

Summary – Proof of Evidence of Robert Slatcher BSc (Hons) MA MIEMA CEnv.

Evidence relating to environmental assessment.

On behalf of Rother Valley Railway Ltd.

Personal details

- 1.1.1 I am a Director with Temple Group Ltd (Temple), who undertook the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and the production of an Environmental Statement (ES) on behalf of Rother Valley Railway Limited (RVR) to support consent applications for the proposed Rother Valley Railway Track Reinstatement Project.
- 1.1.2 I am an Environmental Consultant with 15 years' experience of environmental appraisal and EIA co-ordination, predominantly in relation to the environmental assessment of major infrastructure projects and in particular railway schemes. I have a BSc (Hons) in Geography and Geology and an MA in Environmental Consultancy. I am a full member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) and a chartered environmentalist. Some of my relevant rail experience includes:
- Lead ES author and EIA co-ordinator for two Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects on behalf of Network Rail (Ipswich Chord – 2009-2011 and Norton Bridge – 2011-2013);
 - Environmental Lead for elements of Thameslink (London Bridge GRIP 5, 2009-2011), Crossrail (Stockley Airport Junction and ONW Bridges GRIP 4 and 5, 2010-2011), Reading Depot (GRIP 4 and 5, 2010-2011) and the North London Railway Infrastructure Project (GRIP 2-5, 2007-2008); and
 - Route Window Manager on the High Speed 2 (HS2) Phase 1 and Phase 2b schemes acting as the interface between the engineering design and environment teams as well being a member of the ES authorship team.

Scope of evidence

- 1.1.3 My evidence will address the following points:
- impact of the scheme on air quality, water and noise (SoM, para 3(a));
 - impact on heritage assets and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (SoM, para 3(d));
 - measures proposed by RVR to mitigate adverse environmental impacts of the scheme (SoM, para 4);
 - the extent to which the proposals are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and local environmental policies (SoM, para 5); and
 - the adequacy of the Environmental Statement (SoM, para 6).

EIA Background

- 1.1.4 EIA is a structured framework which allows for the systematic appraisal of a range of potential environmental effects together through a single process, with a final means of communicating the findings through the production of an ES.
- 1.1.5 The Proposed Scheme is relatively unusual in the context of EIA and planning in so much that it has already been granted full planning permission (RR/2014/1608/P

dated 22 March 2017) through the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. That planning application was supported by an ES (RVR/24, RVR/25, RVR/26 and RVR/27). Subsequent to achieving that consent, further documentation has been prepared to augment the 2014 ES to address stakeholder responses, minor revisions to the scheme design and to ensure the environmental assessments and the data upon which it is based remains fit for purpose.

Timeline

- **October 2013:** A formal EIA scoping request (RVR/26) was submitted to Rother District Council (RDC).
- **January 2014:** A formal Scoping Opinion was published by RDC (RVR/26). The Scoping Opinion provided guidance on the content of the ES based on the consultation undertaken by RDC with statutory consultees and the opinion of the Council.
- **June 2014:** RVR submitted a Town and Country planning application to RDC, which was accompanied by an ES (RVR/24, RVR/25, RVR/26 and RVR/27).
- **November 2016:** Following submission of the Town and Country planning application, but prior to its determination, minor changes to the Scheme design were proposed and supplementary ecology information was made available at the request of the East Sussex County Council (ESCC) ecologist. As a result, an ES Addendum (RVR/28) was finalised, providing further explanation and information in relation to the assessment of ecology. It also sets out the proposed changes to the Scheme and considers whether these changes have any material effect on the findings of the EIA as set out in the original 2014 ES.
- **March 2017:** The Scheme was granted planning permission by RDC, subject to a number of conditions.
- **May - June 2017:** As part of the Transport and Works Act Order application process, RVR sought a scoping opinion from the Secretary of State (SoS) in May 2017. That Scoping Opinion was received on 22 June 2017 (RVR/64) and confirmed that the environmental information submitted as part of the scoping request (2014 ES and the 2016 ES Addendum) would provide an ES of sufficient scope for the purposes of a TWAO application, subject to the provision of additional assessment of the Scheme against the High Weald AONB Management Plan.
- **October 2017:** A further addendum to the ES (RVR/28) was prepared which addressed the June 2017 Scoping Opinion request for consideration of the Scheme in the context of the High Weald AONB Management Plan.
- **April 2018:** To support the TWAO application the following documents were submitted:
 - Track Reinstatement between Northbridge Street and Junction Road, ES June 2014 (RVR/24, RVR/25, RVR/26 and RVR/27);
 - Track Reinstatement between Northbridge Street and Junction Road, ES Addendum November 2016 (RVR/28); and
 - Track Reinstatement between Northbridge Street and Junction Road, ES Addendum October 2017 (RVR/28).

- **October 2018:** A further report (Track Reinstatement between Northbridge Street and Junction Road. Air Quality Statement-Level Crossings and Rolling Stock Emissions) (RVR/60) was produced which focussed on air quality impacts from the operation of trains within the Scheme, and as a consequence of vehicle traffic changes associated with the operation of the proposed level-crossings. The report was produced to address stakeholder responses.
- **March 2021:** In order to revalidate the findings of the environmental information provided to date and in response to a Rule 17 direction for further environmental information, an ES Update Report (ES 2021 Update) (RVR/70-01 to -09) was prepared. The report addresses the points raised in the direction and reviewed the findings of the 2014 ES (RVR/24, RVR/25, RVR/26 and RVR/27), and subsequent addenda, in the context of any changes to the baseline that may have occurred in the intervening period. This revalidation reviewed changes to the receiving environment, updates in available environmental data, changes to planning policy and plans and changes to discipline specific assessment methodologies. The purpose of the exercise was to revalidate the original ES findings in order to give continued confidence in the assessment conclusions for the purposes of determining the application. The ES 2021 Update also included assessment of three new topics areas: human health, major accident hazards and disasters and climate change.

Findings of the ES

- 1.1.6 The ES 2021 Update did not identify any new or different significant effects from those previously identified in the 2014 ES and subsequent addenda, the basis on which planning consent has already been granted.
- 1.1.7 The update did not identify any notable conflicts with national and local planning guidance introduced since the original assessment.
- 1.1.8 The receiving environment for the Proposed Scheme is rural in character and remains largely unchanged since the original assessment, a fact verified through the baseline update undertaken.
- 1.1.9 The assessment of the three new additional topics (human health, major accident hazards and disasters and climate change) identified significant beneficial effects related to access to open space and nature and accessibility and active travel as part of the human health assessment.
- 1.1.10 The climate change assessment identified minor adverse effects related to embodied carbon and greenhouse gas emissions. The assessment methodology employed for this assessment classifies any greenhouse gas emission as significant as a means of ensuring that projects take appropriate mitigating action. It was considered in the assessment that the project has and will adopt an appropriate and reasonable level of mitigation and the minor residual effects should therefore be considered appropriate for a scheme of this type and scale.
- 1.1.11 No significant effects were identified for major accident hazards and disasters.

Mitigation

- 1.1.12 The 2017 Town and Country Planning permission (RR/2014/1608/P) granted to the Proposed Scheme contained a series of conditions that relate to monitoring that the project must comply with. These conditions, as described in Section 18 of the ES 2021 Update, provide a comprehensive set of measures, when combined with the additional statutory consents required for the scheme (e.g. protected species

licences), to ensure a framework for the successful implementation of mitigation and regulatory oversight.

Conclusion

- 1.1.13 The revalidation work undertaken and reported in the ES 2021 Update (RVR/70) has demonstrated that the original findings of the 2014 ES continue to remain robust for the purposes of decision making.