

Andrew Willis

Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order)"

I am writing in support of this application.

Although I now live in                      I have family links with Robertsbridge stretching back more than 60 years. My grandparents, parents and now my sister have lived there in the same house.

The disagreement with the landowners over the purchase of the land for the railway, which has led to the requirement for this Order and the associated Compulsory Purchase Order, could, I feel, be resolved with goodwill on both sides. The landowners state that Rother Valley Railway are unwilling or unable to give them the access they need to farm economically sections of land divided off by the railway. One solution to this would be for RVR to buy these sections of land in addition to the land needed for the track bed. If necessary an independent assessor could establish which sections of land qualify. The land could then be maintained for wildlife conservation, a win win solution for all sides.

However, the landowners unwillingness to sell has led, intentionally or not, to the likely requirement for a public inquiry. This will essentially be a further debate of the wider planning issues already aired in the consideration of the planning application by Rother District Council. This seems unfair to RVR, who have already gone through due process and met all the requirements set by RDC.

Leaving aside the fact that they have already been resolved in the planning process, several of the objections now raised by opponents of the scheme are unjustified.

The general point is made that Robertsbridge already suffers from road congestion and overdevelopment and therefore the railway should not be allowed to add to these problems. This is unfair. Robertsbridge is not unique in having these problems, and the potential impact the railway might have (which I would argue will be minimal balanced against the economic and social benefits) should be considered objectively on its own merits.

On the congestion issue, it is said that Robertsbridge has a shortage of car parking capacity and that users of the railway arriving by car will add to this problem. The village's problem is not so much a shortage of parking but uncontrolled free parking. Commuters park in residential roads near the station because they can, while the station car park is underused.

RVR have reportedly said at public meetings that everyone will arrive by train. This is clearly untrue and they are unwise to make this claim. It is not a claim they make on their website. But it is fair to say that a substantial number will come via the adjoining main line station, and RVR can do much to encourage this, by discount ticketing with the main line and discounts or rebates on the station car park. The car park has the capacity to be extended, I understand. RVR will also be able to use their website to warn of car parking problems and encourage visitors to use public transport, as already happens on the Kent and East Sussex Railway website. A large number of visitors will travel on the line from the Tenterden end, of course.

Turning to road safety, the objectors claims do not stand up. To state that a level crossing closing a few times a day for not much more than a minute will make much difference to emergency vehicles is alarmist and unjustified.

The claim that safety will be worsened on the dangerous stretch of A21 between Hurst Green and Robertsbridge is also overblown. This is a winding, hilly road already subject to a 40mph limit for much of its length. But between this stretch and the proposed level crossing there is already a light controlled pedestrian crossing and a roundabout, which would act as a brake on any speeding or dangerous driving on the approach to the level crossing. Electronic warning signs warning of a closed crossing ahead are also feasible.

The only concern I feel may be justified is flood risk. The building of the bypass in the 1980s created what was essentially a bund across the flood plain and worsened flooding in the village. Flood prevention measures have since been taken to ease the situation. It is suggested that the

embankment needed to take the railway line across the bypass will increase the flood risk. It has been claimed that RVR has gone back on a promise to pay for any additional flood prevention work needed. I certainly believe they should pay for such work.

To sum up, I believe that any problems caused by the railway are completely resolveable. However, I detect an undercurrent of opinion in the village that opposes the project under any circumstances, who see it as a rich man's plaything, only of interest to train loving anoraks. This fails to take into account the very many people who would enjoy travelling on the railway. And the economic and social benefits of joining up the short link to the main line from an existing railway across an area poorly served by public transport seem obvious,