

Thank you Mr Mayor. Let me start by saying that broadly speaking I am in absolute agreement with Councillor O'Rourke that it is of the greatest importance that this borough gets a second mainline railway station, and that that station should be the proposed Rugby Parkway. As members will be aware, Rugby is one of the fastest growing towns in Britain, and this council is and always has been a pro-growth authority, committed to ensuring the sustainable and economically beneficial growth of this town.

The existing Rugby station is overstretched, as at times are our roads. Residents and businesses of this town suffer the consequences of traffic congestion and poor air quality, and, particularly as we approach the time when the finalised local plan is back from the inspector and before our members for a final vote, it is time we took a wider look at transport infrastructure in this borough.

Rugby Parkway is one way in which a great deal of this congestion can be alleviated, and is particularly important given the scale of development which will soon be taking place in Houlton. 6200 new homes will be built, and it is vital that the residents of those homes are able to access convenient rail travel. Furthermore, like Councillor O'Rourke, I believe it is important that the station be constructed as soon as possible so as to ensure that those new residents of Houlton enjoy the benefits of the station from the earliest possible moment, and don't need to be persuaded out of their cars later.

Within the context of the local plan, it is vital that the growth of our town is accompanied by a growth in the infrastructure of our town, and that wherever possible, new and existing residents are encouraged to use public and other sustainable forms of transport. This can only happen if the facilities are there for them to do so.

Where we differ, Mr Mayor, is over the most expedient way improve Rugby's transport infrastructure. I am afraid to say that for the Borough Council Leader to make representations to the Department for Transport on this one issue in isolation simply does not go far enough.

This Council needs to work closely with all key stakeholders- the county, the developers, the DfT. There needs to be a coordinated effort to ensure that any representations made are as impactful as possible so as to give them the greatest chance of success, and that any representations are part of a coordinated wider plan to address the transport needs of this borough in totality. Yes, I believe we should build Rugby Parkway. But the same time, we should not lose sight of the fact that investment may also be required in our existing mainline station and its associated infrastructure.

There is no doubt that the vast majority of us – of all parties – want to see Rugby Parkway station built, and built quickly. But Rugby Parkway alone is not a magic bullet to solve all our problems, and needs to be considered as part of a far wider package of improvements to the infrastructure of this borough.