

# Rail Action Group, East of Scotland (RAGES) Haddington and District Community Council

## Re-instating of the Haddington Rail Branch

Haddington and District Community Council invited RAGES to their meeting on 24 January to discuss the re-instating of the rail branch line to Haddington. Also invited was Paul Ince, East Lothian Council Transportation Officer.

Tom Thorburn, Chairman, and Russell Darling, Membership Secretary, gave a presentation which was followed by a useful discussion.

RAGES was inaugurated in January 1999 and has as its main aims: to improve the existing rail services in East Lothian and Berwickshire; press for the re-instatement of a local rail service from Edinburgh to Berwick with stations re-opened at East Linton and Reston; and to have the Haddington branch re-opened.

In 2001, RAGES had presented the case for a Haddington Station to the Community Council and as a result an open meeting was held. Over 100 people attended the meeting at which their views were aired.

At this latest Community Council meeting, Russell Darling noted that the original station was opened in 1846 along with the new main line from Edinburgh to Berwick, but as a branch line. It closed to passenger traffic in 1949 and freight traffic in 1968 after which the lines were lifted. Most of the trackbed and bridges are still in place.

He reminded the meeting that in 1999 Scott Wilson published a report into East Lothian Rail which had been commissioned by the East Lothian Council. Whilst the report did not recommend any immediate action on the re-opening of Haddington to rail, it was optimistic in saying that an hourly all-day service to Edinburgh was feasible for a local train operator such as ScotRail although funding might require to be other than public. They suggested that a terminus for the branch could be sited in the area south of the Roodlands Hospital.

Russell Darling then outlined three sites for a re-opened station. The first was the original site, shown by the red arrow, now occupied by the Station Yard industrial units.



Unfortunately, there is a unit directly over the original track which probably ruled out this option.

The second option was that of the 1999 Scott Wilson report which has the advantages of being near the town and having available car parking space. Access to the station would be from Hospital Road.



However, two obstacles were in the way: the traffic lights at Gateside Avenue would require to be converted to a level crossing; and the bridge under the new A1 bypass would have to be rebuilt at an angle to allow trains to pass under the road. It was unfortunate that the Scottish Office did not heed the Council's recommendations at the time, but was presumably for cost reasons.

The third option is a more economical one which does not require the A1 to be ripped up.



This option was suggested both at the open meeting and more recently by the Community Council in their reply to the latest East Lothian Local Plan. The railway would be diverted from its original line just before the bypass bridge and go along the north side of the A1 as far as Alderston Road, below Alderston House. Again this site has suitable space for parking. Its disadvantage is the distance from the town, but the local bus could be scheduled to arrive and depart from there to coincide with the arrival of the train.

All these options would be looked at when a STAG1 (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance) study was authorised.

The Local Plan for 2005 noted that the existing trackbed was protected from development, but the Community Council had pointed out that space for a station and car park had not been.

RAGES suggests that the service should go at least as far as Edinburgh without the need to change at Longniddry which was the case when the railway closed in 1949 and no doubt contributed to its closure.

With the current new housing being built and the 750

houses planned for Letham, alternative transport to the car is required to reduce traffic congestion and help to meet the Scottish Executive's targets in this area.

Russell Darling also noted that the current study into re-instating the local service to Berwick was on-going and had progressed to the point where the funding partners had been presented with a draft final report covering the STAG1 appraisal. Further discussions are scheduled between East Lothian Council, Scottish Borders Council and the Scottish Executive into how to progress the recommendations. It was hoped that it would then be recommended for the further detailed STAG2 appraisal. If this service was re-instated with a new station at East Linton, it would provide extra services at Drem and two other stations on the North Berwick line.

Paul Ince told the meeting that the re-opening of the Haddington Rail Branch was in the Labour Party Manifesto. He noted that there were several national rail studies currently taking place: Scotland Planning Assessment – Rail; Route Utilisation Strategy for the entire East Coast Main Line; and a Route Utilisation Strategy for Scotland. In reply to the most recent Scottish Executive consultation into the National Transport Strategy, East Lothian Council had included the case for a Haddington Branch, as had RAGES in their reply.

Among the many questions raised by the Community Councillors, was that of more trains running on the existing tracks. Would additional local services be cancelled if the long distance trains were running late? Tom Thorburn replied that most late running was now due to trespassing and vandalism rather than mechanical faults. He expected that if a long distance train was already running late, then the local service

would get the right of way.

It was also suggested that alternative transport provision should have been planned before giving consent for new housing such as that to be at Letham.

At current prices, it was assumed that the fare structure from Haddington would be similar to that from Drem, around £4.50 for a cheap day return.

The Community Council were very much in favour of a rail link being re-instated to the town.

To progress the re-opening of the Haddington Branch further, it was agreed by all parties that our MSP and local Haddington councillors should be invited in a joint letter to a meeting with the Community Council and RAGES at an early date.

Jan Wilson, Chair of the Community Council, thanked RAGES for their presentation.

After the meeting, Tom Thorburn said:

“The RAGES slide show and discussion afterwards was very successful, so much so that Haddington and District Community Council are also very keen to see the branch and station re-opened.

“Both parties realise that with the projected new housing for Haddington, things need to be ratcheted up with regard to the branch and station.

“Given that the 1999 study concluded that the branch and station needed to be reviewed in 2005 to 2011, this time frame is now with us and we need to make arrangements with our Council, Local and Scottish Politicians.”

## Editor's Note

Our meeting was too late to have this report included in the current *Rages Rag*, so I have prepared this insert which will be sent to all Haddington members and those who receive *The Rages Rag* via e-mail.

It will also be reproduced in the next quarterly *Rages Rag*, but not in colour!

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