

Committee Report Checklist

Please submit the completed checklists with your report. If final draft report does not include all the information/sign offs required, your item will be delayed until the next meeting cycle.

Stage 1

Report checklist – responsibility of report owner

ITEM	Yes / No	Date
Councillor engagement / input from Chair prior to briefing	Y	
Commissioner engagement (if report focused on issues of concern to Commissioners such as Finance, Assets etc)	Y	Just starting now
Relevant Group Head review	N	
MAT+ review (to have been circulated at least 5 working days before Stage 2)	Y	20/08/25
This item is on the Forward Plan for the relevant committee	Y	
	Reviewed by	
Risk comments		
Legal comments	JC	20/08/25
HR comments (if applicable)		

For reports with material financial or legal implications the author should engage with the respective teams at the outset and receive input to their reports prior to asking for MO or s151 comments.

Do not forward to stage 2 unless all the above have been completed.

Stage 2

Report checklist – responsibility of report owner

ITEM	Completed by	Date
Monitoring Officer commentary – at least 5 working days before MAT	L Heron	27/08/25
S151 Officer commentary – at least 5 working days before MAT	T. Collier	27/8/25
Confirm final report cleared by MAT		

Business Infrastructure and Growth Committee

11 September 2025

Title	<i>Heathrow Southern Rail link proposal</i>
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report Author	<i>Councillor Chris Bateson</i>
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	<i>No</i>
Exemption Reason	Not applicable
Corporate Priority	This item is not in the current list of Corporate Priorities but still requires a Committee decision.
Recommendations	<p>Committee is asked to:</p> <p>1. Consider the findings of the all-party working group (“the Working Group”) set up by the Business Infrastructure and Growth Committee contained in this report; and</p> <p>2. Recommend to Full Council that this Council supports the Heathrow Southern Rail (“HSR”) link proposal conditional upon:-</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(a) Trains stopping at Staines;</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(b) Evidence that the proposal will not harm Staines Moor nor increase the groundwater flood risk in the area; and</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(c) Reviewing and agreeing detailed terms of the HSR link proposal</p>
Reason for Recommendation	<p><i>HSR will provide a direct link from Staines to Heathrow airport, promoting economic growth in the Borough and providing a sustainable method of travel to the airport for passengers from within and outside the Borough.</i></p> <p><i>Of the two options presented (HSR and the “Southern Light Rail” (SLR) alternative), HSR is the least damaging to the environment and streetscene, most practicable, supported by Heathrow Airport Limited and least intrusive in terms of privacy for local residents</i></p> <p><i>The HSR proposal places far fewer demands on the already overstretched resources of the Council</i></p>

1. Executive summary of the report *(expand detail in Key Issues section below)*

What is the situation	Why we want to do something
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council has to decide whether to support the Heathrow Southern Rail (“HSR”) consortium’s plan to build a “heavy rail” link between Staines town centre and Heathrow Airport or to support an alternative consortium (Southern Light Rail “SLR”) or to support neither. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Government has given the green light to the further expansion at Heathrow. Heathrow is obliged to increase sustainable travel routes. A rail link from London and beyond, via Staines, has been proposed. The Council is being asked to support that proposal.</i>
This is what we want to do about it	These are the next steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The proposal is that the Council engage fully with HSR, support its plans, and work with HSR to deliver the best possible outcome for the Borough’s residents.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Council to make a public declaration of support – with conditions – for the HSR plans.</i> <i>Thereafter, Council to continue the working group links with Heathrow and HSR.</i>

2. Key issues

Introduction

Heathrow Airport has a mandate from the UK government to expand its operations and to build a third runway, in both cases using finance that has been secured from the private sector. At the same time, Heathrow Airport has undertaken to reduce the impact of road traffic (congestion, air pollution, car parking spaces) to the Airport by means of a rail link from the south. Previous attempts to provide this rail link have failed because of geographical constraints, especially those posed in Runnymede and Spelthorne (Egham Hythe rail crossing closure frequency, the Staines Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest or “SSSI”, M25 boundary constraints). Nonetheless, all consultees* now support this latest proposal from Heathrow Southern Rail, except Spelthorne Borough Council. HSR is now again seeking the Council’s support for its proposed southern rail link to Heathrow airport.

Early iterations of the proposal to link the broader Surrey/Sussex areas to Heathrow Airport did not include a stop in Spelthorne, so Spelthorne would have borne the brunt of the disruption and environmental damage but without any benefits for our residents.

The new proposal from Heathrow Southern Rail seeks to address that issue by including a stop at Staines. HSR has also implied that TfL might create a link to the Elizabeth Line from Staines although this is not within the gift of HSR.

In response to the proposal from HSR, a new consortium including the Chief Executive of Spelthorne Borough Council, who has experience of delivering light rail schemes to cities in various countries, has proposed an alternative scheme. The group involved in this SLR consortium also includes the Council’s Head of Place, Protection and Prosperity.

This alternative scheme would be similar to the Docklands Light Railway in East London (“DLR”) and could run at very short intervals 24 hours a day. There would be a direct DLR-style overhead link from Staines to Heathrow.

The respective advantages and disadvantages of each scheme are explained later in this document.

Due to the obvious potential conflict of interest created by the involvement of very senior council officers in one of the schemes, the Business Infrastructure and Growth (“BIG”) Committee decided to exclude *all* council officers from any involvement in the Council's process of evaluating these schemes and making a recommendation to full Council.

The BIG Committee set up an all-party working group to study the proposals, seek further information and evidence, and to make a recommendation to the BIG committee.

The all-party Working Group is now reporting to the BIG committee and making its recommendation to Council in this report.

Options available to the Council

3. Options appraisal and proposal

3.1 The Working Group considers that there are four potential recommendations but of these two can be immediately discounted. (More on that later.)

The four options are:

- 1) Support the HSR scheme
- 2) Support the SLR scheme
- 3) Support both schemes
- 4) Oppose both schemes

Key considerations

First and foremost, the Council acknowledges the potential benefits to Surrey, Sussex, Heathrow Airport and UK plc of these schemes, but our priority is putting *our* residents at the heart of everything we do. Therefore, the Working Group strongly recommends that Council approach this matter purely in terms of what this means to our community in Spelthorne.

In making its recommendation to the Council, the Working Group has, inter alia, considered the following points:

- Environmental impact
 - Of particular concern is the impact on Staines Moor, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. This issue is addressed separately in this report.
 - Some will also argue that any moves to increase air traffic will contradict the Council's declaration of a climate emergency and that both schemes should therefore be opposed.
- Economic impact

- Both schemes suggest that increased footfall in Staines as a result of their link would boost economic growth and prosperity in the town.
- Street scene
 - A major concern about the SLR scheme is that it would run on an elevated track from the current railway station, through the town centre and across Staines Moor. The HSR scheme would use the existing Staines to Windsor and Eton Riverside track then branch off to cross under Staines Moor via a tunnel.
 - Both schemes have so far failed to demonstrate how increased car traffic to the new station would be accommodated without causing severe congestion in the neighbouring roads, which are largely residential in nature.
- Social impact
 - Neither scheme fundamentally improves access for residents other than those with easy access to the existing railway station. Specifically, neither route makes it easier for Stanwell residents, many of whom work at the airport, to commute to and from Heathrow.

Considerations that are out of scope

Some aspects of these proposals, and the evaluation thereof, are considered “out of scope” in terms of the working group’s evaluation and recommendation.

These include:

- The cost of the respective scheme (which only matters to the Council and our residents in terms of deliverability and the risk that the Borough might end up with the residue of an incomplete or otherwise failed scheme).
- The economic viability of the respective schemes (neither scheme is proposing a profit share with the Borough, so their profitability is not our concern (subject to the previous note)).
- Heathrow expansion. The Council cannot veto the expansion of Heathrow, whether that is delivered by a third runway or other means.
- The Council cannot veto the progress of either scheme. They can both submit their proposals to the UK government with or without our support.
- The potential extension of the Elizabeth line to Staines (which is beyond the remit of HSR)
- The impact of the Local Government Reorganisation of Surrey. (Regardless of this restructure, councillors in the new authority who represent the “ex-Spelthorne” area will still want to prioritise their residents and ensure that local considerations are given sufficient weight.)

3.1 The option to support SLR is not recommended because of:

3.2 the detrimental impact on the street scene in Staines of having overhead track in the town centre,

3.3 the loss of privacy to residents along its path (running potentially every 5 minutes, 24/7 at bedroom height, overlooking gardens, etc).,

the detrimental effect on Staines Moor of constructing and operating an overhead rail track,

- 3.4 the diversion of senior officers' time and attention away from the core task of running the Council
- 3.5 This also therefore precludes the option of supporting both schemes.
- 3.6 There is the option to oppose both schemes but the Working Group considers this impractical because there is so much Government support for Heathrow expansion and there is so much support from all other consultees for HSR that the working group believes the Council would be overruled anyway and is better placed to influence the scheme to the benefit of our residents if we support and engage with HSR.

4. Risk implications

- 4.1 Environmental damage, especially to Staines Moor, is a major risk and could have irreversible consequences
- 4.2 This would also potentially harm the reputation of the council
- 4.3 Changes to the route, such as not stopping in Staines, would remove any benefit to Spelthorne residents
- 4.4 Congestion in the town centre caused by passengers driving to the railway station, either to park long term or drop off or pick up
- 4.5 The financial collapse of either scheme could leave Spelthorne with an unfinished construction project blighting Staines in particular
- 4.6 It is difficult to see how any of these risks can be mitigated.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 The recommended course of action places no financial burden on the Council at this time. If the HSR proposal progresses financial implications will be considered in detail.

6. Legal comments

- 6.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report. If the HSR proposal progresses legal advice will be taken.

Corporate implications

7. S151 Officer comments

- 7.1 The S151 Officer notes that as the Council will not be directly involved in the progression of either proposed rail link scheme that there are no direct financial implications for the Council and that there are no budgetary implications. Longer term depending on how any proposal is progressed, there will be potential impacts for the Council's successor authority in terms

prosperity of the town and borough and possibly on Council assets holdings adjacent to the station. No further comments from the S151 Officer

8. Monitoring Officer comments

- 8.1 The Monitoring Officer confirms that the relevant legal implications have been taken into account.

9. Procurement comments

- 9.1 There are no immediate procurement implications arising from this report.

10. Equality and Diversity

- 10.1 The recommendation does not have any equality and diversity implications.

11. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

- 11.1 Staines Moor is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), has been left unworked for 1,000 years other than for grazing, is home, amongst rare flora and fauna, to some unique ecological features, such as the oldest anthills in Britain (200 years old). Both schemes would traverse the Moor, SLR on raised pylons, HSR via a tunnel.
- 11.2 Both schemes potentially increase groundwater flood risk and we have yet to see scientific evidence that either scheme can be built without increasing that risk and causing permanent, irreversible harm to the Moor and surrounding area, including homes.
- 11.3 For these reasons, we expect both schemes will face opposition from a sizeable number of residents and other interested parties.

12. Other considerations

- 12.1 HSR has suggested that a link to the Elizabeth line could also be constructed and this is an attractive notion, but:
- 12.2 Construction of such a link is the responsibility of TfL, not HSR and HSR cannot make such a commitment
- 12.3 It is unclear what the route of such a link would be.
- 12.4 The Working Group recommends that this notion be discounted, since it would not even be a condition that HSR could commit to.

13. Timetable for implementation

- 13.1 Working Group to confirm.

14. Contact

- 14.1 Councillor Chris Bateson Bateson Cllr.Bateson@spelthorne.gov.uk

***Please submit any material questions to the Committee Chair and Officer
Contact by two days in advance of the meeting.***

Background papers: There are none.

Appendices:

Appendix A: HSR presentation 02/04/2025

Appendix B: SLR presentation