

29th April 2018

Dear

I am writing in anticipation of the Parish Council meeting on Thursday 3rd May to discuss the Transport and Works Act Order (TWO) for the construction of the railway line across the flood plain from Robertsbridge to Bodiam. I live and farm at Moat Farm which is directly affected by the TWO and the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) that is included in the Act.

I have sadly spent the last 5 years reviewing RVR's evidence and fighting their very well funded planning application and bias PR communications and whilst I started this fight with the objective to save our farm it has become obvious that the whole of Robertsbridge and the surrounding area is to be sacrificed as a legacy for some very wealthy men and some steam enthusiasts.

There are 6 key issues:

- The building of 3 level crossings across the A21, Northbridge St and B2244 at the narrow bridges.
- The impact of traffic and parking to the whole village
- The increase in the risk of the village flooding
- The destruction of the ecologically sensitive Moat Farm land and introduction of a granite scar across the AONB
- The forecast financial benefits introduced to the Parish
- The compulsory Purchase of farmers homes

Planning permission was granted by the District Council in 2017 however this included 14 pages of significant conditions including proof of how flooding was to be averted, a referral to the Secretary of State for Transport for the level crossings, a full ecological report as no surveys had been undertaken and further work on what the embankment was to look like as no landscape impact was submitted. There was also no mention of car parking or the impact of the traffic generated by this scheme in the officers report which is a little odd when RVR claim that 50,000 visitors will be generated by the Robertsbridge connection.

In reality the application was well funded with a myriad of expensive consultants and lobbyists forcing the hand of the Council and the various authorities.

It is therefore imperative that the local residents and parishioners are aware of the impact that this proposal will have without the spin provided by paid-for consultants:

Level Crossings

The Office for Rail and Road (ORR) has informed RVR that they need to base their assessment of the level crossing closures on 112 seconds and not the 54 seconds that they continue to publish. In reality the current crossings at Bodiam, and Newenden are closed for far longer and the network rail crossings at Robertsbridge and Mountfield last for many minutes and so the disruption to the A21 will be colossal.

Highways England state that any tail back greater than 140m northbound on the A21 will cause unacceptable safety issues as the queues cross over the roundabout. In addition the location of the B2244 level crossing between the 2 narrow bridges will compound the danger in this accident prone black spot rather than relieve it. The RVR claim that the delays can be mitigated as the A21 is a busy road and one more delay would simply be part of the 'norm', however as the major arterial route for both tourists and business it is of paramount importance that this road is kept clear. With queues predicted to be between 265m and 2.9km long this issue will have a paralyzing affect on the bypass.

It is well documented by the Highways England and the ORR that they are actively removing level crossings from the road network due to the appalling safety record. The ORR's own guidance says:

'Except in exceptional circumstances, ORR does not support the creation of any new level crossings of any type'. I do not believe that any right minded person could argue that a hobby railway can be justified as an 'exceptional' circumstance – 3 times.

In their conclusion RVR admit that the A21 is at full capacity that delays can be significant and the addition of the level crossing would compound this problem but that we should simply accept this issue as it would barely effect the overall journey times. The fact that RVR dismiss this as an inconvenience proves the complete disregard it has not only for the local residents but also those using the A21 as the major road artery south of Robertsbridge.

Flooding

Whilst there are significant data, analysis and reports provided by the RVR perhaps the most telling statement is that found in the Environmental Statement where the consultants admit that *'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.'* This is further supported later when there is admission that: *'There are some receptors that will not be protected from flooding even with the proposed flood defences; these are the museum and the pavilion on the Clappers, commercial unit on station road, Robertsbridge Abbey, Udiam Cottages, Forge Farm and Park Farm. At present these properties are undefended but with the proposed scheme scenario, these properties could be flooded more frequently and to a greater depth than they currently experience.'* Yet again RVR callously disregard the residents and businesses in and around Robertsbridge for their own gain; there can be no justification for the increased threat of flooding to these properties. The report completely ignores the disastrous impact the increased flood levels would have on Parsonage and Moat Farms. These farms will have the railway embankment through the centre of their land and in turn the flood water will ingress through the culverts onto the land 'behind' the embankments. However what has not been disclosed is the size and frequency of the culverts or how the landowners should cope with the flood water being retained for far greater periods on the northern side of the embankments.

RVR have recently referred to a revised flood report that is acceptable to the Environment Agency but this has not been released for public consultation or approved by the District Council and therefore is untested.

The planning application also failed to provide detailed drawings of the train embankments showing dimensions and impact on the surrounding area through their height, width and design including culverts and viaducts. The height of the embankment will not only be completely out of keeping on the flood plain it will also have an imposing affect for the housing to the south of Northbridge street.

Car parking

One of the gravest concerns for the people of Robertsbridge is the number of visitors coming by car. RVR claim that the additional 50-100,000 visitors will all arrive by national rail. Clearly this statement is comical; common sense would suggest that this is untrue and shows the complete contempt for those in the public meetings (who showed their disbelief at this claim) and the validity of the various professional reports supplied by RVR.

RVR have simply ignored this issue as there was no palatable answer for the major impact on all the residents of Robertsbridge. Not only from the addition of a substantial number of cars looking for parking in the streets in and around the new station. It should also be remembered that the additional 50-100,000 visitors are not spread evenly over the year as the railway will only run on 181 days of the year with the visitors being attracted to Robertsbridge in relatively short windows during the day to try and catch a train and therefore the congestion will be significant in these periods.

Environmental

There has been no land based study on the affect of this proposal on the delicate environmental balance found on a flood plain. RVR have concentrated their TWAO effort with a significant increase in consultants reports on the ecological impact of the railway on the surrounding area. It should be noted that this is a desktop approach from a consultant who has never set foot on the majority of the land affected. They have brazenly 'mitigated' against every species thought to be in the area however at what point do we say that the impact for what is, in essence a tourist attraction and a hobby, should have on protected species such as larks, newts, badgers, nightingales, doves and very rare species of moths and mosses – all have been identified along the Moat Farm section of the railway. The risk to the area, to its wildlife and inhabitants is simply too great and that the capacity for the flood plain to be interfered in this matter is simply too much and too risky for a very small gain. It should also be noted that the current timetable shows nearly half of the train services operating are with diesel trains – one of the most polluting engines made.

Compulsory Purchase Order

RVR continue to state that they are in negotiations and communication with the farmers. This is simply untrue; On the odd occasion that a letter has been received over the past 15 years a reply is sent requesting more information – not once has a response to these questions ever been received. RVR are simply playing a PR game so that they can stand up and say they are in correspondence with the landowners.

The principle of a CPO is that it needs to demonstrate that there is a compelling case in the public interest. RVR are arguing that there is a substantial financial gain to be had by the link into the

main rail network but have failed to publish their up-to-date economic report. However at the recent Parish Assembly a bold statement of £4m was given by RVR (but with no evidential support) with the admission that the majority of this would be spent in Tenterden and Bodiam.

It is clear that the trustees, especially Mr Richard Broyd and others are funding the RVR Heritage Trust for their own personal gratification and legacy project. None of the trustees live in Robertsbridge with the main benefactor based out of Chelsea, London. They have no care or concern for our community and are intent on employing the consultants and lawyers required to coerce this proposal through regardless of the impact on the village, the environment and the forced sale of land by the farmers. It is in essence an archaic land grab that will sacrifice Robertsbridge and the surrounding area as a vanity project for the train enthusiasts – they have no real interest in generating income into the area; there has been no profound increase in wealth or businesses in Bodiam since the railway opened.

I would urge the Parish Council to use their own common sense and local knowledge of the area on whether the introduction of a railway across 3 roads, a flood plain and a village outweigh the negative impact this will have on the roads, floods, households, environment and farmers that will all be affected by this proposal. With the introduction of the Neighbourhood Plan and the transfer of responsibility to the Parish to control its own destiny it would seem that this is a real opportunity for the Parish Council to determine its own destiny for the village rather than be forced to accept a path of misery controlled by consultants and secret railway benefactors.

Kind Regards

Alex

Alex Ainslie

065 / ~~213~~
666

Alex Ainslie

31st May 2018

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Transport
c/o Transport & Works Act Orders Unit
Department for Transport, Zone 1/18
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

RVR (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order

Department of Transport for a Transport and Works Act order to 'construct, operate and maintain' a new railway line from Bodiam to Robertsbridge.

Dear Secretary for Transport

I live at Salehurst, one of the farms to have the proposed Rother Valley Railway bulldozed through its centre. We have been fighting the RVR for many years and until now it was clear that they had no funds to support firstly the planning application, secondly a TWAO and thirdly the potential build cost. With the introduction of their two key 'secret' benefactors, Mr Jeremy Hosking and Mr Richard Broyd, they have overcome their initial planning and TWAO cost issues. You will have received many letters of objections citing the main issues affecting the village, road users and the farmers and I have gone into further detail below. However I think it important that you also understand the trauma that this threat to our home has caused to my direct family as we have 3 generations living at Moat Farm. RVR are well drilled and try to purvey this air of friendship with the farmers and families and continually tell public meetings that they are in 'negotiations' with them – this is simply untrue. Every meeting (which have been very few in 10 years), RVR have basically told us that they were coming through regardless. The most thorough meeting held in 2014 where we discussed our concerns for access, trees and flooding directly affecting the farm, did not even warrant a follow-up letter or made any difference to their plans (they have landlocked our bottom water meadows). The contempt these people hold for the farmers and the local village at Salehurst and Robertsbridge is outstanding. Not one of the directors of RVR live in the villages they want to destroy and not one of them has the social bearing to understand that their actions are causing families who have been on farms for far longer than the railway was ever in existence, extreme anxiety, huge stress and worry and mental torture. The idea that wealthy men supported by fanatical train enthusiasts can ride rough-shod over the basic principle that land/home ownership is sacrosanct and in only very exceptional circumstances can a CPO be justified to force the sale of land to a third party. We are

reducing our standards to a banana republic if we simply excuse the actions of these men through the use of paid for consultants who write pages of documentation 'justifying' why the proposal is valid. The moral status should take precedent:

The land is not for sale and it should remain the rights of the owners to decide whether it be sold to RVR or not.

It is also clear that RVR felt that the associated costs involved in fighting a TWAO would cripple the farmers into submission and whilst the costs involved are astronomical for two small businesses when you're home, livelihood, family and principles are threatened and under attack a financial solution had to be found at the detriment to our businesses and family life.

Whilst I hope the above issues would be sufficient for a clear rejection of the RVR's proposal I would also comment on the detail of their application which uses hopelessly out-of-date reports and figures.

The application should be refused on these additional grounds:

Car parking

One of the gravest concerns for the people of Robertsbridge is the number of visitors coming by car. RVR claim that the additional 50-100,000 visitors will all arrive by national rail. Clearly this statement is ludicrous and independent reports¹ show that whilst there is a great desire to increase train use currently it is proving difficult to persuade tourists to use public transport.

However there is no provision for car parking in the whole application. The only mention is a short sentence² claiming that there is 'ample' car parking in the national rail car park. It is not clear whether the owners of the car park have agreed to this intrusion, or whether there is the capacity that they claim. In a later report³ RVR note that Robertsbridge Station car park has 75 spaces and is currently 85-90% full during weekdays. With the addition of 160 new houses to the village, the current increase of rail users at 17% for Robertsbridge in 2013 and the desire to attract people on to rails and off the roads, the likelihood is that the car park would be at 100% capacity before the extension is even started.

RVR have simply ignored this issue although it will have a major impact on all the residents of Robertsbridge. Not only from the addition of a substantial number of cars looking for parking in the streets in and around the new station but also with the inclusion of tourist buses that currently ferry many tourists to the existing railway in support of the various promotions run by KESR. It should also be remembered that the additional 50-100,000 visitors are not spread over the year as the railway will only run on 181 days of the year with the visitors being attracted to Robertsbridge in relatively short windows during the day to try and catch a train and therefore the congestion will be significant in these periods.

¹ Visit England Transport Plan

² Environmental Statement – Volume 1 Non technical summary para 4.8.6

³ Environmental Statement – Volume 2 Main statement p163 13.3.11

Level Crossings

The data used for the reports is based on 2010 information; it also uses a prediction model to show figures to 2016 and 2021 (5 and 10 years from the base data). It is questionable whether these figures are up-to-date for correct analysis. The number of Traffic assessments and reports provide significant detail however these should be taken in context. Originally RVR claimed that the level crossing would last 51 seconds, the Office of Rail Regulation requested that the figures should be based on 112 seconds however when a train was timed through the level crossing at Tenterden it took 146 seconds for the train to pass through the crossing (this does not include the time to close/open the barriers).

The Highways Authority note that a queue of 24 vehicles (140m) or more vehicles from the A21 crossing would result in blocking the roundabout⁴ and that this would represent an unacceptable risk to road safety. The evidence supplied by RVR clearly shows a complete disregard for this key safety issue.

The expected maximum queue at the A21 level crossing in 2021 for southbound traffic is 177m (weekday) and 183m for the weekend⁵, however due to the 2010 traffic data being recorded hourly it is necessary to revise the figures by 20 and 40% to account for peak flows. In this case it shows a maximum weekday queue of 265m and a weekend of 265m at 20% increase. When 40% is included it provides for a 265m queue although the data for the bank holiday is not shown for the southern direction. For the northbound direction on the bank holiday at 40% a queue of 2.9km is forecast. (see table 1)

Day Type	Northbound		Southbound	
	Max queue	Average queue	Max queue	Average queue
Weekday	155	137	177	154
Weekend	198	147	183	148
Bank Holiday	265	205	n/a	n/a
Results for 2021 – profile plus 20%				
Weekday	265	172	265	185
Weekend	265	172	265	184
Bank Holiday	383	247	n/a	n/a
Results for 2021 – profile plus 40%				
Weekday	265	195	265	209
Weekend	277	193	265	208
Bank Holiday	2971	648	n/a	n/a

Mott MacDonald Traffic Impact Study – Supplementary Technical Note Jan 2012 p.11 Table 5.1, 5.2, 5.3

RVR and its representatives choose not to answer or provide mitigating circumstances on the issue of the extensive queues caused by the A21 level crossing. They try to justify the significant impact on the A21 by claiming that as *'long queues currently occur on occasions on the A21, particularly at Bank Holidays, and this would occur irrespective of whether or not a level crossing was present'*⁶ Whilst the A21 is a busy road and congestion frequently occurs at Flimwell and Pembury the Robertsbridge roundabout and bye-pass are generally free of queuing traffic. It would make a mockery of Highways England and all those trying to free up the traffic on safety and economic grounds to introduce a barrier that on the worst day of the year produces

⁴ Mott MacDonald – Highways and Traffic Assessment Report Jan 2013 p.12 para 5.2.1.3

⁵ Mott MacDonald – traffic impact Study – supplementary Technical note p.11 table 5.1, 5.2, 5.3

⁶ RVR Proposed Level Crossing Traffic Impact Assessment 2011 para 5.4.2

a 3km tail back and on average day exceeds the 140m maximum distance to avoid clogging the roundabout.

In the RVR Design and Access Statement June 2014 (para 4.6) they state that '*Traffic delay time while the level crossings are in use is very low with a closure time of around a minute per train crossing*'. This is incorrect and misleading, the ORR⁷ have clearly stated that the figures used for the level crossing should use the worse case scenario of 112 seconds and indeed the RVR produced revised figures showing this and the significant queue's this generated; it is not clear why the RVR have chosen to ignore them in this statement. In a recent survey the train times (not including barrier movements), showed the crossing at Tenterden at 106 seconds and the train at Bodiam as 60 seconds. With the introduction of the automated barriers this would increase by 34 seconds making the grand total of between 94 and 140 seconds and therefore the 112 seconds is a 'realistic' figure rather than the 57 seconds proposed by RVR.

Northbridge Street

The RVR Mott MacDonald report gives a queue length of 23m⁸ however it is not clear how this figure is generated as the length of time the level crossing is down is more than double (51 – 112 seconds) but the figure queue is not doubled. The 23m queue length would require the existing road configuration to be revised. Currently the residents park outside their houses which ensure a single flow of traffic and in turn a traffic calming affect. Should the level crossing be placed here and the 112 second figure is used then the single flow of traffic/queue would in affect create complete gridlock once the barrier was down. Therefore on street parking would have removed at the detriment of the residents.

B2244 – Junction road

The B2244 is a straight fast road, it has a poor safety record due to two bridges located directly north and south of the proposed level crossing. The bridges are classified as 'narrow' and have caused numerous accidents. It is well documented by the Highways Authority that they are actively removing level crossings from the road network due to the appalling safety record and their inherent ability to cause very bad accidents. The introduction of a level crossing at perhaps the most dangerous section of this road, would not, as suggested, generate a 'calming affect'. It will in essence generate an unexpected barrier exactly at the narrowest and most dangerous part of the whole road. It quite simply goes against all road safety policies; common sense has been ignored and the level and seriousness of the accidents will increase.

In their conclusion RVR admit that the A21 is at full capacity that delays can be significant and the addition of the level crossing would compound this problem but that we should simply accept this issue as it would barely effect the overall journey times.⁹ As the table above shows, apart from one instance the queues would well exceed the safety measures prescribed by the Highways Authority, they would create significant tailbacks of over 250m and are predicted to get worse year on year. The fact that RVR dismiss this as an inconvenience proves the complete disregard it has not only for the local residents but also those using the A21 as the major road artery south of Robertsbridge.

⁷ Office of Rail Regulation letter Aug 2011 page 2

⁸ RVR Proposed Level Crossing Traffic Impact Assesment 2011 table 4.7 p.27

⁹ Rother Valley Railway Highways and Traffic Assessment Report Jan 2013 para 8.2 p.20

Flood risk

Whilst there is significant data, analysis and reports provided by the RVR perhaps the most telling statement is that found in the Environmental Statement¹⁰ where the consultants admit that *'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.'* This is further supported later when there is admission that: *'There are some receptors that will not be protected from flooding even with the proposed flood defences; these are the museum and the pavilion on the Clappers, commercial unit on station road, Robertsbridge Abbey, Udiam Cottages, Forge Farm and Park Farm. At present these properties are undefended but with the proposed scheme scenario, these properties could be flooded more frequently and to a greater depth than they currently experience.'*¹¹ Yet again RVR callously disregard the residents and businesses in and around Robertsbridge for their own gain; there can be no justification for the increased threat of flooding to these properties. The report completely ignores the disastrous impact the increased flood levels would have on Parsonage and Moat Farms. These farms will have the railway embankment through the centre of their land and in turn the flood will ingress through the culverts onto the land 'behind' the embankments. However what has not been disclosed is the size and frequency of the culverts or how the landowners would be compensated for the flood water being retained for far greater periods on the northern side of the embankments.

RVR have produced mitigating circumstances to protect those already protected by the flood embankments, it completely ignores those that would be affected by the increase in flood levels that currently have no protection, i.e it sacrifices those already under threat by flooding and compounds their problems¹². Can the Government support an application that openly admits that its proposal will significantly increase the risk of flooding not only to residents but also commercial properties and will affect the whole length of the extension?

The planning application also fails to provide detailed drawings of the train embankments showing dimensions and impact on the surrounding area through their height, width and design including culverts and viaducts or how this would fit with the existing landscape. The height of the embankment will not only be completely out of keeping on the flood plain it will also have an imposing affect for the housing to the south of Northbridge.

Environmental

The reports supplied by the RVR on the ecological and environmental impact for the proposed scheme would have on the surrounding area do not contain the required detail. The application has to undertake a full environmental appraisal of the route which includes detailed surveys of the proposed area. As stated by the RVR the landowners did not give their consent for these assessments and therefore the environmental reports are desktop studies with a small amount of factual data where a footpath crosses the route. However no request has been received since the planning application or prior to the TWAO being served. This is quite clearly not sufficient for an area, that the RVR admit, is highly likely to contain protected species. In addition due to the flood plain, the ecological status of the proposed routes and unusual species already identified in the area detailed surveys are required prior to a TWAO rather than the presumption by the RVR that they can produce 'mitigating' procedures to move or deal with anything that can be found. The fact that the landowners had refused access for the planning application did not stop RVR for

¹⁰ RVR Environmental Statement Vol 1 Overview p.2 para 1

¹¹ RVR Environmental Statement Vol 2 10.7.7

¹² RVR Environmental Statement Vol 1 p126 10.3.3 – 10.3.8

requesting access in preparation for a TWAO and should not permit RVR to negate the detail required in the ecological reports as would be required by any other application.

It is noted that in the Environmental statement RVR claim that there is nothing of note that would restrict the proposed development¹³. This is not correct. The required surveys have not been undertaken in the detail required, the increase in levels of flooding and the adverse effect the embankments have on unprotected properties do not adhere to planning guidance and are not acceptable. The provision of ecological surveys based on desktop study is unacceptable. No provision has been given for the visual impact on the area as no drawings have been supplied with the embankments in situ.

Financial

RVR have based their financial case on the Manchester Metropolitan University report of October 2013. (They have recently referred to a more up-to-date report but refuse to release it into the public domain and choose to cherry pick the unsubstantiated claims). The report in turn has based its figures on financial multipliers ranging from 1.2 – 2.47 however these are based on much larger projects including legacy affects from the Olympics. For convenience RVR have based their findings on a multiplier of 2 but with no substantiation. It is more likely that the multiplier would follow the evidence supplied by the Tourism South East Research Department which shows a multiplier of 1.23¹⁴. It is claimed that the 'missing Link', as the extension is being called, would generate a further 50,000 visitors however it fails to say how this figure is generated, it is ultimately a complete 'guesstimate'. The report continues to suggest a 'moderate' increase to 200,000 visitors per annum¹⁵ when additional resources from RVR come in to place. This would be a 132% increase in visitor numbers to the attraction, there is no explanation on what 'additional resources' means or how it would provide such a significant increase. There is a further admission that it is very difficult to quantify what financial benefits could be expected through the extension¹⁶ but the RVR continue to publicise huge figures of benefit that have not been substantiated in any report.

The report also shows a clear decline in the number of visitors to the KESR¹⁷ with the loss of 1,034 visitors per year over the past 10 years to a total of 85,000 for 2012. There is no explanation on how this trend would impact on the total number of visitors predicted for the extension.

RVR have clearly stated that they expect the uplift in visitors to arrive by national rail link. Throughout the reports and in public meetings it has been claimed that all additional visitors will come by train. Common sense and general life experience would suggest that this is untrue and shows the complete contempt for those in the public meetings (who showed their disbelief at this claim) and the validity of the various professional reports. It cannot be substantiated and has not been supported by any evidence supplied. Visit England Transport Action Plan recognises the 'dominant' role that private cars play in visiting attractions and whilst they welcome the contribution a rail line may make to move people off the roads and onto trains they recognise that this could take many years.¹⁸ However if the RVR claim is believed, that all new 50,000 visitors will come by train, then how are they expected to visit the other local attractions which can only be reached by cars. In this case the additional local revenue from the increase in tourist numbers

¹³ RVR Environmental Statement Vol 15.1.5

¹⁴ RVR Local Impact Study, Manchester Metropolitan University p.32 chart 5.5

¹⁵ RVR Local Impact Study, Manchester Metropolitan University p.4

¹⁶ RVR Local Impact Study, Manchester Metropolitan University p.29

¹⁷ RVR Local Impact Study, Manchester Metropolitan University p.16 chart 4.2

¹⁸ RVR Local Impact Study, Manchester Metropolitan University p.38

fails to materialise. If, however, RVR admit that the likely outcome is that a high proportion of visitors will come by car (as suggested in the study¹⁹) then there needs to be further report on the car parking provision at Robertsbridge.

The Impact Study refers to local attractions and recognises that there is a finite number of tourists visiting the area and therefore competition to attract them exists. Whilst RVR argue that the rail extension would bring down increased numbers from London it is clear that these people will be unable to get to most additional attractions due to lack of personal transport. What is more likely is that the extension will draw in local independent tourists, with their own transport, who will possibly visit the RVR rather than going to another attraction and therefore placing further pressure on local attractions. In addition the Manchester Metropolitan University report recognises that: *'increased visitor numbers and the introduction of level crossings (especially on the A21 Robertsbridge by-pass) may have negative economic impacts arising from the RVR/K&ESR "missing Link"'*²⁰

RVR have done little to identify their target audience although it is implied that these would be families who would benefit from coming down on the train from London. It is questionable whether a family of four would spend not only the cost of the national rail ticket (£78.30) but also the cost of the RVR (currently £45) but expected to rise due to the extension, total: £123.30. It is not only the cost but also the expectation that children would enjoy an 80 minute journey from London to Robertsbridge to then sit on a second train (albeit a steam train) for a further 90 minutes to reach Tenterden. In all a return journey of 5 hours and 40 minutes!

The Impact Study concludes that it is likely that visitors will use Robertsbridge simply as a transit terminal either to park their car or through national rail access. Their destination would more likely be Bodiam Castle or Tenterden²¹ and therefore any financial benefit would be drawn away from the village whilst it harbours the pain associated with the traffic congestion on both the car parking and level crossings, the increased flood risk and general upheaval of becoming a transit centre for between 50-100,000 visitors.

Historical

The provision for the Light Railway has previously been discussed in the Houses of Parliament²² prior to the reinstatement of the Tenterden to Bodiam line. In 1967 parliament was told that a Light Railway was not a basic constitutional right and that the then Minister for Transport would make a decision on whether 'public interest is best served by allowing the railway to operate' and that she 'must establish a public transport need sufficient in scale to outweigh the disadvantages to road users, risk to land owners and drainage authorities'. The statement concludes with the following outcome which would seem relevant to today's application:

'On the all-important point of public need, the inspector's considered view was that there is a public demand, slenderly amounting to evidence of a public need, but of a strength which could not prevail against serious objections on wider public grounds to the railway being reopened. That is in paragraph 157. In my right hon. Friend's view there were and are such objections. The interests of road users, taxpayers, landowners and drainage authorities must be allowed to prevail over the desire of the promoters to operate a railway which would not in the main perform a serious public transport function'

¹⁹ RVR Local Impact Study, Manchester Metropolitan University p5

²⁰ RVR Environmental Statement Vol 2 p.183 14.2.18

²¹ RVR Local Impact Study, Manchester Metropolitan University p53 & p.56

²² Hansard; K&ESR 7 Nov 1967 Vol 753 cc983-96

Conclusion

The extension to a steam/diesel railway will always provoke strong emotional arguments however this application must be based on fact, good common sense and be morally justifiable. The applicant's reports, whilst extensive, contain significant queries and anomalies that result in the RVR simply ignoring the issue. The key issues are the level crossings, car parking, environmental, flooding and CPO none of which have been satisfactorily dealt with and currently show a severe detrimental impact on Robertsbridge and the surrounding area. History has shown us that when we tamper with natural resources such as flood plains or try and 'model' our way out of a problem then it normally goes wrong and nature will win.

There is a balance in all development and in this case the balance to retain the farmland, flood plain and clear roads clearly outweighs the interest in a train charity which can be accessed by going directly to Bodiam or Tenterden. The applicant is pushing the boundaries of when a CPO is valid and this arrogance is contributing severe mental and physical pain to those that live and farm on the land affected.

Yours Sincerely

Alex Ainslie