

***KENILWORTH** has become synonymous in railway and indeed in some local authority circles with how not to design and build a railway station and provide a train service. Fraser Pithie, who after a string of delays and rancour between the parties involved, wrote a feature on Kenilworth for RAIL magazine last year, returns to the subject nearly a year on and considers the output from the Task and Finish Review that Warwickshire County Council decided to carry out in the light of the scheme's problems. His view has significantly changed, he believes 'Kenilworth' should come to represent something different, a sentinel with far-reaching implications for the railway, local authorities and transport sector.*



## **WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU WANT A TRAIN SERVICE?...**

It's a question that Kenilworth residents had considered for many years having lived with a railway line that went through the middle of the town but for 53 years since Dr Beeching's rationalisation had cut the passenger service serving the Warwickshire town where around 23,000 people live.

Kenilworth's old station – closed in 1965

The town's previous railway station stood derelict for many years after closure in January 1965 before eventually being demolished. Over many years calls for a railway station and passenger service were made by Kenilworth residents. Few residents of Kenilworth just after the turn of the millennium, would have realised that they lived in a county with a growing and impressive track record of building or encouraging new railway stations.

Bedworth station was an early foray into reopening access to passengers to a railway line that went through their community situated between Nuneaton and Coventry. Warwick Parkway, although built by Chiltern Railways, was significantly encouraged by the Local Transport Authority (LTA), Warwickshire County Council (WaCC). Stratford upon Avon Parkway, Coleshill Parkway, Bermuda Park were all subsequently promoted and built by WaCC. It's a record that's impressive as a demonstration of an LTA's commitment to rail, and one it must be said that is not replicated by many other LTA's.

Cue a group of six local residents led by Richard Hicks and Graham Hyde who pressed for the town to once again have trains stop at the town to provide a passenger service.

Warwickshire County Council responded, with its experience of getting railway stations promoted and built WaCC had reasonable confidence that if a business case could be made to stack up, then a rail station for Kenilworth was a runner. In 2008, WaCC started work on developing a new station

for the town, but in 2011, a year after austerity was introduced by central government, the funding sources were removed which effectively shelved the scheme. Things had got tantalisingly close to a railway station becoming a reality, but at the eleventh hour, it had slipped away.

Hail the Department for Transport's "New Stations Fund", which in 2013 provided another opportunity for Warwickshire, one that it seized to make a bid for part-funding at Kenilworth. WaCC's approach was successful with the DfT providing £4.9M towards a new station for Kenilworth. The DfT funding attracted £4.85M from WaCC with the Coventry & Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) adding in £3.5M.

The scene was set, a new railway station for Kenilworth could now be built with WaCC providing a further £373k as a contingency to what was, in total, a £13.2M capital scheme and investment. Here was Warwickshire County Council, as an LTA, responding to public pressure for better rail connectivity and successfully securing a result.

### **Spades in the ground**

The planets had aligned in 2013 leading to WaCC finally being able to secure adequate support and funding from central government and the LEP for a new railway station and passenger service at Kenilworth. Unfortunately, in a cruel twist of fate by 2015, there was little if any alignment of the planets as the scheme prepared to commence.



The County Council was the principal developer, promoter and driver, of the Kenilworth station scheme, it was therefore clear that WaCC would be the project sponsor. In fulfilling that role, WaCC had a significant challenge to face, how to manage stakeholders, partners and all others in a fragmented rail sector bringing them together to deliver on time, specification and budget.

As is commonplace in several LTA's, WaCC engaged rail expert consultants to manage the Kenilworth project. SLC Rail was appointed having completed previous station builds for County. Currently managing a growing portfolio of rail investment work for several local authorities, the lead team at SLC are well known in the rail sector, previously having been at Chiltern Railways and Laing. The key players at SLC have a somewhat unique experience that was gained through their efficient, effective, prudent and successful development of the Chiltern route under the leadership of Adrian Shooter, by common consent one of the UK rail industry's most accomplished individuals. In many respects the 'can do' and optimistic attitude demonstrated by Chiltern in those early years of expansion has been exported and made available to others through the SLC offer.

However, such optimism, which I wholeheartedly applaud and welcome as there is too little of it across the rail sector not least due to the operating model of what is only a semi-privatised railway, can get choked off if too many hurdles are placed before it.

When I wrote in RAIL magazine about Kenilworth just weeks after it finally opened at the end of April 2018, I did not spare Warwickshire County Council from criticism. From the start of the project trying to get open and transparent answers about the scheme from WaCC was difficult to near impossible, WaCC gave four false dates for the opening of Kenilworth's new railway station and the performance of the Council's press office was, at times, lamentable often taking days to weeks to return calls to journalists. Compounding the situation, the then Managing Director of WaCC either decided or was advised to publicly blame other stakeholders for the failure to open the station in December 2017 but omitted to explain the basis for seeking to apportion such blame.



A tragedy developed and grew out of what should have been an excellent and positive story about an improvement to the quality of life enjoyed by Kenilworth residents. The Kenilworth Railway Station scheme descended into a £13.2m public relations disaster becoming a watchword locally and across the rail sector for a farce. All parties involved with the scheme were fairly or

unfairly tainted merely by association to the project.

Eventually, but far too late, the noise around the project became loud enough for local politicians to hear and realise that something needed to be done. Consequently, the County Council announced that a “Task & Finish Review” would be set up.

It was a positive decision by WaCC to establish a Review but most importantly ensure such a Review's provenance by ensuring independence. John Bridgeman CBE, a former CEO of British Alcan Aluminium and Director General of the Office of Fair Trading was appointed as Chair. Chris Kimberley, a rail professional with experience at both Northern, Caledonian Sleeper and previously the Director of Rail Operations at HS2 Ltd, was also invited to provide input and support to the review.

Reading the 78-page report of the Review, it's clear that WaCC could not have foreseen at the commencement of the work on Kenilworth station that so many hurdles potentially delaying, complicating, with some even putting at risk the whole scheme, would present themselves. Kenilworth station was a “Perfect Storm”, not my description, but the one John Bridgeman's uses in his report.

### **Platform to nowhere**

The new station had sensibly been designed to take account of the proposed redoubling of the railway between Leamington Spa (Milverton Junction) and Kenilworth (Common Lane loop). The redoubling work was due to take place sometime between 2014-19 as part of Network Rails' Control Period 5 (CP5).

Consequently; the new station was designed with two platforms. Regrettably, the Hendy Review, commissioned by the Secretary of State for Transport to determine what could be delivered in CP5 in an affordable and timely way, caused the Leamington Spa- Kenilworth redoubling scheme to be removed from the CP5 programme. The Hendy Review, because of the speed at which it was required to be carried out leading to little if any route consultation or input, led to some schemes being stopped irrespective of the impact of such a decision. In the case of Kenilworth, the redoubling scheme cancellation amounted to 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater'.

Redoubling Leamington to Kenilworth has much broader implications for the regional and national rail network and for transport strategies some of which are linked to HS2. (Midlands Connect are now working on a business case to reinstate the redoubling.)

With no commitment to implement the redoubling scheme in CP6 (2020-2025) it meant that a constructed platform 2 at Kenilworth could lay idle with no track servicing it for maybe a decade or more. This would mean the Station Facility Owner could not accept responsibility for the day to day maintenance of what would be an un-serviced platform 2, in turn, this would mean that Network Rail (NR) could not accept it as an asset either.

The public perception of a platform with no track or train service was also considered, with all parties concluding that reputational damage arising from an un-serviced platform 2 was too high. Consequently, Platform 2 was descoped from the scheme and not fully built.

Six months were lost from the outset of the works because of this change, which included the need for revised plans having to be designed, accepted and approved by several parties.

This delay was compounded by a further three months due to a shortage of NR resources thus delaying the production and provision of revised plans, surveying a culvert and what turned out to be a distraction of a proposal for a temporary demountable platform so NR could avoid having to slew the single line to align it with a new single station platform.



Things had got off to a disappointing start but to be fair to the station project team, they decided to try and prevail and keep things going to realise a passenger train service for Kenilworth. However, the team's optimism, while laudable and serving the town's best interests, was about to be hit by a meteor storm of problems.

### **Ghost Train**

In 2014 London Midland, the local Train Operator, had decided it would not run the Leamington-Kenilworth-Coventry trains. The 'Data Room', which is operated by the DfT and provides a 'snapshot' of critical operating information used by operators and other sectors for planning, showed a train service in place. The service needed removing in the light of LM's decision but critically this did not take place.

Consequently, the Data Room placed what was a "Ghost Train" service in the system. Later on, when West Midlands Railway bid for the new franchise it did so believing that the Kenilworth service was already operational!

The subsequent consequence of this assumption meant that in reality obtaining rolling stock to provide a service by the proposed opening date was going to be very difficult because it had not been planned or sought. In December 2017 London Midland lost its train operating franchise. The new franchise was split between the West Coast services, provided by London and North Western Railway Ltd and West Midlands Railway Ltd (WMR) serving the Midlands area. Eventually, the 'chickens came home to roost' concerning the assumption based upon the 'data room' meaning the new WMR franchise would be facing the unavailability of suitable rolling stock and operating staff, in turn meaning there could be no passenger train service from Kenilworth by December 2017.

### **Financial Pressure**

26% of the funding towards the Kenilworth scheme came from the LEP. The LEP funding was time-limited and linked to fixed milestones. At times this placed pressure on those managing the scheme and leading to them feeling "unreasonably rushed" into making decisions.



### **Insular Train Service Planning**

Concurrent with other delays four months were lost as the timetable for Kenilworth had to be remodelled because Cross Country was granted additional paths along the Leamington Spa-Coventry route on Sundays. When this was considered in 2014 ORR failed to consult WaCC meaning Sunday services have been unable to operate at Kenilworth since the station opened in April 2018. This was compounded by additional timetable planning being required due to service changes affecting the Chiltern local (shuttle) service between Leamington Spa and Birmingham which uses platform 4 and which is also used by the Kenilworth services.

### **Missing Work Order**

Concurrent with other delays a similar period was lost due to the lack of signalling records or other issues. Then, NR dropped the bombshell that the "Kenilworth Loop Works" required to enable the new passenger service to operate had not been included in their programme of works drawn up in October 2016, this meant that loop works could not now be delivered for August 2017. There was lack of collaboration as NR were not included as a key partner in the Steering Groups as Kenilworth scheme progressed.

### **Complicating Safety & Skills Shortage**

With construction well advanced Network Rail re-categorised the station scheme from being two projects, (station) and (infrastructure), into one project causing the application of the Common Safety Method (CSM) to increase the level of safety assurance required leading to more time to for process and paperwork to be completed.

Final station sign off to ensure safe, functional operation is required and known as the 'Entry into Service' process. There were several issues, that despite being built as per the design, needed amendment to satisfy the Civils, Mechanical and Telecoms engineers from NR. This meant that the Entry into Service process also became protracted with final clearance only issued by the ORR on 26 April, just four days before the commencement of train services.

Added to this, Mechanical and Electrical Engineers were in short supply, and this also contributed to delays at times.

### **Overview**

The phrase that comes to mind is 'you couldn't make it up', what is so depressing is I haven't, this is the reality of £13.6M of yours and my money being spent to provide a much-needed railway station and service to a town and its community. I still find the total cost to build Kenilworth an eye watering amount. The station development readily compares to a small village hall and car park. I am still struggling to understand how such a building and car park with a single platform, passenger lift and footbridge added in gets to £13.2m?



I recall that at the time Warwick Parkway was mooted the then Railtrack suggested a figure of around £10m. Chiltern rightly chose the DIY route and built it for around £5m. I can't help but think of Nigel Harris's, the Managing Editor of RAIL Magazine, evidence to the Transport Select Committee last year when he provided the example of how, when challenged, the cost of a significant capital scheme at Kings Cross, was reduced by £172m only because an experienced senior person, the NR Route Director who happens to also be to be an engineer asked the right question and applied a derogation. The sums are very different but it's relative, and for me, despite my best endeavours the costs of Kenilworth remain opaque.

It's clear that some elements need to be addressed that arise from the Kenilworth scheme.

- The need for closer co-operation between all the stakeholders
- Much greater involvement by Network Rail who complained that they felt they were not included as much as they would have liked.
- Much better communication agreed by all those involved and a much higher level of responsiveness to enquiries and questions.
- It is good that the Review report details and the Council will be writing to the DfT about: "The issues with the Data Room do require attention. That a franchise bidder based their assumptions on a snapshot that was out of date as soon as it was created is a concern."
- Third parties involved in rail schemes need to be fully embraced across the rail sector, too often they are overlooked as was the case with ORR and the Cross Country train planning in 2014 that led to the unavailability of a Sunday service at Kenilworth

- SLC's suggestion that future station schemes should have a designated 'Entry in Service' Manager is a practical and sound proposal; there can be little doubt that such a role performed by a suitably competent individual would go a long way to avoiding much of the mess that unravelled towards the end of the Kenilworth scheme.
- 'A local authority must not expect to shift total responsibility for a rail project to its rail advisor. If that happens the advisor becomes seen as the client' was something that the DfT stated in evidence to the Review. It's a salient point and one ignored by politicians and senior officers at local authorities at their peril if things go wrong and public disquiet develops.

After reading this imagine being a player within it and responsible for getting Kenilworth railway station built, completed and opened! Who would want such a responsibility?



There has to be a fundamental change across the rail sector if it is to embrace local authorities sponsoring rail and funding they can bring to help unlock more extensive network benefits for the railway. Yes, there are things that Warwickshire could and should have done better, but I'd have to say you could understand it if they and other LTA's walked away from rail because it's just too fraught. It is a credit to Warwickshire and particularly SLC that they prevailed despite all the problems, I venture this played no small part in Kenilworth actually getting its railway

station.

Larger LTA's such as the Metropolitan Executives' have a greater critical mass of expertise and generally more funding to overcome some of the issues that arise in developing and delivering rail projects. However, the vast majority of the rail network sits in Shire Counties who have been stripped of cash through austerity and are limited in what they can enable.



Costs and byzantine processes need rigorous challenge, not to the extent of compromising key components such as safety or quality, but there is much scope to examine and drive down the extent of non-value added activity, the roles that exist to impose it and the significant associated costs. This is critical not least because if costs are allowed to run at increasingly high levels sound economic cases for rail enhancement schemes that many want and the railway needs will be inexcusably choked off and defeated by Benefit Cost Ratios that fail to clear the bar.



I am cautiously optimistic that the appointment of Andrew Haines as CEO at NR and the Williams Review with their focus on ‘the customer’ will respectively lead to the rigour needed to challenge costs and contingency allowances by delivering accurate estimation and firm budgetary management. If my optimism is misplaced it will be railway, those that work in it, that supply it and above all the customer who uses and wishes to use the railway that will all share in a loss that could ultimately stall the great railway renaissance we have seen in the UK over the past two decades.

I have not been able to cover all the aspects that the Task & Finish Review concerning Kenilworth. For those that are interested in more detail the report is available at [www.warwickshire.gov.uk](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk)

### **Service so far and more work to do**

It was 30 April 2018, when that first Class 153 unit finally called and picked up the first passengers to catch a train from Kenilworth since 1965. The town has a new railway station complete with an independently operated booking office and café. It’s a lovely and very civilised facility with a spacious waiting room where one can sit down with a coffee or tea while waiting for one’s train.

The reality of the Hendy Review is felt nearly every day as the station is constrained to an hourly interval service because of the single line and its intensive mixed traffic usage. Of course, it’s great to have a railway station back at Kenilworth, but patronage can only really grow with a 30-minute interval service. Train service failures have been too frequent and while these have been caused by a number of different reasons the patience and perseverance of new passengers has at times worn thin. In some cases, especially in the peak, passengers have reverted to previous arrangements and given up on using the service.

The arrival of the Class 172 two coach units and the extension of service to run from and to Leamington-Kenilworth-Bedworth-Nuneaton from May will, it is hoped, improve service reliability. WaCC currently subsidise an excellent ‘Station Link’ bus service that operates around Kenilworth in the morning and evening peak hours.

Unfortunately, this really useful facility is seldom seen with a passenger on it because no publicity has been put out to the town telling people about the bus service. Indeed, the same could be said about the station; one would have thought that for a £13.6m scheme a few hundred pounds could have been found to design and deliver a flyer with all the information about the new railway station and the station link bus service. One would think that as WaCC are also paying an undisclosed operating subsidy for the first three years of the new train service they would want to ensure they maximise passenger usage. On this issue, WaCC could and should do much better.

Calls to use 'stop orders' to enable Cross Country Voyagers that race through the station when the local service fails have, to date, fell on deaf ears despite Cross Country indicating they would be prepared to help. Replacement bus services take over two hours to arrange when a 'stop order' could facilitate a replacement train service within minutes.



The issue of replacement bus services is compounded as they appear to be often ordered by the Train Operator to replace trains between Coventry and Leamington Spa. The bus operators take this literally and the word "Kenilworth" is not mentioned, the consequence is that many of the replacement bus services when they have managed to get up and running have missed out calling to drop off and pick up at Kenilworth!

Most of the train service failures experienced at Kenilworth have been due to the Train Operator, not the rail infrastructure. This means that Cross Country train services continue to operate serving both Coventry and Leamington Spa so a replacement bus service exclusively to and from those places is not needed but one to Kenilworth, which is cut off, is needed. Too many times this farcical situation has been repeated despite having been pointed out to the Train Operator, the loser is the customer, the passenger who is left marooned and also Kenilworth's new station because it attracts an 'unreliable train service' tag leading to people not using it.

Reliability is an issue reflected on the "Friends of Kenilworth Station" social media site:

*The key element is that new passengers need to become 'regular' passengers. One accepts that things go wrong now and again but too many failures seriously undermine this new facility. Every time there is a failure or no proper notice of major disruption the fledgling service risks losing new passengers who walk away saying "I can't be bothered because I cannot rely on it".*



*We should not forget we have 7 service buses to/from Coventry an hour and 7 buses to/from Leamington an hour. I can shut up but it doesn't mean the reality goes away. I want the service to succeed and for our booking office to survive, both are being regularly undermined by poor attention and commitment from the Train Operator.*

This leads me onto a final subject, the service provided by Kenilworth Station Travel Ltd who independently operate Kenilworth's Booking Office. They open every day without fail and have displayed 100% reliability yet have faced considerable complaint not once but twice from passengers when planned engineering work meant that the train service was replaced by buses with little or no notice.

It's worthy of mention because the complaints were beyond the Booking Office's control. They were not informed by the train operator WMR of the planned disruption on either occasion, finding out themselves only a day before on the first occasion and only three days before on the most recent occasion 26 January. These events and the poor reliability of the train service attracts a "must do much better" for West Midlands Railway.

## **KENILWORTH RAILWAY STATION**

### **What they said.....**

*Selective quotes from evidence given to the Task & Finish Review carried out by Warwickshire County Council and published in the draft report.*

### **SLC Rail**

*The Kenilworth station project was made complicated by a series of circumstances and challenges all of which need to be addressed. That the project succeeded is remarkable. It straddled a change in franchise, required a wholly new train service, was set on a single line section on a major inter-city and freight route with two significant adjacent junction stations at Leamington and Coventry, it involved many partners and it found a way to proceed despite the impact of the Hendy Review. This is too easily forgotten.*

*Cross Country and the freight operators equally have their own agendas and imperatives. It is important to remember that Kenilworth lies on a UK main route between Bournemouth and Manchester and yet sits between 2 short stretches of single line that acts as both a capacity and performance constraint.*

*If Network Rail had been appointed to deliver the station this would not have removed the impact of the Hendy Review. Indeed, there is a chance that with Network Rail behind the project Hendy may have stopped it from progressing at all during its review period (when all such similar schemes across the network were halted until the conclusion of the Review).*

*The Common Safety Method was a further complication. Initially the scheme was to be regarded as two projects, but it was then changed by Network Rail internal panel review process to one. This change, very late in the day, increased the level of safety assurance on the Network Rail infrastructure works scheme, for which due paperwork and process had to be undertaken prior to entry into service authorisation.*

*On occasions stations have been brought into service with snagging and final installations being carried out afterwards. This was not permitted and resisted to the last at Kenilworth. It reflects a lack of consistency across the industry where different promoters are involved, and indeed even on different Network Rail schemes.*

*There appeared to be an unerring faith in the power of politics. It was believed that as the Secretary of State had promised service introduction on a certain date then this would happen (It did not). The concern that this faith was unfounded extended to WCC officers and the SLC project team. On various occasions it was wrongly believed that the intervention of a senior officer would lead to progress.*

## **Network Rail**

*The Interventions project did not require Common Safety Method (CSM) approval however the CSM panel wanted to understand that the interface has been managed effectively which led to further risk information being requested by the station project. None of that should have been outside of what the process requires, however there was a lack of understanding of the CSM process that ultimately led to a delay.*

*A key question that needs to be reviewed in more detail relates to why these projects were not delivered together as one large project. This would have been the ideal scenario. One delivery organization for both parts of the project would have been able to manage the interface and risk more effectively and led to a more efficient delivery.*

*The delay in Entry into Service (EiS) was due to the installation on site not aligning with the approved design. There were numerous areas that differed from the approved design with some elements such as the CIS screen locations within the building not having a full design at all. There were missing documents such as the telecoms technical specification that should have been completed before the works commenced on site that were still not completed when the station entered service.*

*NR were not included as a key partner within the Kenilworth programme steering groups and board meetings held by WCC. This is a mistake as it created two teams that were then not working together in a true collaboration. NR cannot be expected to collaborate if they are not being involved in the key decision-making for the projects and ultimately collaborated with by other parties.*

### **West Midlands Railway Ltd**

*The Hendy review and the decision not to twin the Leamington to Coventry line was a disappointment. If WMT had a choice it would have waited until such time as twin tracks were provided before agreeing to provide the service.*

*One complication for WMT caused by the delay in opening was that crews having been trained over a 15-month period found themselves with no service to operate. At one point, with the opening of Kenilworth Station delayed WMT did consider the introduction of services between Leamington and Coventry missing out Kenilworth until such time as it was ready.*

*The Kenilworth station service adds an element of risk in terms of the overall network. This is caused in part by the need to place the train in sidings and cross lines at both Coventry and Leamington between each run. The DfT monitors the franchise performance across its entirety. If performance is poor on the Kenilworth service, then this impacts on that overall franchise performance.*

*Providing a new Kenilworth service was not part of the franchise bid and therefore it was not part of a business case. WMT had been led to believe that the new service was up and running when it submitted its bid.*

### **Department for Transport**

*The project progressed at a reasonable pace until its final stages. Some rail partners failed to appreciate the importance of the station scheme to Warwickshire. If they had there might have been a greater sense of urgency.*

*Delays are always regrettable, but they are soon forgotten. For Kenilworth station too many opening dates were announced and missed. It would have been better to accept that delays do happen.*

*There is a sense that Warwickshire County Council and other partners were reluctant to acknowledge that the station opening would be delayed. If the threat of delay had been acknowledged, then it could have been managed more effectively.*

*Communications released by WCC in December 2017 appeared to be apportioning blame with partners. (WCC suggested that the station was complete and ready to accept trains when this was not the case). This was regrettable as it is important to ensure the overall project team continues to work well.*

*The Data Room is managed by the DfT. It produces an Infrastructure Assumptions Document which serves as a snap shot of the rail industry. When it was reviewed in 2017 it was believed that by December of that year there would be a train serving Kenilworth Station. It was that assumption that guided West Midlands Trains in its bid. On reflection it might be better that, even allowing for the snap shot approach, certain assumptions are reviewed and fed onwards to bidders so that they are clear what they are bidding on.*

*It would have been useful if the County Council had met with the DfT franchising team early on in the Kenilworth Station process. This requires a mutual understanding on behalf of the DfT and WaCC. WaCC should also have spoken to the two bidders so that they were clear what the Council was seeking to achieve. This could have been initiated via the DfT.*

*The rail industry is very fragmented but seeks to work together as much as possible. An advantage of fragmentation is that it is possible to relatively easily identify those within various parts of the organisation that can assist.*

*The County Council must not expect to shift total responsibility for a rail project to its rail advisor. If that happens the advisor becomes seen as the client.*

Fraser Pithie  
9 March 2019