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~ Promoting best practise, highlighting issues and positive solutions for improving the quality of peoples and communities daily life experience and opportunities as well as planting ideas. ~

Date: October 2015

# Reopen an Ampthill Parkway Station and make a 5 mile radial catchment more accessible.

~ A mini paper for consultation by Richard Pill. ~  
£3.00 where sold.

Below Left: Typical East Midlands Train (2013), (Right) M1 with traffic stacking back heading north.



## Foreword

Previous reports done by the voluntary Bedfordshire Railway and Transport Association (BRTA) (1) and subsequently by the Handley Partnership (2004) (2) and referencing by Babbie (3) in work done for expansion at Flitwick Station included Ampthill as a possible solution.

This all consecutively added to a new sense that the 50 year span since the Ampthill Station closed was due for a fresh consideration of the trends informing a context of growth and yet



Thameslink Train passes Ampthill Station old site 2004

a very rural and uninspiring patchwork of public transport services. Sure, day time the two buses per hour between Ampthill and Bedford were adequate enough with the intermittent No. 44 linking the town with emergent A6/Wixams communities; but evening and Sunday services were scant and the early evening finish meant many Ampthill people resigned to cycling, taxis or walking between Flitwick Station and their own town centre, some 2 miles away.

The original closure was part of an on-coming trend of rationalisation and shrinkage of railways and stations. 1959 was pre-Dr Beeching's axe and was part of a focus on Midland Main Line services to cut out less used stations and speed up the service. However like Ampthill, others such as Oakley, Sharnbrook, Irchester and Desborough for example have seen populations increasing over the years. The dearth of buses in the interim period and growth of car reliance, van reliance and lorry upsurges has hit hard rural areas and smaller outlets.

In Ampthill's case whilst the closure has meant an absence of an amenity, the growth of population within a catchment of 5 mile radius, new industry, schools, leisure parks and much else, means that in Ampthill's case a need to re-examine the case for it to have its own identity and put its own name back on the railway map, for the sake of an extra 3 minutes overall journey time between Bedford and London would indicate this is the time to make such a re-examination and argue for the station to be reopened.

With the growth of development and impact, if we do not act now to reopen this station, in 10 years time, that prospect could be greatly diminished if not lost for all time. Ampthill exudes attraction, charm and a fittingness of heritage and modern diversity of work and leisure lifestyle balances to warrant this addendum and to help ailing Flitwick out with more parking capacity, less on-street parking and more scope for these Central Bedfordshire locations to live up to their own unique identities and make journey's by rail a more realistic and relevant proposition once again.

**Richard Pill**

**September 2015.**

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Ampthill Town Centre 2004



## Executive Summary and Recommendations

1. Reopening Ampthill Station makes good sense in demographic catchment of a 5 mile radius of the location and because of the wider impacts of CentreParcs and getting more North London audiences to access the venue by rail as a closer venue would surely commend to do.



Types of trains the Midland Main Line  
has to offer standing at Bedford  
Midland Autumn 2013

2. A proper feasibility study needs to be commissioned and jointly funded by all parties.
3. Land needs protecting north of Froghall Road on both sides of the Midland Main Line.
4. Secure access off the Steppingley Road needs to be protected and nurtured
5. It is desirable for all parties to meet and if the Local Authority can be encouraged to take an interest and get involved; then for a more formal working party to be convened to take the matter forward.
6. Early day lobbying of the rail industry from TOCs to Network Rail to the Secretary of State and Midland Main Line electrification inclusion and fit should be part and parcel with case-making to get it scheduled for delivery in a timely manner, certainly within 10 years, ideally within 5 years.
7. A large part will depend upon public interest and support gathered, expressed and orchestrated to optimum effect.



## Introduction

The historic town of Ampthill sits in a context of lovely landscapes and growing popularity, interest and success of courting new audiences as well as a desirable place to live and commute to and from, be it North (Bedford, Wixams and Elstow), South (Luton, Airport and London), East (Wrest park, A6 and A1/North Hertfordshire and West (Woburn, Ridgmont for East-West Rail and M1).

Indeed a population gathering of the growing villages and residences finds some 60, 000 plus population could access and use a new station for Ampthill. The development of CentreParcs one side and the over-crowding and distance of Flitwick, means relief on and off the rails is required. Ampthill serves all these audiences potentially.



**Caption:** The last field separating Flitwick from Ampthill along Froghall Road, 2012.

The new station could be multi-audiences honed and targeted as well as a basic amenity for all ages and users. It could stimulate local bus services feeding each other and respectively opening the area for footfall, spend and visitorship in an environmentally sustainable manner.

The report calls for more studying and for local government to develop policies which protects the land to the south and west of the station vicinity and highways amendments for making the site more publicly accessible and user-friendly in safe crossing and access terms, means the wide and diverse appeal of a station in inclusive terms for visitors, shoppers, commuters and workers informs a ready audience for a station to serve and enjoy a potentially healthy patronage.

Public interest, response and support for the station and the on-going work of voluntary organisations like the English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) to bring people together will ensure the matter is continually raised at every opportunity and ideally, whether separate or as a collective, the interests of various parties come together, form a consensus for reopening and act strategically to further the agenda to delivery in a timely manner.

## 1.0 Ampthill

### 1.1 Historic Town:

There's been a settlement at Ampthill since at least the Saxon times. Later a Castle was built courting royal trips for hunting expeditions. The town grew and boast a heritage of architecture from the Georgian period. Architecture was a theme which Sir Ralph Richardson, who was based in the town left an indelible impression as well as Leonard Cheshire and his legacy of care. The Panoramic views from the Ampthill Park of the former Vale of Bedford, the Houghton House, famed for association with author John Bunyan's House Beautiful (4) and the association of the area with Leonard Cheshire nor the development of steam vehicles under the eye of Albert Edward Grimmer (5) should not be lost to inform a wealth of historicity throughout the ages befitting a station worthy of such a name, location and spectrum of interest, tourism and appeal.

### 1.2. The Past:

The railway arrived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century preceding Flitwick by 2 years showing that then Ampthill was considered more important and commanded size for it to not be overlooked. (6) But whilst the station may have been seen by some as remote to the town in the days of horse and cart, the changes since its closure in 1959 means that the town has grown to it and distance, speed and time have lessened such as a 5 minute all round trip to pick someone up from a new station and only 3-4 minutes delay on a modern Thameslink train to stop at a new station. Today the expanded town is two halves, one a 20<sup>th</sup> century gradual increase of local residencies and the other a commuter London diaspora overspill which wants des-res beit homes, views and essence of community. The town boasts a Waitrose at its heart, but the high volume of road and car age, sits uneasily with condense ancient streets and narrow road alignments which bung up and land for parking in a densely developed heart of the town, proves a challenge awaiting relief. Bypasses have not helped in one sense, the railway could in another. Further reading:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ampthill>

### 1.3 Population:

Population 6767 Source <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ampthill>

This may not sound much and dwarfed by the aggressively growing neighbouring Flitwick (12, 700, source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flitwick>) it is comparable to Olney (6477) but like Olney, has a ready catchment of sizeable village making a 5 mile radial study commanding: We set our borders at Wixams to the North, Shefford to the East, Harlington to the South and Woburn to the West. All within these perimeters are fair game to potentially use an Ampthill Station. The reasons

may be that going south saves time and money. The going east and west respectively along the A507 makes for easy access with parking capacity (existing stations being fuller) and going north, if going north, again saves money but also, off the M1 with the connecting A5120, it has a convenience command few others offer, especially if Ampthill commanded peak East Midlands services as well as Thameslinks.

**1.4. 5 mile catchment population:**

Place	Population	Place	Population
Flitwick	12, 700	Ridgmont	410
Westoning, Flitton and Greenfield	4, 700	Brogborough	343
Harlington	2260	Hulcote and Salford	210
Steppingley	233	Cranfield	4909
Eversholt	420	Lidlington	1350
Silsoe	1729	Clophill	1750
Woburn	933	Marston Moretaine Area	4560
Shefford Area	9330	Stewartby	1212
Haynes and Houghton Conquest	2710	Maulden	2900
Campton and Chicksands	2510	Wilstead	1980
Pulloxhill	850	Gravenhurst	600
Wavendon	787	Woburn Sands	2916
Sub Totals	39, 162		23, 140
Totals	62, 302		
10% Take up usage figure:	6230		
Divide by a 20 hour operating day = 311.10 people per hour		Divide by 4 trains each way per hour = Approximately 38 each way boarding per train.	
Population sources	Wikipedia and Central Beds Council Website		
Taken as an approximately 5 mile radius of Ampthill Station catchment potential area.			

### 1.5. Local Roads:

The area is well cited for road networks. The A507 provides an East-West trunking artery from North Hertfordshire/A1 to Brogborough/M1 Junction 12. The A5120 snakes from Toddington/M1 Junction 11 through growing communities including Westoning through Flitwick where it junctions with its sole road bridge over the Midland Main Line and station at one and the same time before turning towards the A507 roundabout and Ampthill's Dunstable Street which feeds into and draws traffic flows from it. Of recent months a Junction 11a has been mooted off the M1 and whether it is primarily to reduce the 90% car based usage access to the CentreParcs or not is open for some speculation. In any case an Ampthill Station being closer than Flitwick to 1 mile with a Western Station approach access drive and car park off the Steppingley Road; would make it highly competitive for CentreParcs customers from a broader base than just North London, but Luton Airport and pan-European holiday markets too. The A421 trunk road (A1-M1) on a north-easterly to south-westerly trajectory services the Marston Vale and roads A6, B530 and Millbrook Road link a growing population swathe from Marston Moretaine to Wixams and Greater Elstow.

### 1.6 Commuting:

It is envisaged that:

- a. people tend to drive south for principal commuting to London generally
- b. They do so to save cost on Season Tickets
- c. They will do so to save the time and hassle of driving into Bedford and similar main urban areas where they face congestion delays, wasted time and fuel, restricted and costly parking and so given Ampthill will create capacity in parking terms for both Flitwick and Bedford, it would seem logical, the switch to Wixams apart from immediate new build dwellings seems less clear in terms of "how many people south of Bedford to Wixams will/are commuters to London?" I am not aware of any such research or data, whereas we know from a variety of sources, people drive to Bedford from the North Bedfordshire 20 mile gaps until the next station at Wellingborough = a wide catchment it serves, arguably to the detriment of urban users and commuters. The idea these people wish to drive 8+ miles for Wixams via a long-way-round bypass begs some credulity in cost-time penalty





terms; but given Wootton is, on A421 as good as near Marston Moretaine\* in built terms these days, may find Ampthill equally advantageous and more convenient than Wixams which is arguably too close to Bedford and what Bedford needs are stations north or north – west of its vicinity.

\*Places coming off the A422 and A428 for example like Bromham, Turvey, Harrold and Cranfield. If a car has to crawl at 5mph the last 2 miles into Bedford – they can do a lot of driving in that time and save on the cost of parking and Season Ticket and have time to themselves (drive-time).

### **1.7 Problems at Flitwick:**

Flitwick has grown enormously from the late 1970's when it was barely a cricket pitch and a few houses. Now, boasting some 12, 700 people, and a principal station in the Central Bedfordshire Council's Central Belt between its Eastern and Western flanks; punches above its weight in strategic apprehension. It has a sports centre, small shops and a large Tesco, a conference centre or two and the well known Rufus Centre. There is but one field left before the two towns of Ampthill and Flitwick are physically joined and yet there is a healthy competitiveness between the two. They have unique and distinct differences, but because of the station, Ampthill people are forced to walk, cycle, bus, taxi and drive to and from it for work, visiting, travel further afield and shopping in the larger urban centres notably Luton for example. However over the last 2 decades there have been few months go by without people complaining about commuters parking in streets to avoid paying the cost of parking at the railway station and the railway station itself being inadequate in capacity for parking and much more. Indeed, the recent refurbishment was little more than replacement of bus-shelter type facilities and a lick of paint. The station has no lifts, so disabled visitors to CentreParcs have to travel on to Bedford and be specially taxied or bus out again, a 15-20 mile round journey. Ampthill could make that sort of thing a lot easier and less complicated. Ampthill and Flitwick should have lifts and canopy provided as it and Ampthill would enjoy the full Thameslink timetable. Indeed given 10 miles Bedford and Luton, in a similar staggered arrangement to Luton Airport and Luton Town (two stations at close proximity to each other) it should be incumbent on East Midlands to consider calling at these two stations as Central Beds currently has no fast services calling there, a glaring omission.

### **1.8 New Development:**

New Development, beit back garden infill, small extensions and brand new whole fields ploughed up, is taking place left, right and centre, like it or not. Targeted persons and agencies are at work as well as the usual quotas for more housing as part of the London and Southeast over-heating

and effort to build to bring prices down and service demand; which may not be so simple as bands of affordability vary and so demand in a lower band but building in higher tiers of affordability may mean more higher cost dwellings and constraint on lower cost/social housing investment, so demand remains high across bands, than trickle up or down them per se. So type of development is importance and balances to be struck even for local retention and requirements, let alone diasporas' from North London and other places wanting hill views, more green space, fresher air and much more. It brings more traffic which without the station will be flung 2-4 cars per house onto the roads in all directions, commuting, school-runs, college, local employment, recreation, leisure and nightlife. This brings increases in traffic, hazards in crossing narrow roads and more exhausts filling the atmosphere. Clearly there's a balance to be struck and it is the hope of this report that new people as well as existing will see the usefulness of a station for Ampthill and give support accordingly.

## **2.0 Station**

It is for formal studies to appraise what can and should be done on exacting layout for the station and how it is configured with access, optimisation and catchment audiences in mind. However given the layout currently and on the basis no-one wishes to move, a staggered platform arrangement may be best. Again how far south of the tunnel portals and taking Froghall Road as a southern boundary you could have:

### **a. Fast Platforms:**

Fast platforms from the current footbridge to Froghall Road and add a new wider over-bridge.

### **b. Slow Platforms:**

Slow platforms slightly south of development but north of Froghall Road with connecting footbridge with lift shafts at the central point of where the 4 platforms meet.

### **c. West and East Mini Booking Halls:**

Booking halls both sides would be idea – a western approach, car park and bus drive-in with booking hall and amenities. A smaller mini booking hall on the eastern approach off Station Road/Industrial Estate entrance which would need public-use calming to make safer, more cycle, pedestrian and other user friendly to accommodate and get a balance.

### **d. Cycle/Pedestrian:**

To have a cycle – pedestrian only exist onto Froghall Road and paths to A507 roundabout for Redbourne School and East Flitwick/Southern Ampthill local access and use. Indeed the idea of a cycle lane down Froghall Road entirety makes sense given Flitwick West cycle paths extend to

Steppingley and cover the Rufus Centre. Further development of safe cycling to CentreParcs from the A507 and Steppingley Roads makes sense and onwards to join Ridgmont Station for East-West Rail and the MK Redway Network as well as cross-country minor road cycling for Woburn and vice versa to both Ampthill and Flitwick Stations and town centres respectively.

**e. A507 Bypass:**

For A507 Bypass Road to have either a ground level or over bridge (like the A507/Redbourne Roundabout) for pedestrian/cycle access to/from Ampthill town centre via station road. This is critical and would mean an average less-than 10 minute cycle access between town and station and certainly better than anything on offer currently. This especially, if buses use and serve and interchange with the station facility on all sides, adding stimuli to their overall journeys and distribution to and from role.

**2.1 Trains**

**2.2 Thameslink:**

It is envisaged that Ampthill will be served by Thameslink services as Flitwick and Harlington are. This would provide a regular, frequency of service patterns both ways and boost the connectivity between Ampthill/CentreParcs and surrounds to and from local urban main centres of Bedford and Luton respectively as well as further afield e.g. the commute to London. It would add another 3 minutes to overall Bedford-London time schedules but the gains of more off peak especially patronage and receipts as well as local journey's would boost on and off the rails to compensate that minimal delay. In passenger terms, more destination choice and parking capacity again is the reward for that delay.

**2.3 East Midlands Trains.**

Luton Airport and Luton Parkway are close proximity and are both served by Thameslink and East Midlands Trains. Given that Luton is 10+ miles and Bedford likewise and that currently no East Midlands trains call at any Central Bedfordshire Unitary Authority rail station; the idea of a similar staggered calling at Flitwick and Ampthill alternatively could be envisaged, especially am, lunch time and pm 'peak' times to help with capacity and sharing out of the market such as the London-CentreParcs. Weekends would especially command attention to see if the volume of switch to rail would make it worth both operators while to commission their own studies to assess 'what's in it for them'? If it was found a niche could be explored, the result would be fast services and locals for these two principal and growing population centres at the heart of Bedfordshire. Add to that area weekend breaks, leisure and employment to service demand; there is surely scope for more

study and a mutual benefit to Councils, Operators and Government to be involved. The close proximity of Ampthill beats Flitwick and Wixams and given there is a strong call for East-West Rail to serve Bedford and inherent conflict of putting more trains into Bedford on the Midland Main Lines; the need for Wixams and a contrast of its role and the usefulness for the whole band and radius of 5 miles of Ampthill in catchment terms, especially to the north and west of the hill with M1 at one end and Wixams the other; means Ampthill could serve the whole range and leave Bedford for its own catchment and role as a main centre and junction for other services on and off the rails. In any case, the need for all day, safe, secure pounded parking at those stations East-West Trains will call at along the Marston Vale Railway will have to be looked at to court commuter interest.

#### **2.4. Car parking:**

Parking on the western side and south of the industrial estate on brown field, could also have parking and turn-around facilities without requiring existing business' to relocate. If 100 spaces both sides were allocated, that's 200 freed up elsewhere + new business the station may court. It is also 200 less car mileages per day and the benefits to Ampthill and Flitwick as well as the environment should not be underestimated. Likewise North London-CentreParcs, the station may encourage more train use and that switch could also be significant in local if not longer impacts and efficiency savings in fuel, energy and time for example.

### **3.0 Problems**

#### **3.1 Land Use and Development Pressure:**

There is a need to save land North of Froghall Road. It is understood that this land could be developed within the next 15 years but it is the nature of that development. On the one hand, more housing or light industrial development only compounds and locks-in the issues of local access, mobility, distances of traffic generators from modal options like railway use and the cascade to other areas even locally of such a piecemeal and myopic state of affairs. Thus by ensuring the adequacy of lands current and for the station, means that whatever else is added or not, the asset of the station informs a constancy threading through the theatre of Ampthill Station and a 5 mile radial zone as its natural catchment audience great and small.

#### **3.2. The need to work together:**

Clearly the best ERTA can do is to try and bring parties together. It is for outlets like CentreParcs, land owners and the community at large to decide whether they want Ampthill back on the railway map, the pros and issues which it may give rise to and if the decision comes down

positively; to work together to hasten the delivery to a 5 year timeframe and ensure it is in the Network Rail's HLOS programme of planned work and government funding packages worked out. We very much hope that Central Bedfordshire Council will see the strategic gain of having a station for Ampthill and collaborate to help advance its candidacy in policy, planning and advocacy to wider audience terms. Likewise for Luton and Bedford Borough to support cross county and thus 'internal' rail journey's and bus integration and see it as a business contributor to their footfalls and flows as well as the urban populace to enjoy events and other attractions the Central belt has to offer in work, leisure and other entertainment manners and vice versa to the urban areas for more substantive built entertainment, shopping and visiting for a variety of personal, family and community-wide reasons.

### **3.3 Ticketing and Access:**

To this end it would be good to see studies looking at county-wide bus and rail travel and how not just Plusbus ticketing can be an aide to travel, but the idea of a County-wide bus and rail pass or universal day ride which could include water bourne services (see Spalding for an example) and cycle hire where appropriate. Indeed Ampthill Station could have small business units and shops located either side offering food, drink and cycle-hire and the ranges whether to Woburn, Wrest Park, Houghton Conquest or the Ampthill and Flitwick locations; could with progressive introduction of a joined up cycle lane and road calming strategy, make more cycling an attractive proposition. Currently we have no RTI for the main bus stop opposite Flitwick Post Office for Ampthill or cycle lanes along the A5120 between the two towns. This needs to be rectified if we are to imbue confidence in the joined-upness of the public transport and healthy lifestyle options to just car for everything lifestyles and cultures, which uglify otherwise tranquil settings. Some places have visitor books which once purchased and presented, give access to leisure outlets, free or reduced cost on food, drink and other goodies. Tickets/coupons are torn out per time as visitors work around the areas by their voucher books. Smart technology could also make swiping work in a similar manner. What we do not want is plethora of ticket prices on a basic return journey from Luton or Bedford to Central Bedfordshire and vice versa, but cheap, attractive, frequent and consistent pricing which rewards loyalty should be kept a close eye on in the event of reopening and indeed for existing stations. Should Ampthill have the good fortune to have lift shafts attached to its footbridge, that would mean disabled people could use it and CentreParcs special taxis and buses would only have 1 mile transit each way than the current arrangements of Flitwick and



Bedford (2.2 and 10+ miles respectively each way) saving time, fuel and also normalising disabled travel as much as possible.

**Conclusion and Recommendation:**

The founding of CentreParcs has been a traffic generator for road and rail and looks set to grow the location for audiences. With other infill housing and development taking



Looking southwards down Dunstable Street  
Ampthill 2002

place, there's a need to reopen Ampthill station to serve these amenities. Current amenities are inadequate and too distant to

be able to meet the areas need going forward in a context of growth on and off the rails. For the sake of 3 minutes, Ampthill could serve a lion's share of Wixams as well as the near and far catchment the 5 mile cordon informs, some 60, 000 + people. The social and economic benefits to the town of Ampthill and relief to Flitwick without any diminishing of either or, brings this report to the following conclusion:

- a. A proper feasibility study needs to be commissioned and jointly funded by all parties.
- b. Land needs protecting north of Froghall Road on both sides of the Midland Main Line.
- c. Secure access off the Steppingley Road needs to be protected and nurtured
- d. It is desirable for all parties to meet and if the Local Authority can be encouraged to take an interest and get involved; then for a more formal working party to be convened to take the matter forward.
- e. Early day lobbying of the rail industry from TOCs to Network Rail to the Secretary of State and Midland Main Line electrification inclusion and fit should be part and parcel with case-making to get it scheduled for delivery in a timely manner, certainly within 10 years, ideally within 5 years. A large part will depend upon public interest and support gathered, expressed and orchestrated to optimum effect.

## **Glossary**

BRCC Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity

Des-Res Desirable Residences

ERTA English Regional Transport Association

ERTR English Regional Transport Reform

EWRL - East-West Rail Link (former Oxford-Cambridge)

HLOS High Level Output Specification

MK - Milton Keynes

MML - Midland Main Line

MVR – Marston Vale Railway (Bedford-Bletchley) also a part of the emergent East-West Railway

NR - Network Rail

ORR - Office of The Rail Regulator

Redway - A cycle network in Milton Keynes

TOC - Train Operating Company e.g. East Midlands Trains.

Unitary Authority - A Council with combined transport and planning powers

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The English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) is a voluntary membership-based, pro-public transport improvement association with its main projects in the Bedfordshire and surrounding regional areas including Northamptonshire/A45/A428 arcs. Several of its projects have a nation-wide positive benefit and impact and membership is open to all. It firmly supports an Amphill Station being put back on the railway map and sees Luton Airport-Amphill/CentreParcs-Bedford-Northampton/University Campus by one Thameslink train, as informative of an arc and Luton-Northampton M1 end to end, offering a comprehensive joined up rail alternative with no need to change, saving time and money.

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