

No money available for new railway station in West Lothian

Plans for a new railway station in West Lothian are set to stay on the drawing board, after the Scottish Government said it has no money and argues that the project needs to be led by the housing developer.

And West Lothian's veteran Labour councillor Tom Conn said :“It's a problem for others to sort out. The council is not a rail provider.”

Councillors heard this week that it “ remains unclear” what the role of national transport agency is.

Since a proposed new station was first announced in 2012 several new stations have been opened as the Scottish rail network has regenerated.

West Lothian Council set up a meeting in April between Winchburgh Developments Ltd, the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland. Council representatives were advised that no complete business plan or design is in place for the Winchburgh railway station.

A report to members of the Environment and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP) said: “Transport Scotland also made clear that a promoter needed to be identified before the project could progress any further. This

had not previously been identified as an issue.”

Project officer Caitlin Hirst added: “While it is the case that railway station projects are often led by national agencies, it remains unclear as to why Transport Scotland are not promoting the construction of the railway station at Winchburgh.”

Head of Planning Craig McCorrison told the meeting that “ordinarily” it would be Transport Scotland that would be the promoter, acting as the project lead.

The council has arranged a further meeting. Transport Scotland, Network Rail and Winchburgh Developments Ltd will also be asked to attend. The date has not yet been confirmed.

The Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal (CRD) has an infrastructure fund to support development. Winchburgh is one of seven named sites. The council’s Chief Executive has written to the CRD Project Office to understand more about the application process and timescales.

Local councillor Diane Calder suggested the Winchburgh Development should divert the almost £1m supposed to be spent on road links to Edinburgh into the railway station.

Councillor Conn, chairing the meeting, suggested that idea served to “conflate and conflict” the issues. Money for roads would only have to be found later.

He said the argument was between a private developer and the national transport agency. Transport Scotland had changed the rules.

“Those two are responsible. This is not a council project. We are trying to facilitate it but we are not a rail provider.

“Transport Scotland made the decision. It’s for others to sort out the problem.”

He said all agencies need to come together to develop a station which the residents who moved to Winchburgh want.”

Pippa Plevin, for the Joint Forum of Community Councils, told the meeting: “We are appalled that after all these years of being promised a train station there appears to be no work done on design. Instead there are priorities of an A89 corridor. We’re not going to take hundreds of cars off the road.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter