



IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE KENT & EAST SUSSEX RAILWAY
Patrons: Gregory Barker MP, Chris Green MA FCIT
**ROBERTSBRIDGE JUNCTION STATION, STATION ROAD,
ROBERTSBRIDGE, EAST SUSSEX. TN32 5DG**

Reinstatement of the Rother Valley Railway (RVR)

Planning Permission: Design and Access Statement June 2014

1. Summary of the scheme:

1.1 This application is for the reinstatement of the final 3.5km of the Rother Valley Railway between Northbridge Street, Robertsbridge to Junction Road, Bodiam (B2244). This will link up with the sections of railway already rebuilt by Rother Valley Railway under previous planning approvals granted by Rother District Council to form the final part of the extension of the Kent and East Sussex Railway from Bodiam to Robertsbridge.

1.2 The reconstruction of the remaining central section of line that forms this application will allow the final completion of the line between Robertsbridge Junction Station (where it will provide a direct link with the mainline railway network), and the existing line at Bodiam and on to Tenterden as part of the Kent & East Sussex Railway.

1.3 The route will follow the line of the original line of the railway, utilising the existing embankments where extant. The reinstatement will include restoration of shallow embankments, the re-construction of 5 bridges, 2 causeways, (to improve the flows in the River Rother) and 10 culverts. There will be 3 new modern automatic full barrier level crossings and 3 pedestrian/bridleway crossings. The application also includes the provision of a "Halt" platform at Salehurst.

1.4 RVRL (which is owned by Rother Valley Railway Heritage Trust (RVRHT) a registered charity) actively manages its heritage, reporting to the trustee responsible for Design and Heritage Management.

1.5 RVRHT has produced a policy document to assist in managing such works, including the Good Practice Guide "Heritage Policy Statement 2003", and this has been utilised as part of the process for the works proposed.

2. National Planning Policies.

2.1 The relevant National planning policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 14, 17, 21, 103, 115, and 116.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file6077/2116950.pdf

This application has taken full account of these policies in the preparation of this RVR reinstatement project

3. The Local Plan - Rother DC statement of support (Policy EM8)

3.1 *"An extension to the Kent and East Sussex Steam Railway from Bodiam to Robertsbridge, along the route identified on the Proposals Map, will be supported, subject to a proposal meeting the following criteria:*

(i) it must not compromise the integrity of the floodplain and the flood protection measures at Robertsbridge;

(ii) it has an acceptable impact on the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

(iii) it incorporates appropriate arrangements for crossing the A21, B2244 at Udiam, Northbridge Street and the River Rother."

3.2 The principles and criteria in policies DS1 and GD1 of the Rother District Local Plan 2006 (as updated in July 2013) have also been fully taken into account in preparing the planning application.

4. RVR has addressed the criteria:-

4.1 (i) A full Flood Risk Analysis with detailed mathematical modelling has been undertaken by Capita Symonds. The work was carried out in close liaison with the Environment Agency and the key results are based on a 100 year flood. (Which was utilised for the design of the flood protection works to Robertsbridge in 2003.) The parameters of a 100 year event are now more severe than those available in 2002 (in June 2009 the UK Climate Impact Programme released new guidance with respect to climate change predictions with significantly more intense rain in the future than at present.) Utilising the new guidance the new modelling shows that minor overtopping of the existing flood protection scheme would occur with this greater severity of rainfall.

The modelling found that the construction of the railway would have virtually no effect on the flooding by a 100 year event either in Robertsbridge or on the downstream flood plain. The potential maximum increase in flood levels would vary between 2 and 6 cm (0.75 inches to 2.7 inches) though over quite limited lengths of the protection bunds and walls. Utilising the new guidance parameters sections of the defences are overtopped in the existing (baseline) scenario with minor additional overtopping in the 'with railway' scenario. RVR is working closely with the Environment Agency to deliver the enhancement to the flood defences at Robertsbridge to take account of both the new 2009 flooding guidelines and the railway re-construction.

4.2 (ii) Following discussions with the High Weald AONB office, they have confirmed by e-mail that they are content that the railway will have no significant impact and that they do not anticipate that the proposals will have any significant impacts on the AONB but reserve their position pending this planning application.

4.3 (iii) In accordance with the ORR document "Level Crossings: A guide for Managers, Designers and Operators – Rail Safety Publication 7 dated December 2013" http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/upload/pdf/level_crossings_guidance.pdf extensive discussions have taken place with the deciding body for level crossings, the Office of

the Rail Regulator (ORR). That has included the submission of detailed designs for Full Barrier Level Crossings which will close the full width of the carriageways and footpath while the crossing is in use by a train. Additional independent consultants studies have been undertaken into road traffic delay and safety.

4.4 The Full Barrier level crossing type proposed for installation on the Rother Valley Railway are used extensively - including such as the East Coast mainline railway with trains operating at 125 mile/hour. Heritage railways operate at maximum speeds of 25 mph, reduced to a limit of 15mph at the level crossings, resulting in short train stopping distances. The type of level crossings proposed by RVR will be local monitored and controlled by a railway signalman.

4.5 These crossings have an excellent safety performance record. The perceived generalised dangers associated with railway level crossings come primarily from accidents at 'open' level crossings, half barrier level crossings, automatically operated (unmonitored) level crossings and user worked crossings.

4.6 Traffic delay time while the level crossings are in use is very low with a closure time of around a minute per train crossing. The resultant overall road journey time delay is insignificant and is less than caused by other traffic lights on the A21 at such as the road junction at Flimwell. A study of traffic at heavy holiday times, when vehicles can be near at a crawl, shows no perceivable overall journey time effect as vehicles held at the level crossings will, once released to proceed, continue their journey to meet the rear of the traffic queue they were already following.

4.7 Having considered the detailed information provided by RVR, the ORR have provided a 'Letter of No Objection in Principle' to the installation and operation of Full Barrier Level Crossings at the three locations proposed in this planning application. In accordance with the subsequent consultation guidelines in the ORR document, the ORR asked RVR to consult with the two highway authorities. The Highways Agency responsible for the A21 requested a series of studies and these have been completed and shared with them. Initial consultations with East Sussex County Council have taken place and they have undertaken to work closely with RVR in finalising the level crossing designs.

4.8 Note: None of the proposed Level Crossings can be built or operated without RVR having first secured a Transport & Works Act Order and/or Level Crossing Order from the Secretary of State for Transport – which Order application would follow the granting of planning approval for this remaining section of the Railway.

4.9 (iii) A study has been undertaken (with a report by Independent Technical Certifier Graham Bessant Eur Eng, FICE, CEng, AMIStructE, CMILT) of the existing Austen's Bridge over the River Rother. Detailed designs for a replacement bridge over the River Rother and causeway adjacent to Northbridge Street are in preparation. Schematic designs have been shared with the Environment Agency.

5. Summary of Local Plan Policy EM8 conditions - in respect of this Planning Application:

5.1 (i) It must not compromise the integrity of the floodplain and the flood protection measures at Robertsbridge;

We believe this Condition is satisfied in the Flood Risk Analysis undertaken by Capita Symonds which has been submitted in draft to EA.

5.2 (ii) It has an acceptable impact on the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

Following our discussions with High Weald AONB office we trust they will be able to provide Rother District Council with confirmation that the level of impact is considered acceptable.

5.3 (iii) It incorporates appropriate arrangements for crossing the A21, B2244 at Udiam, Northbridge Street and the River Rother

5.4 As outlined in the explanation above we are content that Rother District Council make it a condition of any planning approval that none of the level crossings shall be constructed or put into operation without The Secretary of State for Transport first making an Order under the Transport & Works Act and/or a Level Crossing Order authorising their construction and operation.

5.5 In respect of the River Rother Bridges, one of the existing bridges will be replaced with a design that satisfy the Environment Agency. Outline designs have been prepared and will be submitted with the planning application. The other is still serviceable. We believe that these will fully satisfy this part of the condition.

6. Economic and Social Benefits

6.1 Manchester Metropolitan University and specialist consultants have been commissioned to undertake a full economic and social analysis and initial work indicates a potential annual economic benefit in excess of £10m and significant employment opportunities. The full report is part of the supporting documentation.

7. Transport Benefits

7.1 There will be significant removal of some road traffic from country lanes. Tourist companies and the National Trust are already planning to bring in tourists via the link to Network Rail at Robertsbridge.

7.2 Mott MacDonald has undertaken extensive studies on traffic movements on the A21 and their report demonstrates that the level crossing delays will be minor compared with other nearby delaying points.

7.3 In summary their report found that the Flimwell Crossroads Traffic Lights caused a delay impact 20 times that of any predicted for the RVR level crossing. Similar situations occur at other pinch points to the North and South of Robertsbridge.

7.4 A key benefit will be direct access for visitors to the new railway from the main Network Rail Line at Robertsbridge. (With South-East Train's operations to London, Hastings and along the south coast).

8. Environmental Impact

8.1 An environmental impact assessment is being undertaken by Temple Environmental Consultants in conjunction with local consultants CLM. Access to the route of the railway has not been granted by the private landowners so an initial scoping report has already been prepared. This has been shared and discussed with Rother District Council Officers and found to be satisfactory. The full Environment Statement is now completed and included as part of the application supporting documentation.

9. Construction

9.1 Initial outline designs of the bridges have been completed and are included in the formal planning permission application.

9.2 Access to the site during construction will be mainly from the A21 at Robertsbridge for vehicular traffic and then along the line of the railway ensuring that little use is made of minor roads in the area. Wherever possible, materials will be brought in by rail utilising the new link to Network Rail at Robertsbridge Station. (Presently under construction).

9.2 Installation of the level crossings will be at a time to avoid excessive disruption to road traffic and from experience elsewhere, each should be completed in two weekends with traffic light controls, with a short night-time closure to install the final rails. Closures will be approved and gazetted in conjunction with the appropriate Authorities. Close liaison will be maintained with the traffic police and comprehensive signing will be erected.

9.3 Maintenance of the footpaths and bridleway have been discussed with the ESCC Footpaths Officer and it is not envisaged that any permanent diversions will be needed. Temporary diversions, if required, will be dealt with under the appropriate approval process.

9.4 Further details of the Construction methodology are included in the EIA work together with appropriate disturbance mitigation measures.

10. Land issues

10.1 Discussions and consultations are ongoing with the agents of, and the three landowners who will be affected by the reinstatement of the line.

11. Consultation

11.1 A comprehensive Stakeholder analysis has been drawn up and consultations are ongoing. A consultation spreadsheet is being populated as a “living document” with the responses and any suggestions.

12. Process

12.1 Rother District Council has given planning permission for the reconstruction of the railway from Bodiam Station to Junction Road (2011) and from Robertsbridge Station to Northbridge Street (2009) and these works (including 5 new bridges) were completed in 2012. The construction of the sidings and RVR station at Robertsbridge were given planning permission by RDC in 2012 and the work on these is progressing.

12.2 In order to progress and operate the Rother Valley Railway, following planning approval by Rother District Council for the outstanding section, a formal Transport Works Act Order submission will be made to the Secretary of State for Transport. (This will authorise the construction and operation of the level crossing and any necessary land acquisition).

13. Finance

13.1 Finance is in place to enable the construction of the Railway once the necessary approvals are in place.