

## **ROTHER VALLEY RAILWAY PUBLIC INQUIRY**

### **Representation from Salehurst and Robertsbridge Parish Council**

The Parish Council has a responsibility to represent the views of all Parish residents. It also has a duty to consider the economic, social and environmental health of the Parish and the possible effects of any development, whether it be residential, commercial or infrastructural.

The Parish Council is not qualified to make a judgment on the possible economic benefits or disadvantages of the proposed RVR development. It notes the theoretical financial projections made in the RVR business case and would agree that, were these to prove correct, the economic benefit to the Parish and the businesses operating within it could be significant. The Parish Council must also consider the effects upon the limited infrastructure currently existing in this rural area which a major development of this kind may have.

The Parish Council has specific concerns about a number of issues surrounding the proposed development. It does not seek to go into comprehensive detail on these, as the rationale behind each of them is clearly laid out in other representations. The primary, although not exclusive, issues are best summarised as follows:

1. The risk of flooding.
2. The pressure on parking, a perennial problem within the village of Robertsbridge, arising from the generation of considerable amounts of visiting traffic.
3. The effects on the environment, animal habitat and vegetation of construction on a greenfield site.
4. The right of the owners of the land and other residents affected by the proposed TWAO to quiet enjoyment of their property.

In raising these issues, the Parish Council is guided by the policies adopted in the Neighbourhood Plan. Further details are given below. The Parish Council acknowledges that the Neighbourhood Plan was primarily concerned with residential housing; but it also addressed commercial development proposals and the Parish Council believes that the policies cited below are equally applicable to infrastructure projects such as that proposed by RVR.

### **RELEVANT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN POLICIES**

The Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2028 was created as a result of the Localism Act 2011. It was established following extensive consultation and adopted following a local plebiscite in May 2018. The Plan sought to address potential housing sites within the Parish and associated development possibilities, but also sought to address some of the major concerns which the Parish already faces, including (although not limited to) continued potential flooding from the River Rother and from surface water; parking difficulties caused by railway commuters, users of the village schools and other visitors; and the absolute need to preserve and enhance the beautiful natural environment within which the Parish sits.

The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to influence development in the area under six different criteria:

**Economy**

**Education**

**Environment**

**Housing**

## **Infrastructure**

### **Leisure**

It is arguable that the RVR proposal primarily relates to four of these, with both Education and Housing being to a large extent not directly affected; and that there are a number of specific policies which should be addressed.

## **ECONOMY**

**Policy EC5** states that Tourism development which includes any business activities that facilitate tourism and leisure activities will be permitted where:

- a) Any new buildings make appropriate use of materials, scale, height, form and signage; and
- b) They are in keeping with the rural character of the AONB countryside and settlements.

**Policy EC7** states that business development in the Parish will be encouraged where:

- a) It is in keeping with the character of the area and the amenities of neighbouring properties and minimises visual impact through sensitive siting and design;
- b) It minimises the impact of the proposal on the wider character of the AONB landscape; and
- c) It will not cause or exacerbate any severe traffic problems and will promote sustainable transport.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

**Policy EN3** deals with Countryside Protection and the Parish's place within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and states:

All development will be considered with regard to the need to protect the landscape character of the countryside, as a whole of the Parish is within the AONB. Proposals which preserve the open character of the important gaps between settlements and which are not detrimental to the Green Infrastructure Network (as identified by RDC) will be supported.

Development will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances the natural beauty of the Parish and has regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

In particular it will:

- a) Take opportunities to restore the natural function of the River Rother, the Darwell Stream and other watercourses to improve water quality, to prevent flooding and enhance wetland habitats;
- b) Respect the settlement pattern of the Parish, use local materials that enhance the appearance of development, and support woodland management;
- c) Relate well to historic route ways and not divert them from their original course or damage their rural character by loss of banks, hedgerows, verges or other important features;
- d) Not result in the loss or degradation of Ancient Woodland or historic features within it and, where appropriate, will contribute to its ongoing management;
- e) Conserve and enhance the ecology and productivity of fields, trees and hedgerows, retain and reinstate historic field boundaries, and direct development away from mediaeval or earlier fields, especially where these form coherent field systems with other mediaeval features.

**Policy EN4** deals with Conservation of Landscape and Natural Resources and states that development will be expected to retain well-established features of the landscape, including mature trees, species-rich hedgerows, watercourses and other ecological networks together with the habitats alongside them and ponds.

**Policy EN8** deals with locally important trees and hedgerows outside the Conservation Area. It makes clear that development will be resisted where it would result in:

- a) An unacceptable loss of, or damage to, existing trees or woodlands or hedgerows during or as a result of development unless the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the amenity value of the trees or hedgerows in question.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Policy IN1** deals with loss of parking and states that:

- a) Development proposals that would result in the overall net loss of existing on-street and/or off-street parking will generally not be supported.

**Policy IN2** addresses the maintenance and improvement of existing infrastructure and states that new and/or improved infrastructure, including utility infrastructure, will be encouraged and supported in order to meet the identified needs of the Parish, subject to the following criteria:

- a) The proposal would not have significant harmful impacts on the amenities of surrounding residents and other activities;
- b) The proposal would not have significant harmful impacts on the surrounding local environment; and
- c) The proposal would not have significant impacts on the local road network.

## **LEISURE**

**Policy LE3** deals with new leisure or community facilities and states that proposals will be supported subject to the following criteria:

- a) The proposal would not have significant harmful impacts on the amenities of surrounding residents and other activities;
- b) The proposal would not have significant harmful impacts on the surrounding local environment;
- c) The proposal would not have unacceptable impacts on the local road network and will actively promote access by sustainable transport; and
- d) The proposal would adequately address surface water run-off issues.

The Parish Council respectfully requests that the Inquiry consider these points and policies as part of their deliberations.

Nick Brown

Chairman, Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council

13 May 2021