

THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

The champion for Victorian and Edwardian architecture

planning@leeds.gov.uk

Your reference: 23/04387/LI
Our reference: 187054

15th September 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Listed Building Consent for the demolition of the existing Austhorpe Lane bridge (including the adjacent footbridge and gas pipeline) and a new bridge erected in its place

Thank you for consulting the Victorian Society about this application. We **object** to the proposed demolition of Austhorpe Lane Overbridge.

We would first of all like to emphasise our support for the TransPennine Route Upgrade which will electrify the route to improve journey times and reduce carbon emissions. However, we believe that there exists a potential for a more balanced compromise that can deliver substantial public benefits while preserving the Grade II listed structure.

Significance and harm

Austhorpe Lane Overbridge, constructed in 1830-2 and designed by the renowned railway engineer James Walker, holds significant historical and architectural value. This bridge is part of a group of 43 bridges originally erected along the Leeds to Selby railway line, one of the earliest railways in the world. Authorised by Parliament in 1830, four months before the Liverpool & Manchester opened, and was opened fully by December 1834. Of these, Austhorpe Lane Overbridge is one of thirteen surviving single-span, semi-elliptical 'basket' arch bridges crafted from grit stone and ashlar.

The bridge was given Grade II listed status in 2015, following a comprehensive review of the Leeds to Selby line. Its recognition at a national level was primarily attributed to special architectural and historic interest and its largely unaltered state.

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The demolition of Austhorpe Lane Overbridge would result in substantial harm to this heritage asset and less than substantial harm to the group setting of the Leeds to Selby railway line.

Options assessment

The proposal to demolish and rebuild Austhorpe Lane Overbridge arises from the need for clearance for overhead line equipment due to the position of the track in relation to the bridge structure. Two options were considered:

Option A - Bridge Deck Reconstruction

Option B - Track Slue/Track Lower

Option A was selected based on cost-effectiveness and efficiency, involving the complete demolition and rebuilding of the bridge while incorporating some stonework from Austhorpe Lane Overbridge and Brady Farm Overbridge.

Option B, which would involve lowering the line and repositioning the track to the centre while retaining the listed structure, was dismissed due to estimated costs and timing considerations. Additionally, there is no mention of the feasibility of temporarily diverting the Leeds to Selby line to accommodate the longer works associated with Option B.

Listed buildings can present challenges in terms of maintenance and upkeep. However, these heritage assets are invaluable and finite resources. Every effort should be made to retain them, particularly when they hold both national and international significance. These railways and associated structures represent a transformative early chapter in global transportation history and are a testament to human innovation and progress.

While we acknowledge the complexities of clearing the way for electrification, we urge a long-term perspective, especially regarding early structures that have survived intact. In the context of the multi-billion-pound TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU) project, the costs associated with preserving Austhorpe Lane Overbridge would be relatively small compared to the overall project budget. The retention of this bridge, through Option B, would safeguard a structure of national, if not international, importance in the history of railways.

Option A should not be agreed to without further information being provided on the feasibility of diverting the line for option B.

Policy

Paragraph NPPF 200 states: "Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification."

Paragraph NPPF 201 states: Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial

harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

To grant consent your authority must be satisfied that the identified public benefits are deliverable, and that there are no other viable or practical ways of delivering them which will cause a lesser degree of harm than that proposed within this application for listed building consent. Given the lack of information that has not been established. For the reasons outlined above we believe your authority should reject this application.

I would be grateful if you could inform the Victorian Society of your decision in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Newton

Conservation Adviser