

## Overview

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken for the proposed Rother Valley Railway Track Reinstatement Project. This Scheme would comprise the reinstatement of approximately 3.4km of the former Kent and East Sussex Railway between the B2244 Junction Road and Northbridge Street, Robertsbridge.

The assessment work has been constrained by lack of access to much of the site due to landowner concerns; however, the assessment methods employed have been developed to accommodate this constraint to ensure the conclusions made are suitably robust. The scope of the EIA was agreed with Rother District Council through submission of a Scope and Methodology Report in October 2013 and a formal Scoping Opinion was published by the council in January 2014.

Detailed assessments for each of the agreed environmental topic areas have been undertaken to identify any potentially significant effects arising from the construction and operational phase of the Scheme.

Mitigation measures have been proposed and committed to by Rother Valley Railway to reduce the effects to acceptable levels.

The noise and vibration assessment concluded that there would be no significant effects as a consequence of the construction or operation of the railway.

The air quality assessment concluded that there would be a potential generation of dust during the construction phase, which would reduce the local air quality. However, through the implementation of best practice construction methods (e.g. minimise exposed earthworks and dampening down areas during dry periods), the impacts to air quality would be reduced to acceptable levels. There are not predicted to be any significant air quality impacts as a result of the operation of the railway.

The landscape and visual assessment concluded that the construction phase of the Scheme would have a significant effect on several viewpoints along the dismantled railway. However, these would be temporary in nature. Visual effects during operation of the railway would be more notable at the western end of the route where there are more residential properties (in Robertsbridge, Northbridge Street and Salehurst). Mitigation planting and new hedgerows will be incorporated within the landscape to mitigate these effects. However, it is predicted that landscape impacts will remain, although the level of impact will reduce over time as new planting becomes established and the Scheme blends into the landscape.

The ecology assessment concluded that construction of the railway in the absence of mitigation could result in both a temporary and permanent loss of habitats and impacts on a number of protected species. Despite proposed mitigation measures, including woodland planting and the reinstatement of temporary habitat loss, it is anticipated that impacts will remain due to displacement and disturbance to bats and birds and the loss of mature trees. There are not anticipated to be any ecological impacts during the operational phase of the Scheme.

Through the use of best practice construction methods, outlined in the Environment Agency Pollution Prevention Guidelines, potential impacts due to the accidental pollution of watercourses and groundwater would be minimised. Therefore, there are not predicted to be any significant effects on river water quality and flood risk during construction of the Scheme. However, during the

operational phase of the Scheme, the Flood Risk Assessment concluded that there would be significant flood risk effects due to an increase in flood water levels (including increased flows due to climate change) as a consequence of the small loss of floodplain and restriction of flood water flows. Planned mitigation measures to minimise these impacts include raising the existing flood defence levels to protect properties against the effects of the Scheme and future climate change. Raising the flood defences would have significant beneficial impacts to residents at Robertsbridge who are not currently defended against the impacts of climate change. Rother Valley Railway is working closely with the Environment Agency to deliver the enhancement to the flood defences at Robertsbridge. However, at present these mitigation works are not yet a committed part of the Scheme and as such have not been taken into account as incorporated mitigation for the Scheme.

While there are not predicted to be any significant impacts to archaeology or cultural heritage during construction of the Scheme, it is anticipated that the built scheme would affect the setting of Robertsbridge Abbey (a Scheduled Monument). Although landscape mitigation planting will be implemented, the impacts to the setting will remain significant albeit declining over time.

The transport and access assessment concluded that there would be no significant impacts resulting from the construction of the proposed Scheme on the basis that appropriate local traffic management measures can be agreed with the highway authorities (Highways Agency and East Sussex County Council). There would be no significant impacts once the railway is operational, with delays due to barrier down time at the level-crossings being minimal as a result of the limited number of trains crossing on any given day.

Based on a wide-ranging assessment of the socio-economic impacts of the Scheme, the socio-economics assessment concluded that there may be some beneficial effects during the construction phase due to increased spend at local shops and suppliers by construction workers. The assessment identified that the Scheme could also generate an additional 14 full time equivalent jobs as a result of improved connectivity for inward tourism that the link to the mainline rail network could provide. It is acknowledged that there is the potential for wider regional economic and social benefits, although analysis of this fell outside of the scope of the EIA.

The land use and agriculture assessment concluded that there would be no significant effects as a result of the construction or operation of the railway, although discussions are ongoing with the affected landowners to agree appropriate mitigation and compensation measures.

An assessment of the cumulative effects of the proposed Scheme identified no cumulative effects as a result of the construction or operation of the Scheme in isolation or in combination with other unrelated proposed developments.