



England's Economic Heartland Board

18 June 2026

Item 6: Major Development Activity

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Considers and approves the EEH consultation response to East West Rail 2026 consultation**
- b) Notes the EEH consultation response to New Towns Draft Programme**
- c) Agrees EEH should register as an interested party to the development of the OxSRFI NSIP and officers should provide technical insight**
- d) Notes the remaining content of this paper on Universal United Kingdom Resort and Forest City 1**

1. Purpose of the report

1.1. This paper provides an update on five major developments of regional significance with the potential to substantially change the usage of the existing transport network and system, at both local and regional levels: East West Rail; New Towns; Oxfordshire SRFI; Universal United Kingdom Resort; and Forest City 1.

2. Key points of note

- 2.1. 21 major developments in/near the Heartland have been identified by the team for active monitoring due to their potential to substantially impact the region's existing transport network and system, at both local and regional levels.
- 2.2. East West Rail has recently closed its third non-statutory public consultation on the scheme. EEH has secured an extension to allow for our approved regional response to be included.
- 2.3. EEH has provided a technical response to MHCLG's New Towns Draft Programme consultation. The Draft Programme indicates that the original 12 locations have been revised down to 7 for further assessment. These include Tempsford, Milton Keynes and Crews Hill & Chase Farm (Enfield). It is worth noting that LB of Enfield has now withdrawn its support for Crews Hill & Chase Farm being a proposed New Town.
- 2.4. Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (OxSRFI) has been accepted for examination by the Planning Inspectorate. This is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) scheme and, therefore, EEH would need to register as an 'interested party' to provide technical insights into the examination.

- 2.5. Central Government has announced £1.3bn investment into regional and local community infrastructure to support the Universal United Kingdom Resort. This includes £474 million for upgrades to the strategic road and rail network, on the A421 and at Wixams station.
- 2.6. Forest City 1 is a privately led large-scale housing development scheme seeking to establish a new city on the Cambridgeshire – West Suffolk border.

3. Context

- 3.1. There are a number of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP), NISTA UK Infrastructure Pipeline schemes and major housing programmes in development or construction in or neighbouring our region.
- 3.2. 21 developments are of particular note for the potential scale of impacts on the region's transport network and are actively monitored by the EEH team. These are outlined in Annex 1.
- 3.3. The involvement of EEH on each of these schemes is proportionate to the likely impact on the cross-border strategic road and rail network, and requests by local authorities and/or the Department for Transport for our involvement in them.

4. East West Rail – Proposed Consultation Response

- 4.1. East West Rail Company (EWRCo) recently undertook a non-statutory consultation, building on the *You Said, We Did* report in 2025. This included a number of new elements, including the phased delivery approach and the increased demand at Stewartby to serve Universal United Kingdom Resort.
- 4.2. To enable the Board to consider the wider regional response to the consultation documentation, EWRCo has agreed to permit EEH to submit our response by 26 June 2026. Whilst this is after the closing date, EWRCo has guaranteed that the EEH response will be regarded as part of the public consultation and be included in their analysis.
- 4.3. The proposed EEH response draws heavily on integration and regional priorities – please see Annex 2. EEH has worked with officers across our local authority partners to develop our thinking and proposed response.
- 4.4. In Members' consideration of this response, attention is particularly drawn to four high-level themes which have not previously been discussed by this Board:
 - The proposed phased delivery approach proposed changes the expected timeline in comparison to the previous Connectivity Stages-based programme. The lack of detail makes it challenging to understand the delivery implications.
 - As written, the consultation document does not adequately support an integrated multi-modal approach to station access. It does not fully reflect the ongoing engagement on door-to-door connectivity and the work being undertaken by local authorities. Currently there is a lack of interventions covering modes other than active travel, including bus services and mass rapid transit.



- EEH and the East West Main Line Partnership jointly commissioned lessons learned from the planning and construction stages of new passenger rail services between Oxford and Milton Keynes i.e. East West Rail Connection Stage 1 (EWR CS1). This put the local authority experience at the heart of the work. It was clear from the findings that construction impact was keenly felt by local residents and that costs unexpectedly fell onto local authorities for road repairs in some areas. Given the level of cumulative impact from ongoing or recent major developments in proximity to the EWR works (such as Universal United Kingdom Resort and various NSIPs), EEH wishes to see a clear commitment to coordinating and working alongside local authority partners and with EEH on route-wide, coordination across local authority boundaries to minimise disruption for all.
- The response also expresses disappointment that this consultation has been undertaken in the pre-election period for multiple local planning authorities along the route. This conflicts with the reasonable expectation of local authorities that there will be meaningful engagement, including the unfettered opportunity to respond to consultation. As yet, secondary legislation has not been passed to fully remove the requirement for statutory consultation under the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, nor has supporting guidance been published. Whilst EEH is understanding of the need for timely delivery of major infrastructure to support the growth of the region, with East West Rail acting as a pathfinder for this NSIP streamlining measure, this should not come at the expense of local authorities and communities having the opportunity to feed into and help steer development in their area.

4.5. EEH is aware of a number of location-specific concerns, which will be reflected in individual local authority responses. These will be included as part of the East West Main Line Partnership Board response, given membership of that group includes all the EWR host authorities (i.e. it includes all the local planning authorities in addition to EEH partners).

5. New Towns Programme - Technical Consultation Response Submitted

- 5.1. EEH has provided a technical response to the MHCLG consultation on the proposed New Towns Programme¹. This is focused on the need for an infrastructure-first approach to development and the opportunity for exemplar integration. Please see Annex 3.
- 5.2. The Draft Programme indicates that the original 12 locations have been revised down to 7 for further assessment. These include Tempsford, Milton Keynes, and Crews Hill & Chase Farm (Enfield). It is worth noting that LB of Enfield has now withdrawn its support for Crews Hill & Chase Farm being a proposed New Town. Heyford Park (Cherwell) has been recommended as a 'reasonable alternative'.
- 5.3. Both Tempsford and Crews Hill & Chase Farm have been identified as priority interventions (alongside Leeds South Bank). For both locations, there is a need to consider the wider implications for the East Coast Main Line (ECML), which has seen significant growth in passenger and freight services. There are several operational bottlenecks, as well as formally declared congested infrastructure, resulting in existing capacity pressures on the network which could be exacerbated by the New Towns unless adequate interventions are made.

¹ [New Towns Draft Programme - GOV.UK](#)



5.4. Further specific points are made around Government's lack of consistent approach to funding MRT schemes; issues with the existing land value capture mechanisms; and the need to match the scale of ambition with the funding to achieve it.

6. Oxfordshire SRFI (OxSRFI) NSIP – moving to NSIP examination

6.1. The Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (OxSRFI) is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP)².

6.2. Located 1.6km southwest of M40 Junction 10, the proposed development comprises a new rail freight interchange, warehousing, highway improvements, and associated infrastructure.

6.3. From a railway perspective, the intermodal rail freight terminal is proposed to be connected to the section of the Chiltern Main Line between Bicester North and Kings Sutton, south of Aynho Junction. It is worth noting that existing Solent – Midlands rail freight runs via the Cherwell Valley Line, but there is no direct route between the OxSRFI site and the Cherwell Valley Line from the south.

6.4. EEH provided a technical consultation response in November 2025³. This particularly highlighted concerns based on railway operations, availability of compliant pathing, and how this site would interact with existing rail freight flows.

6.5. On 28 April 2026, the Planning Inspectorate accepted the development consent application for examination. It is recommended that EEH registers as an interested party, and that officers are supported to make appropriate technical representations and responses on behalf of EEH.

7. Universal United Kingdom Resort – Government Investment

7.1. Central Government has announced a package of £1.3bn of investment into regional and local community infrastructure to support Universal United Kingdom Resort⁴.

7.2. A joint press release from HM Treasury, DCMS and the Department for Business and Trade states that this is "one of the largest ever investments in the UK tourism sector."

7.3. The Department for Transport contribution is expected to cost £474 million and includes upgrades to the strategic road and rail network, including the A421 and Wixams station.

7.4. It is estimated that Universal United Kingdom Resort could generate nearly £50bn of economic benefit for the UK. At a more local level, it is expected that approximately 80% of staff will come from Bedfordshire and the surrounding regions.

7.5. It is therefore critical that the expected transport demand generated by visitors, operations and staff can be met – EEH is working alongside Bedford Borough Council and DfT, in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Council and Milton Keynes City Council to ensure active and sustainable travel connectivity to the site, as part of the wider Transport Opportunity Plan for the area.

² [OXSRFI | Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange](#)

³ [693af1c8f033db9a7b2bb5ae_EEH_Oxford_SFRI_Response_Nov_2025.pdf](#)

⁴ [Universal theme park to be UK's most popular tourist attraction - GOV.UK](#)



8. Forest City 1 - Proposal

- 8.1. Forest City 1 (FC1) is a proposal for a new city of up to approximately 400,000 dwellings located on the Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk border⁵. The proposal particularly targets improving affordability of the new homes through their delivery model, including community land trust and cooperative rental.
- 8.2. To support delivery of such large-scale housing development would require substantial new infrastructure. Transport proposals include:
- Modal share targets of 80% of trips by sustainable modes
 - Double-tracking and upgrades to the Cambridge – Newmarket line
 - New rail link connecting Newmarket line southwards to Stansted Airport via Haverhill
 - Integration with East West Rail
- 8.3. A high-capacity mass rapid transit system linked with South Cambridge, fed by buses, trams and/or very light rail.
- 8.4. The scheme is being promoted by the privately led Albion City Development Corporation (ACDC), which is chaired by Dame Patricia Hewitt (former Labour Secretary of State for Trade & Industry). The developers are currently pursuing expressions of interest and early-stage backing from central government, alongside building relationships with MPs, ministers, investors, and wider stakeholders.
- 8.5. The scheme is not identified in adopted or emerging local plans and remains at a pre-planning, concept, and advocacy stage.

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June 2026

⁵ [Forest City 1 | Britain's Next Great City](#)

