

Great British Rail – Expression of interest for Bishop’s Stortford

1. Describe the location of your application and your proposed headquarters site

Bishop’s Stortford is a historic market town lying on the border of Hertfordshire, Essex and Cambridgeshire. Its train station was first opened on 16 May 1842 by the Northern and Eastern Railway and included a large goods yard as well as sidings as far as the wharves along the River Stort. Like many other towns in England Bishop’s Stortford has undergone many changes since then and currently the Goods Yard site is now the centre of an exciting £200m development programme led jointly by Network Rail and Kier. This project, which received planning permission in 2018 and is already well underway and will deliver improved accessibility, retail, residential and high quality office space. More details can be found here: [Our Plans – Bishop's Stortford Goods Yard Site](#)

Overlooking the railway the new, the 4-storey, 27,000 sq ft “Goods Shed” office block would be an ideal HQ for Great British Rail and would fit in with the wider aspirations of Shaping Stortford, a steering group of local public and private stakeholders. The benefits of being located here would include:

- A continuity between an historic railway site and a modern, mixed development in keeping with a market town
- Additional jobs and investment within a major site, near to the town centre
- An accessible gateway to the Eastern region including major hubs such as Cambridge and Norfolk
- Encouraging more sustainable travel in the town

This expression of interest has been supported by the Shaping Stortford Group, representing East Herts District Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Bishop’s Stortford Town Council, Herts LEP, Solum*, local residents and the local Business Improvement District. The Shaping Stortford group has been established for some years and have been working on various projects to improve the town including encouraging modal shift and behaviour change around travel. Their most recent study on options can be found here: [Bishop's Stortford Transport Options Summary.pdf \(eastherts.fra1.digitaloceanspaces.com\)](#)

We think having the Great British Rail HQ in Bishop’s Stortford would fit neatly with the wider aspirations of the town in terms of housing and employment growth whilst linking to our market town heritage.

2. Describe how your application will and demonstrate Levelling Up

Although Bishop’s Stortford is a market town in the South East of England it is not without its challenges. For example a recent report by the Education Policy Institute indicates disadvantaged pupils in Stortford are 1.2 grades behind their peers by the time they take their GCSEs. The town’s primary

employer, Stansted Airport, was hit hard by Covid restrictions and the industry (along with employment) has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Levelling Up for the area is about building a diverse local economy which supports levels of housing growth outlined in East Herts Councils District Plan.

Locating the HQ in Bishop's Stortford will help us achieve three of the twelve Levelling Up missions directly (improved wellbeing, pride in place and improved pay, employment and productivity).

3. Describe how your location is well connected to the rest of Great Britain and how people will access your site

The current site is on the West Anglia Main line, providing good access to/ from London and to the rest of the Eastern region, especially Cambridge and Essex and Norfolk. It is also the last stop on the fast connection from London to Stansted Airport, supporting good access to many European destinations.

In terms of wider accessibility and the Equalities Act 2010, step free access to the Goods Yard (from the train station as well as the rest of town) is a planning condition and the development is progressing with this in mind.

4. Showcase the opportunities your location offers Great British Railways:

Bishop's Stortford is a town where rail travel is a key means of transport, especially to work (commuting into London, Stansted and Cambridge). For example, pre-pandemic (2018/19) there were 3.529m journeys from the train station putting usage at 80 per head against a national average of 52. There is already a set of well engaged residents/ customers who would welcome a high profile organisation being located within the town.

The Goods Yard site is adjacent to the railway station and from there offers direct access to the town centre, with its mix of independent retail and professional services, all supported by the Business Improvement District and local Chamber of Commerce who can facilitate engagement and opportunities for working with different local industries. It is also near to a key town centre site called Old River Lane where a major cinema led regeneration scheme will be taking place in the next few years and the Council has recently opened up a brand new £30m leisure centre (Grange Paddocks) and new employment sites to the North and South of the town are currently being built out as part of ensuring the local retail, leisure and employment offer can support housing growth.

5. Demonstrate the location's railway heritage and current network links

The Goods Yard site is the original goods yard that serviced the railway station when it first opened up. Locating the HQ of Great British Rail on this historic site, as part of modern, mixed development would provide strong continuity between the past and present. A good history of the railway station at Bishop's Stortford can be found here: [Guide 11: Railway Station | Bishop's Stortford & Thorley - A History & Guide \(stortfordhistory.co.uk\)](https://stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide-11-railway-station-bishop-stortford-thorley-a-history-guide/)

6. Describe how your location will offer Great British Railways good value for money

Depending on the size and space requirements of Great British Rail, rents and service charges will be at market rates.

7. Demonstrate how the national headquarters will be welcomed by the local public

As mentioned above rail usage is above the national average in the town meaning local residents are fully behind the importance of rail travel and would welcome Great British Rail being located in the town.

Shaping Stortford is representative group of local stakeholders from the public and private sectors and are behind this expression of interest as are the Bishop's Stortford Railway Society (a local voluntary organisation formed in 1969)