to a return to a demand for rail travel, which will continue to play a key role in delivering mobility in the

¹ 'Notice to proceed' issued to construction companies on 15th April 2020, and three non-executive directors appointed to HS2 Ltd board on 14th July 2020 to strengthen oversight and scrutiny of the UK's largest infrastructure project.

² The announcement on 21st September 2020 to provide Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements (ERMAs) and end rail franchising

UK in the future and make a significant contribution towards addressing the climate crisis and achieving the UK's net zero carbon targets.

2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Tidbury Green

- 2.1 Tidbury Green is a small rural settlement located to the south-west of Birmingham and within the metropolitan borough of Solihull. Tidbury Green is close to the administrative borders of both Bromsgrove District Council and Stratford on Avon District Council.
- 2.2 Its population as of 2011 was 1,130. Census journey to work data indicates that 6% of residents of Tidbury Green travel to work by rail with 80% of these heading into Birmingham. Although Tidbury Green itself does not have a rail station, Tidbury is highly accessible to the rail network and residents of Tidbury will use one of three railway stations, Wythall, Earlswood or Whitlocks End.
- 2.3 **Table 2.1** outlines a comparison of local settlements, that have a railway station, and the percentage of residents who travel to work by train. This shows that while Tidbury Green officially does not have a railway station it has the demand equal or above areas with a railway station attributed to its very close proximity to existing stations.

Table 2.1 – Comparison of Local Rail Station Demand

Settlement	Population	Percentage that Travel to Work by Train
Tidbury Green	1,130	6%
Majors Green (North)	1,193	3%
Henley in Arden (South)	2,074	3%
Wythall (West)	11,377	5%

- 2.4 Wythall rail station is directly west of Tidbury Green and is connected to Tidbury Green via a pathway. It has bus stop with one service that passes through Tidbury Green which operates once per hour.
- 2.5 Earlswood rail station is to the southwest of Tidbury Green. It has no pedestrian provision or bus services to it from Tidbury Green.
- 2.6 Whitlocks End rail station is located north of Tidbury Green. It has pedestrian provision to it and has an hourly bus service via Tidbury Green. This is the same service that provides connection to Wythall station.

2.7 There is no specific cycle provision to any of the stations. However, the road routes to them are local and therefore would be acceptable for confident and experienced cyclists. Most of the routes have limited lighting.

Local Development

2.8 There are at present two large developments occurring within Tidbury Green. One to the east and one to the north.

2.9 These are shown at **Figure 2.1**.

Figure 2.1 – Tidbury Green Local Development



2.10 The eastern development (Barret Homes) is for 305 residential dwellings ranging from 2-5 bedrooms. This development has recently completed construction.

2.11 The northern development (Miller Homes) is for 200 residential dwellings ranging from 2-5 bedrooms. This development is currently in construction.

2.12 This local development must be considered in terms of the extra demand on local rail services.

North Warwickshire Railway Line

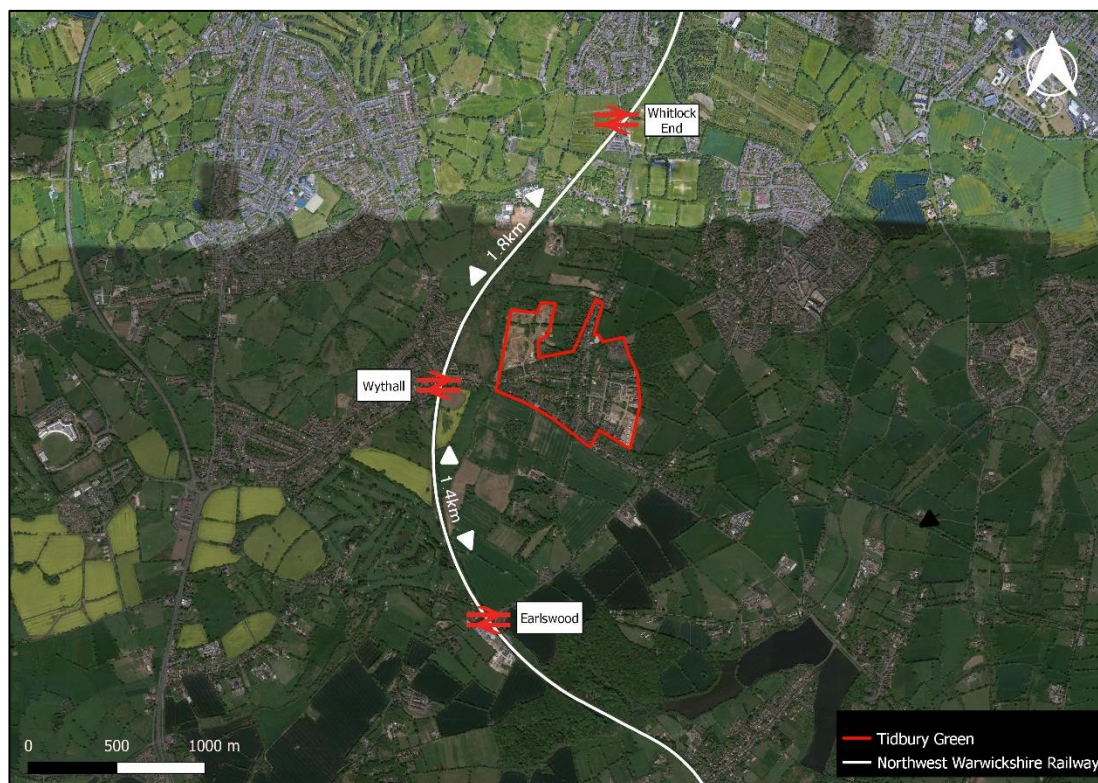
2.13 The NWR passes mainly through Warwickshire County Council and Birmingham City Council areas, although not exclusively.

2.14 Tidbury Green does not have a rail station itself. The nearest rail station is Wythall (1km), with Earlswood (1.4km) and Whitlocks End (1.8km) also nearby. These rail stations are located along the NWR, with one service per hour in each direction, one north to Birmingham and one south to Stratford upon Avon. The locations of these stations in comparison to Tidbury Green are shown in **Figure 2.2** and a full list of services outlined in **Table 2.2**.

Table 2.2 – Services along the NWR

Destination	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday	Journey Time
Stratford Upon Avon	Hourly (Extra services in PM peak hour)	Hourly	Hourly	28-32 minutes depending on station
Birmingham Snow Hill	Hourly (Extra services in AM peak hour)	Hourly	Hourly	18-22 Minutes depending on station

Figure 2.2 – Tidbury Green Local Railway Stations



- 2.15 The nearby Chiltern line, which runs from Birmingham to London, also has a branch line that connects with Stratford upon Avon. Travel time via the Chiltern Line to Stratford is shorter than along the NWR and passes through higher density areas.
- 2.16 The line which passes through Wythall and Earlswood is a secondary route used mainly for local villages commuting to Birmingham. The location of the different lines is shown in **Figure 2.3**. Both lines have one service per hour each way between Birmingham and Stratford upon Avon.
- 2.17 The NWR is also part of the Snow Hill Corridors, a group of rail lines that pass through and around Birmingham.

Figure 2.3 – Local Rail Lines



- 2.18 The NWL is not electrified and is double track along its entire length from Birmingham to Stratford (circa 40km). The line is not used for freight and consists only of passenger services with an average of three carriages (circa 300 people capacity).

Local Stations

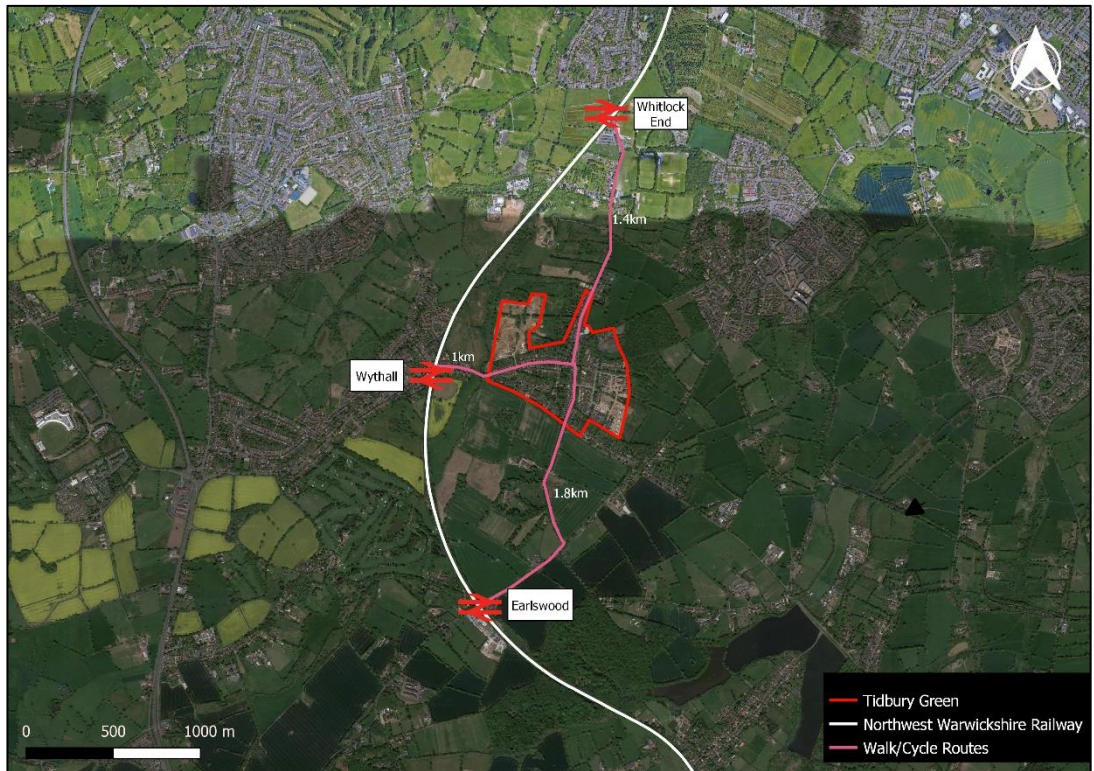
- 2.19 Wythall rail station is a two-platform station with no parking provision. It has sheltered waiting areas, transport information provision and cycle parking for four bikes. Wythall rail station is 1km from the centre of Tidbury Green. It is accessible to all and can be walked to from Tidbury Green along pedestrian footways. It is operated by West Midlands Railway at present and falls within the area supported by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM). Wythall rail station is in Zone 5 of the West Midlands Travel Network meaning people have the ability to buy unlimited travel tickets across Birmingham from Wythall station.
- 2.20 Wythall rail station is an attractive and accessible rail station for residents of Tidbury Green, which could be further enhanced with improved station facilities, including additional cycling parking, and improved connectivity in the form on enhanced bus services.

- 2.21 Earlswood rail station is a two-platform station with free parking provision for 12 vehicles and one disabled space. It has sheltered waiting areas and transport information provision. Earlswood rail station is 1.8km from the centre of Tidbury Green. It is operated by West Midlands Railway at present. There are no footways along the route to / from Tidbury Green. Earlswood rail station is also in Zone 5 of the West Midlands Travel Network.
- 2.22 The accessibility of Earlswood rail station, particularly for residents living to the south of Tidbury Green, could be enhanced through improved cycle provision at the station and improved bus connectivity.
- 2.23 Whitlocks End station is located to the north of Tidbury Green and is closer, 1.4km from Tidbury Green, and more accessible than Earlswood station, with pedestrian footways along the approaching roads. This station was upgraded in 2011 to provide better facilities, namely car (111 spaces, 8 accessible) and cycle parking (2 spaces). It is also operated by West Midland Trains and is within Zone 5.
- 2.24 A summary of the provisions of each station is included at **Table 2.3** and the walking and cycling routes to them are shown in **Figure 2.4**.

Table 2.3 – Station Provisions Comparison

Provision	Wythall	Whitlock End	Earlswood
Distance from centre of Tidbury Green	1km	1.4km	1.8km
Accessible by Foot	Yes along footways	Yes along footways	No
Accessible by Cycle	Yes along main road	Yes along main road	Yes along country lanes
Cycle Parking	4	2	None
Car Parking	None	111 with 8 accessible	12 and 1 accessible

Figure 2.4 – Walking/Cycling Routes from Tidbury Green Centre to Local Stations



3 POTENTIAL RAIL ACCESSIBILITY

- 3.1 This section outlines the potential for emerging rail travel for residents of Tidbury Green and the current plans to improve the services/rail infrastructure available.

Rail Studies and Strategies

West Midlands and Chiltern Route Capacity Study (2017)

- 3.2 In a Network Rail Capacity Study (2017) the NWR was identified, in most cases, to have 30% spare capacity at peak times. Spare capacity was available along the majority of the line, at a level of 30% at peak times, but on the approach to Birmingham (3 stops from Moor Street) this spare capacity reduced to 0% at peak times. The demand for the train at the local stations to Tidbury Green was not exceeding supply.
- 3.3 Furthermore, the Network Rail Capacity Study identified that the Snow Hill Corridors of which the NWR is included would need an extra 36 vehicles (3 carriage trains) by 2043 to cope with demand at peak times. This was to account for the perceived expected housing growth along the rail lines and the increase in rail travel, especially for commuting purposes.
- 3.4 However, the rail network provides capacity throughout the day, not just at peak times, and the availability of this key form of mass transit at all times of the day should be fully utilised, particularly with people now adopting more flexible behaviour patterns and varying the temporal distribution of journeys which are made.

West Midlands 30 Year Rail Investment Strategy 2018-2047 (2018)

- 3.5 The West Midland 30-Year Rail Investment Strategy (2018) identifies the aspirations related to improving rail provision between the years 2018-2047. More specifically, between the years 2026 to 2034 it outlines aims to increase the frequency of services along the Snow Hill Corridors. No further details on how this increase in frequency would be achieved are provided. However, increasing services to Whitlocks End was specifically mentioned. Whether this means just to Whitlocks End or for the whole NWR remains unknown.

- 3.6 The delivery of new development along the rail line will add to the business case and justification for an increase in service frequency, which will benefit all users of the route, and all people and business located along the route.
- 3.7 In addition, the line already has the infrastructure (dual track, two way platforms) in place to support more services, money has been spent on upgrading stations along the line in recent years (2011), and demand for this rail line is expected to grow. Therefore, the increase in services should be achievable.
- 3.8 The increase in frequency is the key measures included within the document that directly relates to the NWR.
- 3.9 In addition, the 30-year strategy also links with individual council aspirations and objectives.

Warwickshire Rail Strategy (2019)

- 3.10 A review of the Warwickshire Rail Strategy (2019) outlines that rail patronage across Warwickshire has increased by 30% in the period 2015 to 2019.
- 3.11 The document also outlines the aspirations for improvement across rail over Warwickshire. The main focus is on services focused around Coventry, London and Rugby.
- 3.12 The Snow Hills Lines are outlined to have the following key objectives:
- Improve service frequencies;
 - Secure improved local services; and
 - Secure improvements to passenger facilities at key station.
- 3.13 A detailed review of where these broad objectives will occur determines that the focus along the NWR is at Henley station (south of Wythall). No specific reason was given for the focus on this station, however from analysis it serves one of the largest population areas along the NWR excluding areas within the Birmingham conurbation and Stratford Upon Avon and has the geographical space for improvements. The plans are to investigate and undertake appropriate feasibility work to improve the stations facilities and implement service improvements. This was later defined as increasing it to two services per hour each way from

one service per hour each way. The aspirational dates for this were 2027-2033, broadly similar to the West Midlands timeframes.

- 3.14 This provides further evidence reinforcing the notion that in the long-term service improvements are required/aspired along the NWR to include Wythall, Whitlocks End and Earlswood. The delivery of new development at Tidbury Green can provided added justification from the proposed increase in frequency of services along this rail line.

Conclusions

- 3.15 On initial review of relevant documentation, spare capacity along the NWR is typically 30% at peak times, or 0% at peak times on approach to Birmingham.
- 3.16 There is a demand for more capacity within the next decade. This can be achieved through increased frequency which is outlined in both the West Midlands 30 Year Strategy and Warwickshire Rail Strategy, with the latter confirming an aspiration for a bi hourly service. This would address the capacity issue while also give users more choice and convenience. This would increase patronage of the NWR. Additional development along the line can add to the business case for improved rail service frequency.
- 3.17 The impact of COVID 19 has not changed the rail strategies for the West Midlands and Warwickshire. Indeed, the continued delivery of HS2, and the continued importance stated by the Government in achieving a transport revolution and the role rail can play in this, emphasises how well placed Fulford Hall Farm is to deliver key transport, climate, health and economic objectives, and make best use of available and future infrastructure improvements.

Potential

- 3.18 Fulford Hall Farm is located in close proximity to Wythall station and can be accessed safely by pedestrian footpaths along the adjoining roads. At present it offers a regular service on the weekday and weekend with 2017 analysis suggesting there is always spare capacity. However, the forecast growth in rail patronage will increase demand on this part of the rail network.

- 3.19 The service is regular and relatively quick into Birmingham from Wythall (20 mins). It is at present an attractive option and certainly presents itself as a good base for emerging rail travel from Tidbury Green. Other local stations (Whitlocks End) also provide access to the same services and can be accessed by foot/cycle safely.
- 3.20 It is expected that there will be a desire to consider the use of the local train service by residents of Fulford Hall Farm. Which station this would be via would vary depending on the specific requirements e.g. parking, distance, direction of travel and residence location within Fulford Hall Farm. This is because each identified station has different facilities.
- 3.21 Those living in the northern part of Fulford Hall Farm will be closer to Whitlocks End than Wythall and those that may need to drive to a station would use Earlswood or Whitlock End, due to no parking at Wythall. Finally, if heading south Earlswood may be used as the train travel distance would be shorter although ticket prices remain the same. Overall, Wythall station and Whitlock End station would be the most used. Earlswood is inaccessible safely by foot and has limited facilities, although these could be improved, and it is also in the opposite direction to the main direction of travel to Birmingham.
- 3.22 The frequency of service (hourly) is the key challenge in relation to travel along the NWR. The proposals to increase the frequency to bi hourly are likely to materially enhance the attractiveness of rail travel on this route. A study by the European Commission³ determined that service frequency has an important influence on rail demand and is one of the three key considerations (the others being fare and journey time). A study by the University of Leeds⁴ outlined the mathematical 'costs' associated with different service frequencies, concluding that while regular services were better, the benefits of train travel increases with frequency.
- 3.23 If the outlined improvements to frequency occur, rail will become an even more attractive method of travel for Fulford Hall Farm and will have reduced 'costs' for users. This has been identified within the West Midland 30 Year Rail Investment Strategy and Warwickshire Rail Policy.

³ European Commission – Study on the prices and quality of rail passenger services – April 2016

⁴ Wardman Mark, Shires Jeremy, Lythgoe William – Consumer benefits and demand impacts of regular train timetables - 2004

- 3.24 There is significant scope for enhanced rail travel from Fulford Hall Farm, if a more frequent service is provided, which will address forecast issues with capacity. This is especially applicable for travel from Fulford Hall Farm into Birmingham and for commuters at peak times. Outside of peak times this is less of an issue.
- 3.25 Therefore, while baseline conditions are good and can be enhanced and capitalized on, a more frequent service will make a major contribution to the attractiveness of rail travel to / from Fulford Hall Farm.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

- 4.1 This report has been produced by Vectos on behalf of Summix FHS Developments LLP in relation to development at Tidbury Green.
- 4.2 This report sets out the existing conditions of the nearby Northwest Warwickshire Railway (NWR) including the key local stations, before undertaking a review of studies and strategies regarding enhancing and developing the line.
- 4.3 Fulford Hall Farm has the option of three railway stations with differing levels of station facilities. The most used station for residents of Fulford Hall Farm is likely to be Wythall, followed by Whitlocks End. Use of Earlswood station will mainly be attractive to residents to the south of Fulford Hall Farm.
- 4.4 The stations have an hourly service in both directions, providing access directly into Birmingham and Stratford Upon Avon.
- 4.5 The stations already have good facilities, but additional improvements could be made to enhance the accessibility and attractiveness of the stations to enhance rail travel from Tidbury Green.
- 4.6 A review of local studies and strategies identified that aspirations to increase the frequency of services along the NWR to two per hour. This would provide a material benefit to the attractiveness of rail travel to and from Fulford Hall Farm, giving users more choice and convenience, and new development in Fulford Hall Farm which can provide additional demand can enhance the business case for rail frequency improvements.
- 4.7 The impact of COVID 19 has not lessened the importance of rail provision for delivering future mobility. The critical role rail will play in the future prosperity of the country is demonstrated by the continued support for the UK's biggest infrastructure project, HS2. The importance of connecting into this key piece of infrastructure, and enhancing local rail services to maximise accessibility to the strategic rail network, is critical, and clearly demonstrated by the rail strategy documents for West Midlands and Warwickshire.

Conclusion

- 4.8 Fulford Hall Farm is well placed within easy reach of a well developed rail network. The proposals to increase the frequency of service from hourly to bi hourly will further enhance the rail credentials of the surrounding area, including Fulford Hall Farm. New development in Fulford Hall Farm can provide the additional demand to help support and justify the increase in service frequency.