

Great British Railways is looking for a headquarters

Melksham, Wiltshire is well connected, welcoming, growing and large enough to welcome the headquarters, yet small enough for that headquarters to be really important to us. It is climate and environment aware, with sites available close to public and sustainable transport and varied housing in an attractive area that will attract and help retain the very best of staff.

Melksham could be selected for the new headquarters for Great British Railways. It works for the railway. It works for the government. It works for the people who will work there. It works for the local community. *Come on, Mr Shapps, Minister for Transport, what's stopping you?*

We may not be an expected bidder for the HQ, but sometimes it pays to take a serious look at the unexpected.

Please read further ...

Dear Reader,

Introduction

Great British Railways is looking for a headquarters.

Expressions of interest are being sought from towns and cities across Great Britain by 16th March, with a short list drawn up over the following couple of months and a public vote on that shortlist in the later spring.

Although public talk suggests old railway towns such as Crewe, Derby, Darlington and York, the only absolute geographic stipulation from HMG is "Not London", I asked myself the question "**How would this work for my home town of MELKSHAM, and for GBR, if it was located here?**" **And the answer I came up with is "it would work amazingly well"**. So - case made (below) in 10 bullet points, and how about putting in an expression of interest, with the full knowledge that if we actually progress and win, **this would be fabulous for the town, for the county, and for Great British Railways.**

What next

This "starter" document is about 1,200 words long. That's about a quarter of the length needed for an application. It needs to be picked up by our district of regional council ... detail links and contact details further down.

The case for Melksham as the Great British Railways Headquarters in 11 steps

I will elaborate each of these in turn:

1. Good rail connections right across Great Britain
2. A proven record of public transport success in the community
3. Locations available close to public transport, town, parks and river
4. Employment pool within walking and cycling distance and more just a few minutes by train
5. A town that welcomes people, growing, in a growing area in line with local and regional plans
6. (Re)development opportunities
7. Other key transport employers in the area
8. Rail infrastructure with showcase opportunities
9. Levelling up opportunity for Melksham
10. Excellent well educated workforce and good virtual connectivity

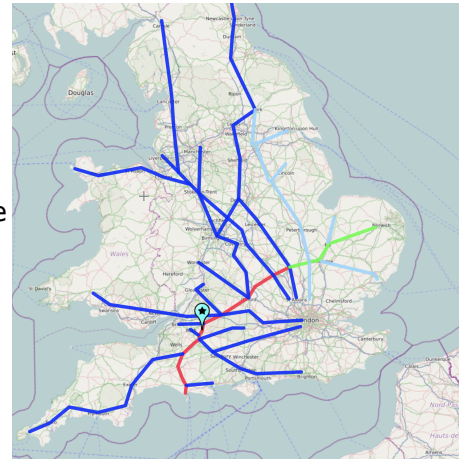
This overview / thought-provoker put together as a "what-if" by Graham Ellis (graham@wellho.net), February 2022. I would be happy to support a serious expression of interest along these lines from the Unitary Council, subNational Transport body or MP.

"Why Melksham" in more detail:

1. Good rail connections right across Great Britain

Melksham has good rail connectivity. See attached map showing connectivity with no more than 1 change to locations across England, Wales and Scotland. Some of these make use of the under-construction East-West rail link which would include direct trains to Milton Keynes for the Network Rail operational centre.

Red – direct trains with current phase East-West
Blue – single change connections (off red)
Green – direct trains with completion of East-West
Cyan – single change connections (off green)



2. A proven record of public transport success in the community

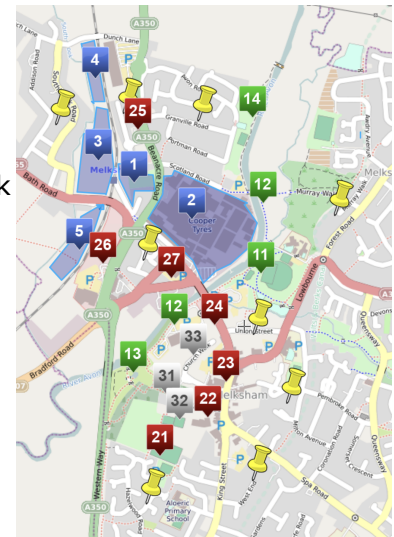
Melksham station was closed in the "Beeching Era" and later re-opened. In the last decade, the community working with local and central government, the train operator has boosted passenger journeys from 3,000 per annum to 75,000 (pre Covid) on a lean train service, with the prospect of us working together for further growth.

3. Locations available close to public transport, town, parks and river

The request for expressions of interest describes the GBRHQ as a streamlined and quite small operation, but is vague beyond that. There are a number of brown field sites near the railway, and a large underutilised industrial and office area - "what do you need" questions to the team to be more specific. See attached map. Most of the sites are contiguous and adjoining or a very short walk from the station. Town buses, buses to neighbouring town and nearby villages also pass by the various sites.

Melksham Town Centre is just across the river (the Bristol Avon) from the sites, with park and nature reserve with exercise equipment, cafe, etc ... also cafes and facilities in Town.

Blue – Potential sites (linkable if multiple needed)
Green – Park and outdoor facilities
Red – Retail and service support
Grey – History and heritage
Yellow – Walking / cycling distance residential



4. Employment pool within walking and cycling distance and more just a few minutes by train

There is a wide variety of housing available within walking and cycling distance of the suggested sites, with multiple primary schools and a secondary school in the town. Most of the housing stock is in good condition. Just 10 minutes on the train will take you to Chippenham and Trowbridge - two other towns with significant pools of skilled workers with residential areas close to the station in both of them.

5. A town that welcomes people and is growing and in a growing area in line with local and regional plans

Melksham is in the heart of Wiltshire on what is known as the "A350 corridor". Central and County planning has our towns all growing, and there seems no trouble for the developers to sell houses. Local and neighbourhood plans (with which I believe this proposal for the GBRHQ is compatible)

6. (Re)development opportunities

The sites shown / listed are mostly brown field or existing buildings (site 12 from the neighbourhood plan - a long shot - is green field but earmarked as development potential).

7. Other key transport employers in the area

There are strong rail industry suppliers in Melksham, and strong business and industry parks in Melksham, Chippenham and Trowbridge.

8. Rail infrastructure with showcase opportunities

Melksham's Station has already been extended from one carriage length to three, trains increased in length and car parking extended twice in recent years. Last year, a station cafe opened too.

Many years ago, the line through Melksham was double tracked, but it is now single - a high standard running line. Dynamic loops are being seriously considered to increase capacity and enable service to be stepped up from one train in alternate directions per hour to one train in each direction. There is also the space available to provide a loop and "special" platform at Melksham itself. Electrification stretches from London almost to Chippenham. We are one of the core lines for electrification in Network Rail's long term strategy.

9. Levelling up opportunity for Melksham

Although a growing area, Melksham has some of the poorest wards in Wiltshire and the bringing of the GBR HQ to the town would help drive levelling up - both in terms of indirect and direct employment and perhaps maintaining / upgrading some of the older industrial building stock.

10. Excellent well educated workforce and Good virtual connectivity

Wiltshire is a centre of excellence for high performance connectivity and technical expertise.

Wiltshire College in Chippenham, Trowbridge and Lackham, Swindon College, and the two Universities in Bath, with the Bath Spa University campus at Corsham Court.

What next?

Having the UK headquarters of Great British Railways in Melksham would be good for the town, good for the region, and good for the railway. It would help levelling up Melksham - one of the poorer towns in Wiltshire, and levelling up the South West - one of the areas that gets lowest transport investment per head of population in the UK. It is a growing town, with a pool of expertise and good connectivity which, however, also needs levelling up - a process made much more viable with the significant extra passenger volume generated by an HQ.

This document is just a rough outline and should any recipient wish to pick up the baton, they are welcome to do so, and I would be happy to support an expression of interest by qualified parties along the lines suggested here.

See <https://gbrrt.co.uk/hq/> for details of the process for selection of the HQ

I (above authored by Graham Ellis, 2nd March 2022) reachable as follows:

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