

PRESENTATION TO THE SWALE JOINT TRANSPORT MEETING

7th September 2020

By Linda Brinklow

Chair of the Swale Section of the Kent Community Rail Partnership and local SUSTRANS representative.

INTRODUCTION

WHO THE KCRP ARE AND WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Kent Community Rail Partnership comprises currently of two lines. The Swale Line, which is the original line and the Medway Valley Line.

The Medway Valley Line runs alongside the river Medway connecting Tonbridge and Strood via Maidstone. Direct services to London operate from Maidstone West, Snodland and Strood on weekday mornings and evenings using Javelin High Speed trains.

SwaleRail is the Sittingbourne to Sheerness line which connects the Isle of Sheppey to the rest of Kent. Some direct services to London run on weekday mornings and evenings.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS

Community Rail Partnerships encourage the support of railway lines and stations by the local community. They comprise of railway operators, local and parish councils, schools, businesses, rail user groups and other community organisations. CRPs are managed to fit local circumstances, recognising the need to increase revenue, reduce costs, increase community involvement and support social and economic development.

Recently the group applied for extensions of their interests **on both lines**. Of the £400K available from South Eastern, KCRP secured £150K of the total. (The remaining money was split between other organisations in Kent and Sussex.)

Unfortunately for Swale, the extension (part of the bid) to the North Downs route was not chosen. This would have connected the Swale Line with the line running through Canterbury to Dover.

The Partnership is currently hosted by **Sustrans**.

WHY AM I SPEAKING TO YOU TODAY?

1) As Chair of the local line, I have a responsibility to guide our team in the promotion of “sustainable, healthy and accessible travel”

2) "Community rail is inherently all about sustainability; the movement's core field of work is encouraging people to use rail as an alternative to driving"

On the Isle of Sheppey, as in many rural areas, this means first getting to the railway station and the obvious means is by using ones car.

PROBLEM

The isle of Sheppey does not possess a station car park and the obvious solution is to locate one at Queenborough on the land once used as a goods yard for local industry.



The reasons seem obvious since the site in the photograph has not been used since around 1950 and now belongs to a German freight company.

However, encouraging people to use their cars is not a policy that fits well with the CRP's ethos



3) Community Rail continued;-

"A key issue that many of our members are involved in is better connecting and integrating rail with other sustainable and healthy modes of travel:

- walking,
- cycling,
- bus,
- community bus and tram. "

THE PROBLEMS

The problems are very much reflected in the report on “Transport for the South East”, which states:-

“Local journeys are short distance trips typically undertaken at the start or end of a journey and can be made by any mode of transport.

Challenges identified include conflict between different modes and users, air quality issues on urban corridors,

poor integration between modes (such as bus and rail), pressure on bus services (especially in rural areas), and affordability of public transport.

PROBLEMS IN MORE DETAIL

Local journeys are short if you live in Sheerness and Queenborough where walking to the station is an option.



Local journeys are not short if you live at the east end of the island.(approximately 11 miles to Leysdown)

TRAVELLING BY BIKE

There is very little incentive to leave bikes or motorcycles at the stations at Queenborough or at Sheerness and many people take their bikes with them on the train. Neither are there safe and well designed cycle paths throughout the island.



Perhaps the above land could be put to better use for rail passengers than it is at present. **Better, safer bike and motorcycle storage being one idea.**

POOR INTEGRATION BETWEEN BUS AND RAIL

Recent changes to the Arriva bus time table on the island.

334 Timetable and Stops

The 334 bus (Direction: Sheerness) has 66 stops departing from Chequers Bus Station Maidstone (H5) and ending in Tesco Sheerness.

The service runs every half hour and every hour on Sundays

: Normally it starts operating at 06:46 and ends at 18:15. The journey takes about an hour.

NB:-Until recently there were 2 buses that passed the station at Queenborough.

One came from Minster, past the station and on to Morrison's.

The 334 Maidstone bus came via Minster Broadway, Halfway, Queenborough Station, and then onto Rushenden and Morrison's.

Now the only bus to pass Queenborough Station is the one coming from Rushenden.

THIS IS A MUCH POORER SERVICE

Bus services from Leysdown and Eastchurch are hourly except during the school run period when they stop and take on school children instead.

The bus takes over half an hour to reach the station.

This means that any working family living at the east end of the island, has by necessity, to own at least one car in order to get to work, for there is very little employment locally.

School leavers and older persons are virtually imprisoned by the transport system.

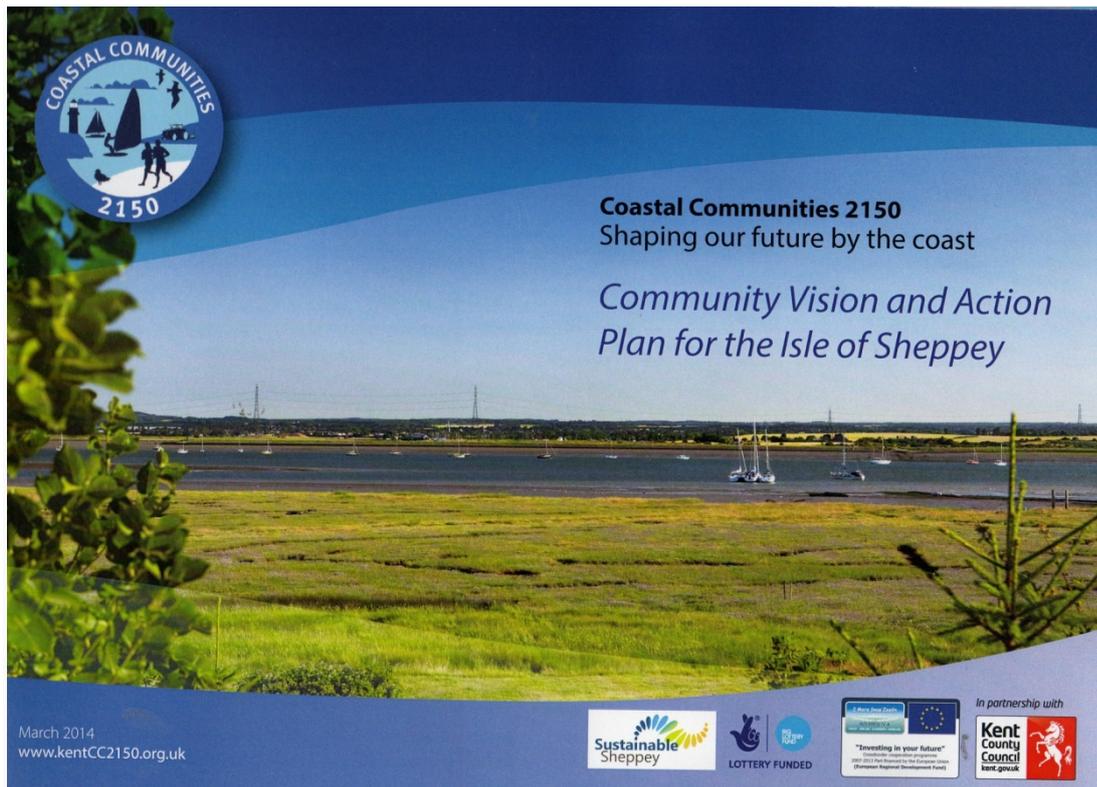
School children for Sittingbourne schools are bused off the island by Travel Master (Tim's Travel) and there are usually commuter buses to London. This is no help if you work in Maidstone.

THE REPORT ON “Transport for the South East” continued,

Initiatives to address these issues include ;

- developing highquality public transport,
- improving air quality (by reallocating space,
- reducing speeds,
- switching modes, etc.),
- **prioritising pedestrians and cyclists over the private car,**
- **investing in passenger information,**
- **developing integrated transport hubs,**
- **lobbying Government for enhanced funding for buses,**
- **lobbying for a freeze in rail fares,**
- **and improving public transport accessibility**

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT SHEPPEY AND WHY SHOULD SHEPPEY BE GIVEN PRIORITY OVER OTHER PLACES IN THE SOUTH EAST?



As a Sheppey resident, I was very much involved in helping to shape the above report, which was part of a long term vision for the future of our coastal communities in the light of climate change.

Part of the report dealt with Business and Tourism opportunities

Developing Business and tourism Opportunities

OUR VISION

In 2150, the Isle of Sheppey will be a place:

- Where people can live, work and play sustainably
- Which makes good use of its unique resources (including the river, maritime heritage, beaches and natural environment)
- Which is well-connected, internally and externally
- Which is an exemplar teaching others how to be sustainable.

OUR ACTIONS

Proposed Actions	Proposed Sub-actions	Suggested Partners	Time scale	Resource
Tourism				
Encourage Visitors and Residents to Experience the Natural Environment across the Isle of Sheppey	Support the development of a cross island cycleway	KCC, SBC, NE, Prsh Cncls, Businesses, VG, Green Grid, Sustran, Land Owners	On-going to Medium	£££
	Identify areas to create an environment park or trail and review potential for linking art and the natural environment to further promote the island.	Environment Forum, STA, Prsh Cncls, Land Owners, Big Fish	Medium	£££
	Develop coastal amenities to increase access to waterways and wetlands (including all tide landing)	STA, Queenborough Harbour Trust, NE, Green Grid	Medium	££££
	Work closely with tourism boards and Visit Kent to broaden and showcase tourism offer	Visit Kent, STA, KCC, SBC, Prsh Cncls, Businesses, LO, VG	On-going to Short	££
Infrastructure and Economy				
Improve Sustainable Public Transport on Isle of Sheppey	Develop local travel plans and identify gaps in provision for Isle of Sheppey	KCC, SBC, Prsh Cncls, Businesses, Bus Companies	On-going to Short	£££
	Encourage better year round rail and bus links through private companies and community schemes	KCC, SBC, Prsh Cncls, Businesses, Rail Companies, VG, LO	On-going to Long	££
Encourage development of the Low Carbon Sector on Isle of Sheppey	Continue to identify opportunities for community energy schemes to produce a sustainable energy plan for the island (e.g. solar power, marine technologies)	KCC, SBC, Prsh Cncls, Businesses, Environment Forum, Land Owners	On-going to Medium	££
	Identify key skills gaps or low carbon sector opportunities to inform development of apprenticeships	KCC, SBC, Prsh Cncls, Businesses, GW, AH, Schools	Short to Medium	£££
	Identify solar arrays/wind farms provisions and limitations and encourage energy efficiency options in new developments and retrofitting through neighbourhood plans as appropriate	Prsh Cncls, Comm Memrs, Businesses, SBC	On-going to Short	££
	Continue to support residents to reduce energy use in their homes and businesses (e.g. Warm Homes scheme, Green Doctors etc)	KCC, SBC, Prsh Cncls, Businesses, GW, AH, Schools, LO, VG	On-going to Medium	£££

PLANNING OUR FUTURE BY THE COAST

Under the OUR VISION heading were the words, "Which is well connected internally and externally" and "Which is an exemplar, teaching others how to be sustainable"

Under the title Tourism with the sub heading "To encourage visitors and residents to experience the natural environment across the Isle of Sheppey", certain sub actions were proposed.

The first proposal was to support the development of a **cross island cycle way.**

Under the heading Infrastructure and economy

“Develop travel plans and identify gaps in provisions for the Isle of Sheppey” and “Encourage better year round rail and bus links through private companies and community schemes”

Suggested partners were given as KCC SBC Parish Councils, Sustrans etc.

In compiling this report, I have consulted with representatives of the Community Rail Partnership management and Sustrans.

Here are some of the comments received.

From our Connected Stations Toolkit

"Empowering communities to travel through sustainable and healthy means, including a shift away from car use, **and more equitable access to transport, brings a range of benefits for local people, places and our wider environment.**

When spearheaded and delivered by local people and partners, **station travel planning can put communities at the forefront of sustainable transport development, tapping into local identities, aspirations and needs."**

Paul said that:

"Whilst it is unrealistic to think all cars and car parks could be banned overnight, we aren't able to support a proposal which is looking to develop new car parking infrastructure - even though this might mean shorter journeys **IF** those people did travel to a railway station closer to their home. Where existing car parks exist we would suggest a local

campaign to promote more sustainable journeys to reach those car parks within the current provision.

We would suggest ;-

**A DRT bus service,
better cycling provision and charging points for electric cycles or scooters (when these become legal) at the station.**

Any solution that requires investment would need to be backed by **evidence of need from the communities** who might use them and through conversations with South Eastern, the district council and transport authority to see how this aligns with their plans.

Hope this helps convey our stance as Community Rail Network and that we would expect our members to also promote - as I know Sustrans do.”

Finally, to quote from Minster Parish Councillor Peter Mac Donald, who sums up the predicament that Sheppey is in thus

1) The economic base of Sheppey is extremely poor, Sheerness West Ward has the highest % of non employed residents of working age *IN THE COUNTRY even higher than the so called poor inner city's.*

(2) A great play is made of the alleged value of tourism, this is of course is generally only seasonal, the main beneficiaries are of course the absentee site owners who spend their ground rents elsewhere.

(3) There is a need for small & starter units on the Island, but before these can make any real impact, most working people commute off the Island. Rather than the increase of population of un or low skilled new residents, Sheppey's economy needs

London Commuters who due to their enhanced earning capacity, have the potential to have a greater disposable income by taking advantage of lower living costs. To encourage employed people to use the rail network rather than commute by car, Queenborough needs car parking. The other site is a car/lorry park at Swale to cater for the residents of Iwade.

(4) BETTER ACCESS TO THE RAILWAY IS NEEDED IN ORDER To make some progress in the Island's economy which was destroyed by the closure of the Royal Dockyard 60 years ago, followed by the policy 'build more houses on brown land', which resulted in Pilkington's closing the sheet glass factory, (they bought the private Tudor Safety Glass, took the patents & closed the factory.) Royal Dolton closed the sanitary ware factory, Canning Town Glass bottle factory was closed, Sheppey Glue & Chemical's closed their factory....all these were because the owner Companies wanted to cash in on the enhanced value of their sites with residential Planning Permission.

(5) For several years I have asked for a morning & evening return of a HS1 service to boost our local potential for higher grade commuters, Newington & Medway would ensure the viability, Swale Rail, & our MP should make an effort not just come up with negatives.

THE HISTORY BIT

Initially called **the Sittingbourne and Sheerness Railway**, now called **The Swale Line**, it has only two island stations on it. There is a station at **Queenborough** and there was once one leading to

the **Naval Dockyard**. This station, originally called **Sheerness-on-Sea**, opened on the 19th July 1860.

On 1st June 1883, a branch was opened to a new station which was much more convenient for the town. The new station took the name **Sheerness-on-Sea** and the original station was renamed **Sheerness Dockyard Station**.

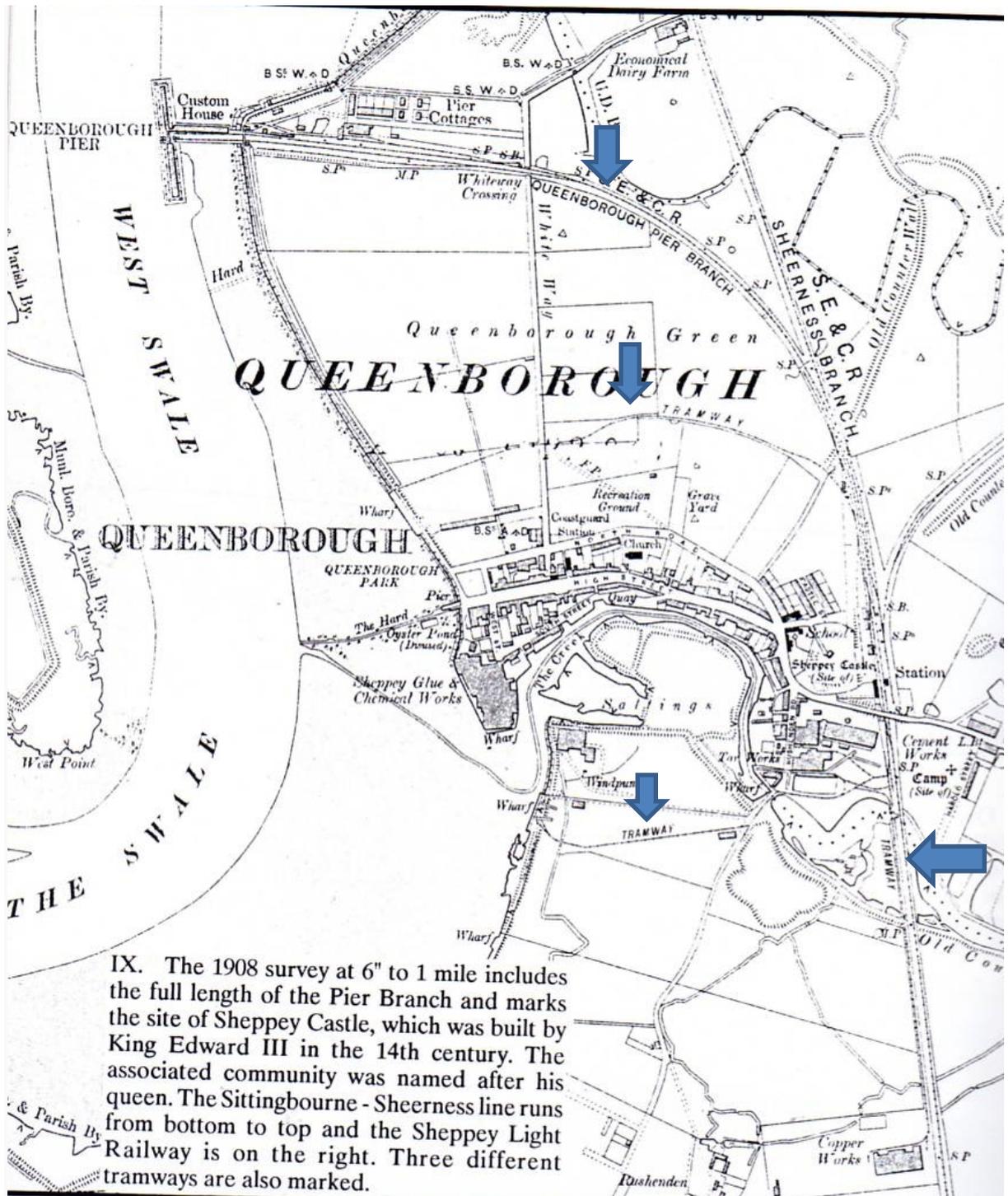


ALL OF THE STATIONS WERE BUILT WITH THE IDEA OF ATTRACTING FRIEGHT TO THE LINE.

NONE OF THE STATIONS HAD PROVISIONS FOR PARKING CARS OR THE STORAGE OF BICYCLES

This was a Victorian Railway built for the needs to the Victorian times.

Below is a map of the areas around Queenborough in 1908. Note the number of tramways that existed at the time to carry freight.



Sadly there is very little freight carried on the line now and the freight yard at Queenborough has remained empty since around the 1950ies.

Just as the Victorians had a new vision for the island, we today need to have a new vision to be adopted and implemented, but it will need support.