

Angela Foster

Supp/178

From: Harold Cloutt
Sent: 30 May 2018 17:14
To: TRANSPORTANDWORKSACT
Subject: Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order
Attachments: RVR Support 201805.pdf

Dear Sirs

Please find attached a letter of support for RVR's application for a TWAO.

Harold Cloutt

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30th May 2018

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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

Dear Sirs

Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order

I am writing in support of the application made by the Rother Valley Railway for a Transport and Works Act Order [TWAo] for the reinstatement of the railway between Bodiam and Robertsbridge Junction.

I live within five miles of Robertsbridge and have family and friends in the village. I am very familiar with the area.

My reasons for supporting this application are set out below:-

History

The reinstatement of the line has been part of the Rother District Local Plan since 2004. The plan was adopted following a Public Inquiry at which the Inspector acknowledged that Compulsory Purchase might be needed to acquire some of the land. Planning consent for the reinstatement of the line was granted by Rother District Council in 2017.

The project was included in the local plan as policy EM8 since it was recognised that there would be Economic benefit and additional employment opportunities to the area. This is estimated as up to £4.1m per annum. The project is being financed by donations from private individuals.

The applicant has shown commitment to the project by the acquisition of land and reinstatement of the trackbed at both ends of the proposed line. In addition they are in the process of constructing station facilities at Robertsbridge and have funded the provision of a new carriage shed at Rolvenden on the Kent and East Sussex railway.

Possible Concerns A number of concerns have been raised in objection to the scheme. I have set out a number of key points to address these below:-

Flooding

The applicant has worked closely with the various statutory bodies and has modified the scheme in response to comments received. Extensive modelling has been carried out which has been validated by the Environment Agency. The latest Environmental survey included as part of the TWAO submission has shown **no increased risk** of flooding in the area.

Habitat and environment

Once again this is covered in the supporting TWAO documentation. The applicants have not been allowed access to the land in order to carry out a detailed study, but have given an assurance that any protected species found during development will be relocated by specialists in accordance with plans agreed with both Natural England and the Environment Agency.

The project will establish a protected wildlife corridor in the area where the Railway Embankment has been removed by the existing landowner.

Level Crossings

The project calls for the provision of three additional level crossings. The applicant has been granted permission to cross the A21 by Highways England and the other two roads by East Sussex County Council. They have been in discussions with the Office of the Rail Regulator [ORR] over the design and operation of the level crossings.

The most significant Level Crossing is over the A21. A letter from the ORR included as part of the TWAO submission estimated that this crossing will be closed for a time between 42 and 112 seconds with the closure time likely to be 51 seconds. The crossing will not be used at peak times [this is a planning condition].

Detailed modelling has been carried out and the data is included in the application. This suggests that the queue caused by the closure of the crossing will be around 12 cars which will not reach to the roundabout to the north of the proposed crossing. There is a situation in the document which describes longer queues with peak Bank Holiday traffic but it should be noted that these queues are not caused by the closure of the crossing since they happen at present.

The applicant has indicated that they will work with the appropriate highways authorities on the provision of additional traffic calming.

Compulsory Purchase

At the Public Inquiry into the Rother Local Plan the Planning Inspector recommended the use of Compulsory Purchase powers to acquire the land from the then four landowners. RVR have been able to acquire two of these four parcels of land by negotiation. They have made offers to the remaining two landowners and have expressed the wish to buy the land by negotiation if at all possible. Having looked at the plans it would seem that there is around 2 miles yet to acquire which is roughly evenly divided between the two landowners. With regard to these two parcels of land I would make the following observations:-

Moat Farm. This is the portion of land to the east. The former trackbed appears [from publicly available aerial photographs] not to have been touched since the land was purchased from the British Railways. It is therefore not being used for agriculture so would not lead to any financial loss for the current owner. However there is land to the south of the trackbed which forms part of Moat Farm and access across is required. It is not clear from the aerial photographs how this land is currently accessed.

RVR have included a farm access across the proposed railway in the documents submitted as part of the TWAO application together with a farm access track. There have been comments on social media by those opposed to the application as a 'Concrete Access Road' to be used during the construction phase – this is clearly not the case. This access track can take whatever form the landowner requires.

Concern has been expressed about the loss of wildlife habitat after construction of the railway, but the applicants have stated that they will discuss this with the relevant statutory Authorities.

Parsonage Farm. This is the portion of land to the West and is a mixed arable and livestock undertaking. Having looked at the aerial photographs it would appear that the trackbed would, in some cases be quite close to existing field boundaries. There are a couple of fields which would be bisected by the proposed railway. RVR have proposed farm access crossings in a number of places. It has been suggested that the reinstatement of the railway might make some land packets unusable but I feel sure that the current landowners could adjust their usage of the land as necessary.

Other Matters

There has been a lot of comments made on social media about this application. Unfortunately it would appear that many of the comments are based on inaccurate information by people who have not read the latest versions of the documents.

This is a re-instatement of the railway – a large proportion of the trackbed is still in existence. It is not a 'new railway'.

A connection with the main line from London to Hastings would enable many visitors to come by train.

Some have stated that a Public Inquiry is needed because the documents submitted for the TWAO are out-of-date, I cannot see that this is the case and this does not seem a valid reason for a Public Inquiry particularly since the Rother Local plan [which included the reinstatement of the railway] was adopted following a Public Inquiry. There may, of course, be other reasons why a Public Inquiry is needed.

Yours faithfully

Harold Cloutt Bsc[Hons]

