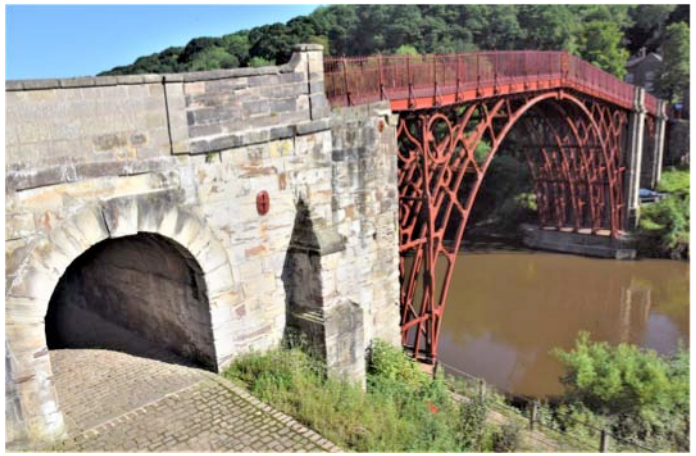
Ironbridge: a future access solution

1. Introduction

The Ironbridge Railway Trust was formed in November 2005 and is a Company limited by Guarantee, incorporated in 2007, gaining charitable status in 2009. It was formed for the purpose of promoting sustainable transport into The World Heritage site at Ironbridge, by advocating the reinstatement of the old GWR(Severn Valley – Hartelbury to Shrewsbury via Bridgnorth) branch line through the Ironbridge Gorge, following the redevelopment of former power station site at Buildwas.

The redevelopment of this site represents a unique opportunity to create a complimentary landscape of mixed use development in an area of outstanding natural beauty. The potential of this site was recognised over ten years ago by a small group of volunteers with experience in tourism, railways and architecture. This group formed The Trust and at their own expense, they have gone on to develop proposals of their own for the redevelopment of the power station site, which they believe will bring benefit to the community and the economy of the local district, whilst recognising the sensitivity of the area.

Much research has been undertaken over the last 12 years, but progress has been inhibited by a lack of clarity on the fate of the power station site. However, since its future has now become more apparent, we consider there are enormous opportunities, as we will explain in this document, Including proposals to use of the line to improve access for tourists and visitors, thus providing significant employment and enhanced economic opportunities for Ironbridge.



2. History and Geography

Ice Age glaciers forced their melt waters to cut their way through the Gorge thus diverting the River Severn south into its present course.

Geologically, the area is rich in carboniferous rocks and the availability of coal was one of the factors which led to the first smelting of iron with coke by Abraham Darby in Coalbrookdale over three hundred years ago. Due to its part in the Industrial Revolution, the Gorge is now recognised as a World Heritage Site, the only one in the West Midlands.

However, whilst the geography of the area is an attraction, it is also a limitation. The valley sides are steep and the river leaves little space for a road corridor at the bottom of the Gorge. Consequently there is little space for expansion, which becomes a threat to the environment visitors come to see. The area is also prone to flooding, particularly during autumn and winter.

At the head of the Gorge lies the redundant site of the Buildwas Power Station; which is now about to be redeveloped by the Harworth Group PLC. However, we believe this should be undertaken imaginatively and in a way which relates to the economy of the local community. Future planning requirements for the site need to reflect the essence of our transport proposals against the unique opportunity provided by the closure of the power station.

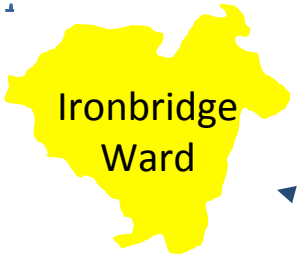
3. Transport Challenges

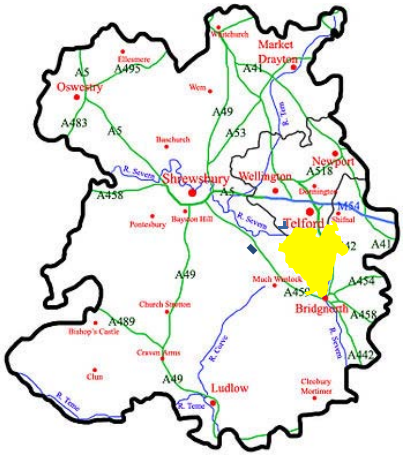
There are no major roads into the Ironbridge Gorge. The route in and out consists of steep hills and winding lanes. Car parking provision is very limited and there are few opportunities to expand this outside the existing envelope.

Traffic jams are frequent, particularly during the spring and summer months when visitor numbers are highest. The narrow roads cannot easily accommodate buses and coaches; while there is a reasonable number of bus services in the Telford area, only two run through the Ironbridge Gorge Monday-Saturday, with no Sunday service at all. This clearly does not provide a sustainable service, encouraging car users to use public transport.

The nearest railway stations are Bridgnorth, served by the Severn Valley Railway (services to and from Kidderminster) and Telford Central, which is situated on the Birmingham to Shrewsbury line. There is no current railway access from Telford or Bridgnorth through the Gorge, therefore there is no option for travellers to leave their cars behind and use rail.

Ironbridge





Key Challenges

1. No major roads
2. Steep hills in and out the gorge
3. Car parking limited
4. Frequent traffic jams
5. Difficult for buses and coaches to navigate
6. Inadequate bus service
7. Local economy suffers from poor access

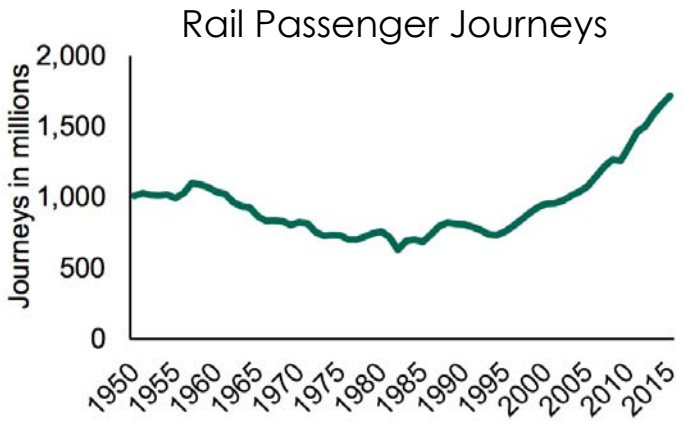
4. Benefits of Rail

The obvious solution for future access

Rail is now a priority of many local authorities, playing a key part in local plans and green transport policies because it has a reputation for being able to stimulate economic growth; see the importance of public transport in the "sustainability pyramid".

Rail is also critical in being able to reduce the amount of traffic and reduce congestion.

The industry has been in continuous growth since 1994 and it is unlikely that this trend will change. It is therefore important to consider the use of rail as a protective measure for areas of great natural beauty such as the Ironbridge Gorge as it is a sustainable solution which reduces pressure on narrow road corridors.



Benefits of rail

1. Reduced traffic congestion
2. Helps reduce pollution
3. Aids economic growth and encourages inward investment in the area
4. Easier access to and from the Gorge
5. Aids the growth of tourism

5. Access to Ironbridge

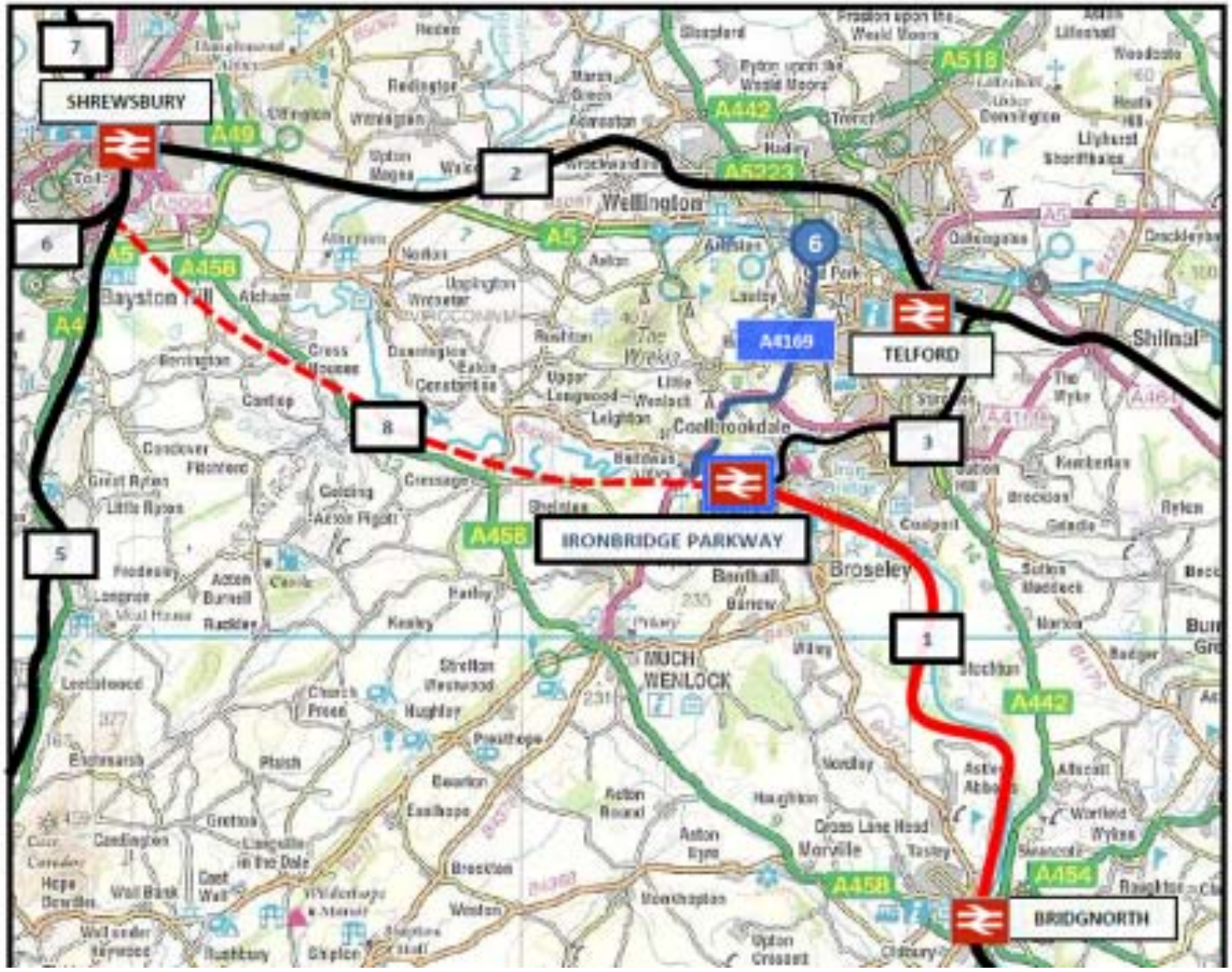
A sustainable transport solution in the Gorge would enable the area to prosper for the following reasons:

- Encourage more tourist, commercial and residential growth in an area where there is currently restricted or insufficient existing transport, whilst providing opportunities for visitors to access the Gorge without traffic problems
- Offer better travel options for visitors and residents linking to Telford and the surrounding area particularly, if power station redevelopment was to be imaginatively designed as a "Shropshire hub" – a destination of national importance.
- Greatly enhances a unique opportunity to develop the World Heritage site at Buildwas sympathetically, to be recognised nationally and internationally as the "Gateway to the Gorge" – being a model for environmental, economic and social community improvement.
- Provision of a community railway operating a service mix of heritage trains and ultra modern heavy rail compatible Parry People Mover (PPM)units along the former GWR (Severn Valley) line, providing the introduction of a most sustainable transport system without creating congestion. Whilst the former operates at SVR with enthusiastic public support, the latter successfully does so at Stourbridge, feeding the main line services. The operation of old and new technology in the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution would indeed be most appropriate !!

Ironbridge & Broseley station before closure

Historic Rail Corridors

The DfT's Initiative for Reversing the Beaching Cuts has the potential to allow re-using some of these



SHROPSHIRE RAIL ROUTES

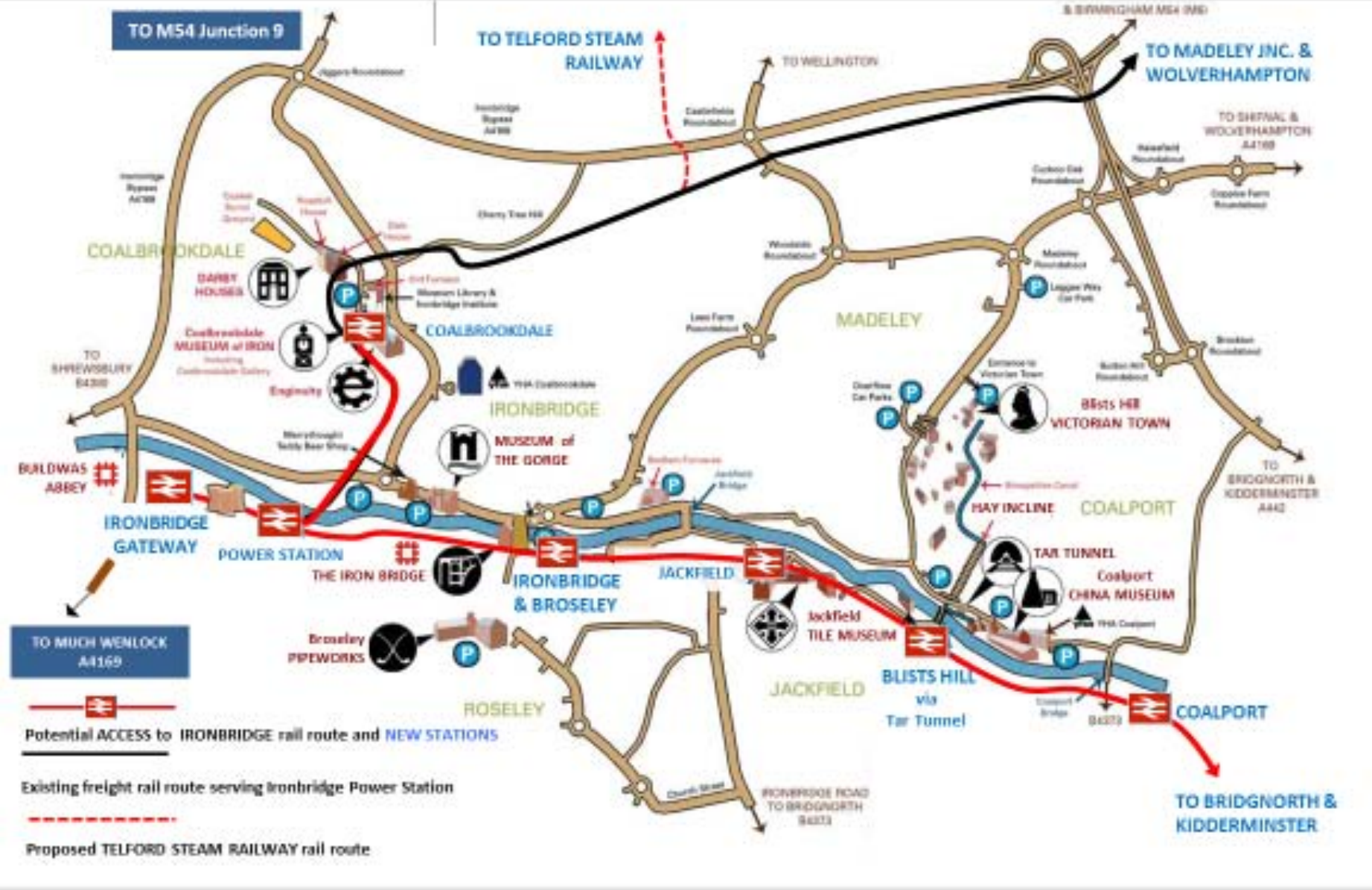
1. Ironbridge-Bridgnorth
   Proposed re-opening
2. Shrewsbury-Wolverhampton
   Network Rail - Passenger
3. Madeley-Ironbridge Power Stn
   Network Rail – Freight Only
4. Bridgnorth-Kidderminster
   Severn Valley Railway
5. Shrewsbury-Hereford
   Network Rail – Passenger
6. Shrewsbury-Cambrian Coast
   Network Rail – Passenger
7. Shrewsbury-Chester
   Network Rail – Passenger
8. Ironbridge-Shrewsbury
   Abandoned railway

Passenger railways

Freight Only railways

Proposed reopened railway

The Gateway to the Gorge has the potential to Access the Heart of the World Heritage Site and allow Ironbridge to become traffic free



Buildwas Power Station prior to demolition commencing in 2019

6. Buildwas Power Station Re-development Opportunities

The redundant existing terraced site of the Buildwas Power Station is unique, with a rural setting and a mainline rail connection to the UK network.

Ironbridge Railway Trust (IRT) considers this to be a high-quality site requiring very careful consideration as to its future redevelopment, being adjacent to the Ironbridge Gorge and its immediate environment.

The Trust believes the site's availability presents an ideal opportunity to create a mixed-use development of the highest calibre which should include housing, hotels (with conference facilities and an extension of the existing golf course with driving range), a leisure retail village, an extension of the existing golf course and a range of R+D high-tech commercial premises.

Tourism, leisure and the quality of the local heritage are at the very heart of this River Severn corridor, so its future prosperity is of local, regional, national and international importance.

Modern day visitors also need complimentary facilities if their continued interest is to be harnessed in order to safeguard the financial future of the region at large.

Our suggested design concept aims to improve the area in a sustainable way that enables future economic growth for local inhabitants and those in the surrounding towns.

The Ironbridge Gorge is an exquisite rural location that houses a World Heritage Site, but its visitors need access to a full range of amenities to enable the area to realise the full economic potential of its tourism industry.

Appropriate development of this site is the key to unlocking the Gorge's true potential.

The current public transport and tourist accommodation needs enhancement to match high visitor expectations as well as environmental and conservation agendas. Making the attractions (and any future development) accessible without adverse effects to the environment is key to a successful development which conserves and develops the sensitive environment of the Ironbridge Gorge. Reinstating the old Severn Valley Branch line as a community railway, allowing the operation of heritage trains and modern PPM units, is of fundamental importance to this concept. This would also provide the opportunity to explore the economic feasibility of extending back to Bridgnorth.

Retaining and upgrading the power station freight line for passenger use, (given a connection to the national network already exists), would also create a major new transport artery which should encourage a modal shift away from road to accommodate both existing **and** future demand

The Ironbridge Railway Trust considers that a mixed redevelopment proposal for the power station site would greatly assist the financial viability of re-establishing rail services by providing a "destination" as well as affording the opportunity to create a park and ride facility for rail access to the Gorge. The effects on congestion in the area would be significant improvement.

Future redevelopment could also accommodate the termination of the Telford Steam Railway's future service proposals, (or any through traffic to Buildwas Abbey), by the creation of shared station facilities to include those necessary for a main line connection as well as the reintroduction of rail transportation through the Gorge. Indeed, such proposals would not only enhance TSR's existing arrangements but, coupled with the requirements for re-introducing rail travel along the Gorge, all these possibilities could also lead to the establishment of railway engineering workshops etc., thus creating jobs and apprenticeships in an historical environment.

Buildwas Station in the 60's

Housing is an important consideration, but not as a single use for the site; despite there being current **and** future housing requirements for the county.

The local expansion of Jaguar Land Rover and other associated companies could also justify the site's use for a major hi-tech research /commercial complex.

However, we would caution against a single use project due to the resultant pressure on local roads from a large amount of residential or commercial traffic.

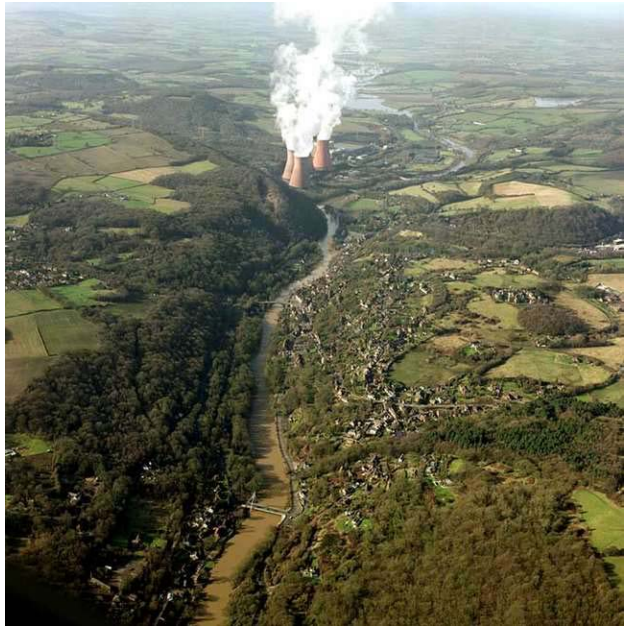
We feel that the topography of the Gorge would much more easily accommodate the type of mixed development that we have outlined above. In addition, a mixed-use development could take advantage of the existing landscape features and be more visually acceptable.

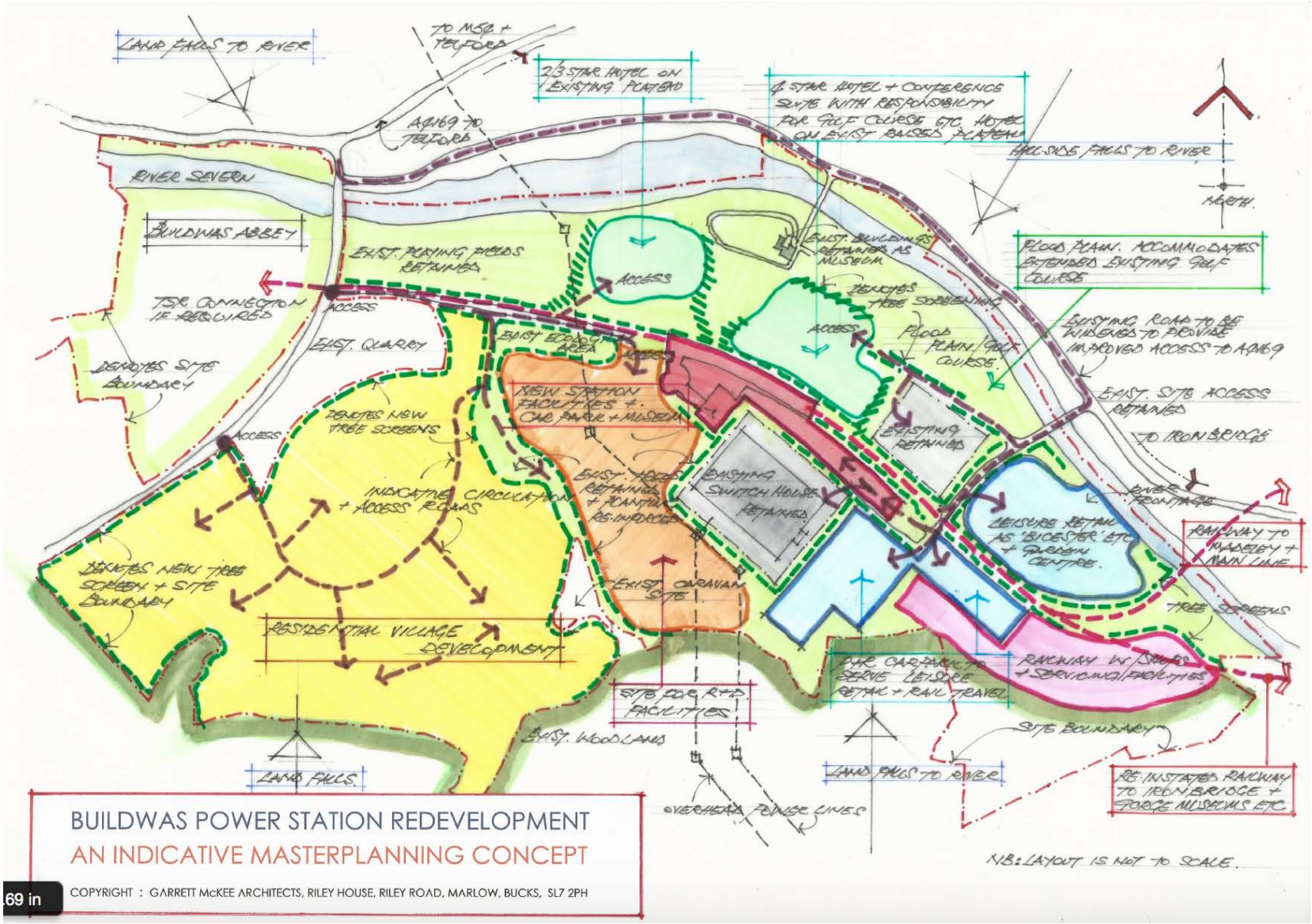
A mixed site could yield over 1500 houses depending upon density, between 500,000sqft and 750,000sqft (circa 46,500m^2 -70,000m^2)of R&D and circa 210,000sqft (19,000m^2) of leisure retail plus the hotel + conference facilities. An initial analysis using the industry standard TRCIS software and the current mode shares for transport in Telford for a development of this size suggests that between 4000 and 6000 new single road trips could occur per day. Without rail, this will place a major strain on the road network.

Conversion of the existing freight line could reduce the impact in line with the National Policy Planning Framework para 32 on sustainable transport, making a development much more attractive.

The Power Station:

1. Ceased operation in November 2015
2. The site has now been sold to the Harworth Group Plc., who are currently planning their development proposals
3. We propose a mixed use development for the site
4. The railway is required to enable the establishment of a mixed use development whilst protecting the linear heritage corridor
5. A mixed redevelopment of the power station site is crucial to create a 'DESTINATION' for the railway





The accompanying indicative conceptual masterplan, prepared by Peter J. Lyons RIBA Dip LA., Chartered Architect and Landscape Consultant representing Garrett McKee Architects Ltd., demonstrates the benefits which can be provided by the creation of a mixed development at Buildwas Power Station. Future local planning requirements for the site need, therefore, to not only reflect the essence of this proposal but also, of equal importance, the alternative sustainable transport initiative it could generate.

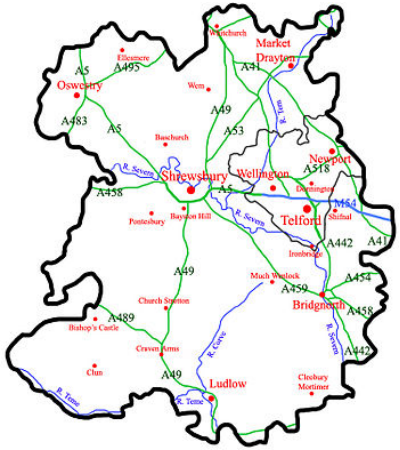
7. Economic Context

Shropshire is one of the most sparsely populated local authorities in the country, with less than 1 person per hectare (compared to 4 per hectare for the rest of England). But against this environment it is more time consuming to travel to and from work.

It is a small business economy and there are a high number of self-employed people in the county. There is also more "outward" commuting than "inward" commuting.

The 2015 population estimate was 311,400, and it is worth noting that in general, social deprivation is not high, other than small pockets.

Car dependency is high, with only 15.8% of households not in car ownership (compared with 24.7% in the West Midlands). Some 70.5% of the working population commute by car, and in 2011, only 3.3% of workers used public transport.



Counting the benefits in jobs

We believe that the economic benefits of a mixed use development could equate to an estimated significant increase in the number of available jobs in the Gorge, for instance :-

- Research and development – circa 4000 to 5000
- Hotels/hospitality – 500 to 600
- Leisure retail – 300 to 600
- Railway (services/engineering) – 150

8. Plans for growth

There are huge plans for growth in Shropshire, as well as in Telford and Wrekin. These are in line with the plans of the West Midlands Combined Authority of which Telford and Wrekin is a non- constituent member and Shropshire aims to join as a non-constituent member.

The Shropshire growth plan sets out aspirations for 70,000 new homes by 2031, 40,000 new jobs by 2031 as well as an increase in GVA (currently £6bn) by 12% as well as an aspiration to bring in £300m private sector investment.

Key Statistics (Shropshire's Growth Objectives):

70,000 new homes by 2031 in Shropshire

40,000 new jobs by 2031 in Shropshire

Increase GVA (currently £6bn) by 12% in Shropshire

Attracts £300m private sector investment

9. Shropshire Tourism Economy

Tourism remains an important part of the county's economy, with a total spend in 2011 of £500m. 35% of spend is generated by overnight visitors, the remaining 65% by day trippers. Some 11.6m people visited Shropshire in 2011. The county employs nearly 15,000 people in tourism (7% of total figures), the equivalent of nearly 11,000 whole time posts.
The main beneficiaries of the tourism trade are accommodation providers (£58m), retail establishments (£133m), catering (£170m), entertainment (£65m) and transport (£43m).

The County of Shropshire is the largest inland county in England. Contained within its boundary is the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution at Ironbridge, which having been granted the status of a World Heritage Site, (bestowed upon it by UNESCO in 1986), needs to be preserved at all costs. It also has several other nationally recognised tourist attractions like The Severn Valley Railway, The Royal Air Force Museum at Cosford and Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, not forgetting the beautiful countryside walks on the Shropshire hills and the many historically important towns. In fact, Shropshire has enough tourist attractions for it to surpass Derbyshire and become the country's principle inland tourist county.

However, the last 10 years has seen a steady decline in visitor numbers to Shropshire's principal tourist attractions which necessitates the need for dramatic and energetic change. The post Brexit and the Corvid 19 pandemic era necessitates a 'New Dawn' and so 'GB Limited' must go all out to redefine its industrial, financial and tourist economies by exploring, harnessing and exploiting every avenue to re-generate growth. Thus, the opportunity exists here to support this initiative, for Ironbridge is not immune

In Summary: *35% of spend is generated by overnight visitors with remaining 65% being generated by day trippers. The county employs nearly 15,000 people in tourism (7% of total employment) with nearly 11,000 being permanent posts. Ironbridge Gorge Museum is the largest income generator which supports around 160 jobs and generates about £20m p.a. to the local economy*

10. Summary

Our proposed solution is to use the existing power station line and then create a rail link back through the Ironbridge Gorge and if feasible perhaps eventually to Bridgnorth. Nine new railway stations could be created, giving opportunities for tourist travel and commuting.

- It also unlocks a significant number of opportunities for the use of the power station site including:
- Residential development
- 1000-space Park and Ride development
- Leisure retail village
- A 4 star hotel and conference centre
- A high-tech R+D Innovation and technology centre

Behind the Vision

1. Buildwas Power Station offers an excellent opportunity to create a mixed-use development as an additional complementary destination at the head of the World Heritage Gorge without impinging upon the quality of the existing environment.
2. Such redevelopment would enhance the future prosperity of the local area encouraging greater tourism and provide numerous jobs, particularly for the local community.
3. The re-introduction of passenger rail transport into the Gorge along the old GWR(Severn Valley) line is essential to support investment of this magnitude, for it would ease access, alleviate visitors traffic congestion and parking problems and help to reduce pollution levels.
4. The proposed concept would respect not only the environment of the World Heritage environment but also the physical characteristic and ecologic quality of the power station site. Rail transportation is also a very sustainable means of travel within the World Heritage Gorge.
5. Such a proposal could be achieved through the formation of public/private enterprise partnership.

11. Finance

It is anticipated that funding and financial assistance would come from a number of sources, depending on the input of local businesses and interested volunteer groups, for example Section 106 Agreements, private contributions from enthusiasts and hopefully grants, given the present thinking of central government.

The success of this "self-help" approach has been seen elsewhere:

- **Llangollen Railway** – abandoned in the 1960s, it saw a volunteer rebuild which included replacement of track, buildings and other infrastructure in phases. The line is now a sustainable tourist attraction between Llangollen and Corwen
- **Gloucestershire and Warwickshire Railway** – in the 1980s a group of interested parties embarked on a rebuild of the defunct line. It has been gradually reopened and extended and will reach Broadway (Worcs) and Cheltenham Racecourse in 2018, bringing jobs and income to the area
- **Welsh Highland Railway** – the successful Ffestiniog Railway extended their operation by rebuilding the narrow-gauge line through the mountains of Snowdonia. The capital was raised with the help of several funding agencies and supporters and the full 25-mile line was built using local companies and volunteers. This is now a significant attraction and has helped to arrest the decline in the region's tourism.

BUT – Ironbridge is unique as it could unite the Severn Valley Railway <u>and</u> the main line, to the benefit of the heritage line, the area's tourist industry and the local community.

12. Our Roadmap for the Future

The Potential Transport Network with Rail