

Angela Foster

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From: Emilia Griffin
Sent: 29 May 2018 14:39
To: TRANSPORTANDWORKSACT
Subject: Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order

Secretary of State for Transport,

c/o Transports and Works Act Orders Unit,

General Counsel's
Office,
Department for Transport Zone 1/18,
Sussex,
Great Minster House,
33 Horseferry Road,
London,
SW1P 4DR

29th May

2018

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you to object the Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order (RVR). I am aware of all the issues surrounding this proposal such as the A21 crossing, Compulsory Purchase Order and the extent of the local economic benefit, however I am writing to express my concern about the potential environmental and ecological impacts.

Important European Protected Species such as *Vespertilionidae* (typical bats), *Muscardinus avellanarius* (dormouse) and *Triturus cristatus* (Great crested newt) have been sighted on the proposed site. Whilst the disturbance of their habitat might not be deliberate, the intention to remove woodland and build over habitats would disturb these species and could conflict with conservation regulations. There are two active badger setts on the disused line. Along with this, there are nesting buzzards, kestrels, sparrow hawks, barn owls and tawny owls in the area so the destruction of woodland removes vital nesting grounds. I have seen kingfishers along the River Rother and barn owls in neighbouring fields. The crossing points over the river could be destructive to kingfisher nests and feeding grounds. The destruction of the Rother valley could drive protected species away from their nesting and feeding grounds and disrupt food webs and decrease biodiversity. Ecosystem services provided by the valley would be severely affected. Ecosystems services are supporting services, such as soil formation and water cycling, provisioning services which are the products we can obtain from the ecosystem, regulating services which are the benefits of climate and environmental regulation, and cultural services which are the non-material benefits of ecosystems to people. This Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) provides the local area with beautiful landscapes that are a place of relaxation to many.

Permission can be granted for development on the habitats of these protected species when the proposition is necessary and benefits the community, but this hobby railway line is not necessary, or beneficial, especially when it would require a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) over the protected habitats.

I understand that an adequate ecological survey has not taken place on the proposed land as the landowners have not granted permission. The desk surveys carried out for the Environmental Statement (ES), on behalf of RVR, state in paragraph 9.2.25 that there are "significant gaps in knowledge of the ecological receptors on the site."

Surely, the planning application cannot go forward if a full survey has not been carried out in an AONB. Planning permission should not be granted where there are areas with insufficient evidence of biodiversity because the consequences of development could be detrimental. We cannot know the extent of the biodiversity in this area without the survey, and this could lead to an uninformed decision about the RVR plan.

Another key environmental issue would be the potential increase in rubbish. This issue was raised at a Parish Council Meeting but there did not seem to be an answer from RVR. With the suggested 50,000 visitors a year, the increase in rubbish and its detrimental effect on the village is inevitable. Due to increasing awareness about plastics in the environment, the government is beginning to act on these issues. Our Prime Minister claims that our country is a "world leader" on dealing with plastic waste and Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, says that it is a worldwide emergency to reduce plastic waste. With 50,000 visitors a year adding to plastic waste, then we cannot suggest that we are acting as a "world leader" in reducing plastic waste and I do not see that RVR have suggested any mitigation of increased waste from visitors.

The Paris Agreement calls all nations to tackle climate change and mitigate its effects. One of the aims is "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels". In the UK we should be doing our best to reduce our impact and emissions of greenhouse gases. However, the steam locomotives would use 45kg of coal each time they run along the proposed 3.4km extension, giving rise to the release of 125kg of carbon dioxide on each run. This mass of carbon dioxide equates to a diesel car driving 1000km. Any drivers stopped at the crossings are unlikely to switch their engines off whilst waiting and this will also contribute to increased pollution levels and greenhouse gases.

I urge you to consider the potential negative environmental impact of this plan because it is clear the AONB surrounding Robertsbridge would be irreparably damaged if this plan were to go ahead.

Yours Sincerely,

Emilia Griffin

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