

The Mid-Norfolk Railway Preservation Trust (MNRPT) has read with some interest the prospectus issued by Lanpro for its proposed New Town to the east of North Elmham. The MNRPT would like to stress that it had no prior knowledge of this document, was not consulted regarding the information contained within it and has yet to be sent it, having only received it via third parties.

Our responses are in red:

The company also has full control of the freehold interest of the former North Elmham Station site.

No, it does not. Lanpro have an option to purchase the old station yard at North Elmham which is privately owned and that is the total extent of their railway orientated interest there. The former station building was sold privately and remains in private hands and the Mid-Norfolk Railway is the sole owner of the trackbed, including the level crossing over Station Road, and the line northwards to County School. Lanpro should not be suggesting anything else.

The company is currently working with the Mid Norfolk Railway Trust to deliver a new platform, drop-off area and car parking within this site.

The MNRPT has been in discussions with various developers alongside the railway for many years, amongst them Lanpro. These discussions have related to the various developments which Lanpro are involved in, including their option to purchase the old station yard at North Elmham. However, the post holding the gate of the level crossing on the north-west corner is in line of sight of traffic coming down Back Lane in North Elmham and if Lanpro wish to build houses on this site, the post needs to be moved. If moved, it will also maintain a safe route across the railway line for pupils on their way to school. Lanpro have suggested a new platform, drop-off area and car park at the developer's expense in return for the MNRPT allowing the post to be moved to provide a vision splay for traffic leaving the new site to a standard acceptable to Highways Norfolk. These negotiations are currently separate to the New Town concept though we have no doubt Lanpro have ulterior motives concerning the New Town project and North Elmham Station.

The Mid Norfolk Railway that currently operates a heritage service represents a unique planning and development opportunity. The Trust is committed to bringing the rail line back into commercial use and it has worked towards this aim since its inception in 1972.

One of the main aims of the MNRPT is to restore the railway line to County School and run a rail service there from Dereham using heritage railway stock. The MNRPT has always from its inception in 1995 (not 1972) run on a commercial basis and works with a number of mainline train companies, such as Direct Rail Services and the recently announced storage deal with Greater Anglia to maintain and improve our facilities.

The Trust owns all the rights (including unusually transferred former British Rail powers), rolling stock, certification and other paperwork necessary to operate a passenger and rail freight service between the town of Wymondham and County School Station near the village of North Elmham. Importantly due to the transfer of powers, its platforms, signalling, sidings, turning loops, track bed, crossings and other associated infrastructure can be improved, replaced and upgraded at any time without the need for a Transport and Works Orders or Parliamentary time with associated delays.

This is true with one exception, there is no Transport and Works Order in place between County School Station and the buffer stop at the end of the old siding to the north of North Elmham Station site. However,...

...The delivery of the garden town land capture model as a funding mechanism will secure an economic future for both new and existing communities along its route.

This is an absurd comment to make. All heritage railways in Britain have a maximum speed limit of 25mph. How many commuters will want to board a train at County School, North Elmham or Dereham and travel at a sedate 25mph to Wymondham? Road traffic down the A1067 from the new roundabout at Bintree to Norwich will be absolutely appalling. In addition, existing communities will not benefit at all from the railway – if trains have to stop at the intermediate stations between Dereham and Wymondham Abbey, the journey time will be at least 38 minutes from Dereham alone. It's also worth bearing in mind that the main reason the railway closed to

passengers in the 1960s was that none of the stations were within easy walking distance of the villages and largely still aren't. And there aren't any car parks at any of the village stations either. How will they benefit? Our understanding is that trains will only operate as far as a new Wymondham Junction Station and not into the mainline station there – if so, commuters will face a ten minute walk from one station to the other, hardly a perfect start to a working day! The MNRPT has a rail connection on to the mainline at Wymondham but, as a heritage railway, we are not allowed to run our trains on to the main line.

The rail corridor also provides existing utilities to the garden town site and, through the delivery of a new data centre within the garden town, could be used to create a new virtual smart city along its route. This approach could be used to connect into the discussed Global Crossing network along the Norwich to Cambridge line to deliver high-speed communications, funding opportunities and a commercial advantage across Mid-Norfolk.

The MNRPT is concerned that Lanpro have made this statement with nothing of substance to back up what they're saying. Lanpro contacted the MNRPT in 2014 wanting our support for this project which we have consistently refused to give. We made it perfectly clear then and still do now that when we have a sufficiently detailed proposal to put to our Members, the Members will be asked to vote on it. If the vote is in favour of the development we will support it but if it's against, we won't. Worth noting that comments about the rail corridor providing existing utilities to the proposed new town site have never even been mentioned to the MNRPT let alone discussed and yet they appear in Lanpro's official proposal. This, as far as we are concerned, is Lanpro trying to make their arguments for their project look as attractive as possible with no hard evidence to support it. Something else to consider and which isn't mentioned is that the occupiers of the new homes will have to pay an extra service charge to help to cover the huge ongoing costs of keeping the railway running. How much will this be per family?

The MNRPT is also concerned about the rumours now circulating regarding Lanpro having control of the MNRPT, the MNRPT would like to stress that this is simply not true, the MNRPT is a wholly independent charity and not under the control or management of any other body. The subject of Compulsory Purchase powers has also been rumoured. These powers are normally used by government and statutory authorities for the purchase of land required in the national interest for major projects. These powers are not normally granted to developers for projects proposed to generate them a profit.

As far as we are aware, Lanpro have carried out no feasibility studies into this project and we must make it clear that we have not entered into any formal agreement with Lanpro nor have any intention of doing so in the foreseeable future. Our primary concern is to preserve our status as a Heritage Railway and, until all the implications concerning the future of the MNRPT if this new township goes ahead are made clear, which Lanpro have so far failed to do, we are in no position to either support or oppose these proposals.

The Mid-Norfolk Railway would like to stress, therefore, that we have no formal relationship with Lanpro, or "Norfolk Railway Village Ltd" and, in particular, have no involvement, control or input into the plans for the new township which have still to be approved by the planning department of Breckland Council.

We trust that our position is now clear. Suggestions to the contrary should be ignored.