

Angela Foster

SUPP/121

From: Tom Lewis
Sent: 27 May 2018 18:57
To: TRANSPORTANDWORKSACT
Subject: Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order.
Attachments: 2018-05-23 Secretary of State for Transport V2.0.docx

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please find attached a document outlining my SUPPORT for the aims of the above Order.

Yours faithfully,

Tom Lewis

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The Secretary of State for Transport
c/o Transport and Works Act Orders Unit
General Counsel's Office
Department for Transport
Zone 1/18, Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

27th May 2018

ROTHER VALLEY RAILWAY (BODIAM to ROBERTSBRIDGE JUNCTION)
ORDER

Dear Secretary of State,

My name is Tom Lewis. My knowledge of the farmers' grievance at Salehurst comes mainly from reading their statements as reported in the Kentish Express newspaper (April 26th and May 17th) as well as the Daily Mail (May 12th). Also, my brief Google search unearthed an article featuring the Hoad family and Parsonage Farm from the Farmer's Guardian magazine, 09/09/2014.

My qualification to comment ...

In the late 1960s, I was a teenage volunteer at the railway.

After university and a career in the computer industry, I'm now in my sixties, and farm the 2000 acre Morghew Park Estate at Tenterden, through which the Tenterden railway runs for a distance of approximately two miles between Rolvenden and Wittersham. So, while not directly involved, I have first-hand experience of the matters at issue.

The farmers' opposition should surprise nobody ...

No farmer I've ever met will happily lose any of his land by compulsory purchase – even if it's only ten acres out of an 800-acre farming operation. And no farmer I know will welcome even the tiny reduction in profitability and convenience that results when a large field is divided in two. And farmers, myself very much included, can be obstinate men and women, and so the Hoad and Ainslie families' impassioned opposition to the Tenterden railway's plans should surprise nobody.

Implicit in the farmers' campaign is their fear that the railway would not be a good neighbour to them ... My experience shows otherwise ...

I also had concerns about the railway when I began farming Morghew Park in 2001. Would sparks from the steam engines set light to our crops at the height of the summer? Would the railway maintain its fences and the gates on our four accommodation crossings, and so on?

Well, in my experience, the railway has proved to be a friendly, responsible and cooperative neighbour whose operations in no way interfere with our business.

Indeed, I'd say the railway track that crosses our Estate is no more problematical to us than a comparable narrow country lane, and without the scourge of fly-tipping. You don't hear many farmers complaining about the country lanes that characterise our landscape!

'We feel angry at having our land taken from us ... for a vanity project. It would wreck part of our farm ... Andrew Hoad, Daily Mail, 12/05/18

This appears to be the central grievance sustaining the farmers' campaign, and is reinforced with emotional language. Fields are to be 'chopped into narrow pieces' (Andrew Hoad, Daily Mail 12/05/18), 'bisected ... and trapped between the line and the River Rother' (Tom Hoad, Kentish Express 26/04/18.) The implication is of serious damage being done to the farm.

According to the Farmers' Guardian article referenced above, Parsonage Farm's total operation spans 800 acres, of which about half is owned outright. Now, given that the railway only requires a narrow two-mile strip of land in total, it's genuinely difficult to conclude that the impact of the railway's proposal on this large farming operation will be anything other than trivial. To put it simply:

Just how much disruption can a two-mile strip of land no wider than a new country lane be claimed to cause to an 800-acre farming operation?

I also note Tom Hoad's observation in the Kentish Express that land will be 'trapped' between the railway line and the River Rother.

'Trapped' of course implies that the reinstated railway will make it difficult or impossible to travel from one part of Parsonage Farm to another. This is a slightly disingenuous point, as it makes no mention of the remedy offered by 'accommodation crossings'.

Satisfying the operational needs of farmers was a major issue during the railway-building decades between 1850 and 1900, and it was achieved using so-called 'accommodation crossings' or private level crossings located at points where farmers told the railway builders that they needed to cross the line. I cannot believe that the Tenterden railway would not have offered Mr Hoad as many accommodation crossings as he may need or desire to continue farming his land efficiently.

So much for my farming points.

May I carry on to make a few more general points that strike me about this application?

The first is that this case is strongly reminiscent of hundreds of similar cases that filled the courts during the railway-building decades between 1850 and 1900. Typically, one or more wealthy landowners would seek to block a proposed railway line on grounds including visual intrusion, a

fractional reduction in Estate profitability, disruption of local foxhunting, and so on. Often, these cases were billed as 'the landowner against the people', and in most cases, the people prevailed. Had they not, we wouldn't have much of a railway network in this country!

Secondly, let me highlight the largest threat I can see to the Hoads and Ainslie's chance of prevailing in this matter.

For all the talk of 'wrecking', 'chopping', 'bisecting' and 'trapping', It is clear that the railway's proposal will do no more than recreate a situation that would already have applied when the Hoad family purchased the farm in the late 1890s. By this time the railway would already have been under construction. So, between the late 1890s and late-1970s, a period of about 75 years, Parsonage Farm presumably operated successfully despite the inconvenient presence of the railway line, and most likely made use of it to take delivery of materials – particularly during wartime.

This begs the question that if previous generations of the Hoad family were able to thrive despite the presence of the railway at Salehurst, why is the current generation making such a fuss about it, and claiming that it will 'wreck' part of their farm? Could this be an admission that previous generations of the Hoad family were simply better and more adaptable farmers than the current generation?

And finally, may I draw readers' attention again to the recent Daily Mail article, which includes an observation attributed to both the Ainslie and Hoad families, as follows:

'They claim the project is to allow 'rich men to play with their toys' and the threat of Compulsory Purchase Orders amounts to a land grab reminiscent of the Dark Ages'.

I note their joint narrative, but prefer an alternative interpretation which comes closer to the mark:

'Two wealthy, landowning families campaign to place their narrow commercial interests above those of the neighbouring village of Robertsbridge, its economy and the wider population's desire to enjoy access to the beauty of the Rother Valley countryside.'

Yours faithfully,

Tom Lewis