

To receive an update on Trackside Café and consider any actions and associated expenditure

Report to: Station Property

Date of Report: 27.08.25

Cllrs Writing the Report: Bickford and Bullock

Cllrs Recommendations

1. To approve the use of additional space inside and outside of the black railings (rail side) plus purchase of additional outdoor tables and chairs both to increase seating capacity and better accommodate patrons at Trackside Café.
2. To delegate authority to the Assistant to the Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair, to identify the most suitable solution for providing sun cover (e.g. umbrella or canopy). This will be subject to approval from GWR and must comply with track regulations and health & safety requirements.
3. To approve a six-month trial period allowing Trackside Café access to the car park during operational hours, in support of business operations.
4. To approve the installation of additional car park signage to discourage unauthorised parking and clearly communicate usage restrictions.
5. To approve the Service Delivery Team to install a small blackboard advertising specials beneath the real-time information screen.
6. To allocate associated cost working within budget for the above items against budget code 6473 EMF Station Building (Purchase & Capital Works).

Report Summary

Councillors Bullock and Bickford met with Dawn Couch from the Trackside Café on Friday, the 22nd of August.

Dawn explained that business was continuing to improve on a month-by-month basis and that she was now at a solid break-even or better than the breakeven point. She was careful to outline that business still remains unpredictable and is often weather-dependent.

She explained that there was a mix of rail travellers and local patrons, with a majority of local residents using the facility. However, in recent months, rail passengers had picked up, which could be in relation to improved service provision.

Councillor Bickford explained the train changes that had come into place to the timetable in May and more recent additions.

Dawn outlined potential concerns over the winter period but was to continue with the operation, and that did underpin our conversation.

Councillor Bickford explained that we hoped there would be some modal shift to rail given the tunnel works, although that might not be as large as originally predicted by National Highways.

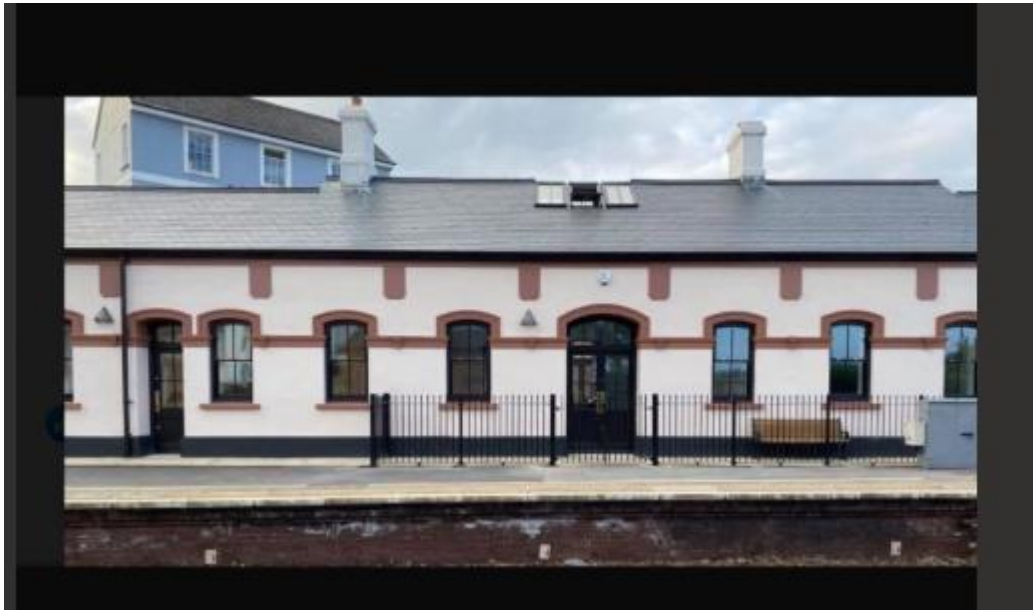
We discussed two elements that would support the Trackside Café and boost income. The first was additional outside table and chair space, as this is very popular (refer to pictures below for location). To achieve this, the Town Council could consider buying additional chairs and tables; storage needs to be carefully considered, and we might need to allow Dawn to access the area behind the railings to the café side of the double doors where tables could be not only stored securely but set up for use by patrons of the Trackside Café.

To review costings for outside table and chairs refer to **Appendix A**.

Inside the gate of the railings up to the double open doors as shown in the picture.



Outside the railings to the grey box shown in the picture.



Dawn also covered the area around parking and advised that patrons would love to have it on site. She offered the option for her staff to open and close the car park each day. However, there would be no way for her to manage the car park, and STC would need to undertake that with additional signage.

Draft additional signage for consideration:

Private Car Park – Isambard House and Trackside Café

Parking is reserved exclusively for hirers of Isambard House and patrons of Trackside Cafe. Unauthorised parking may result in your vehicle being locked in.

STC would need to consider if there would be a charge to use the car park and what potential impact would be on users of Isambard house. We would also need to carefully consider what happens if a car remains in the car park on the café closure time.

We would therefore recommend undertaking a six-month trial whereby the car park is opened and closed by staff at trackside Café between Trackside Café operational hours.

Usage could be monitored and any additional stays carefully managed to ensure the facilities is not abused and the car park remains available for afternoon and evening hirers of Isambard house.

We note the Trackside Café have improved their social media presence and further that there have been several posts saying how busy they are, overall indicating what we understand is an improving position.

Dawn would like permission to install a small blackboard underneath the real time passenger information screen displaying specials. If approved, we suggest our service delivery team install this. Refer to picture below for further information.



Dawn recently took the decision to open when a heritage train came through and although the steam train broke down there were large crowds that meant it was successful opening the Trackside Café and waiting room during that period, she is considering doing this on future days. They also opened this week on the bank holiday Monday and we understand it was relatively busy.

Budgets

Budget Codes: 6473 EMF Station Building (Purchase and Capital)

Budget Availability: £41,566

Committed Spend: Potential for solar PV no firm quotes or decisions made at this stage

Budget Codes: 6810 General Repairs and Maintenance

Budget Availability: £2,088

Committed Spend: £0.00

Signature of Cllrs

Bickford & Bullock