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Submitted Electronically

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Dear Stephen,

READING WEST FOOTBRIDGE, READING WEST STATION - RAILWAY MILEAGE BKE 36m 72ch – RECONSTRUCTION OF BRIDGE TO INCREASE HEIGHT OF FOOTWAY OVER RAILWAY AND RASING PARAPETS - UNDER PART 18 CLASS A TO SCHEDULE 2 OF THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (GENERAL PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT) (ENGLAND) ORDER 2015, REQUIRING THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY'S PRIOR APPROVAL. LPA REFERENCE 172192/PNN

Grid Ref: E 470129 N 173063 Post Code: RG30 1AS

Following the useful meeting on Monday 14th May, please find attached / enclosed information requested in support of prior approval for Reading West Footbridge replacement which is further to earlier emails and attachments.

At the meeting we discussed the wider context of the ongoing largest modernisation of the railway since Victorian times and the significant investment being made to the rail infrastructure across the route and in particular within Reading. This includes electrification of the railway line from London Paddington, through Reading West, to Newbury. GWR are introducing the biggest fleet upgrade in a generation, providing new longer trains with more seats and better facilities as well as being quieter and greener. Reading itself has already benefitted from significant investment by Network Rail at the main Reading station less than a mile away which provides fully inclusive and exemplar accessibility.

The existing footbridge at Reading West station will be demolished in June to facilitate the installation of overhead electrification to maintain the programme for of electrification from Reading to Newbury for December 2018. The removal of the footbridge in itself does not need planning consent and would be deemed "excluded" development.

Part 11, Class B of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 permits 'any building operation consisting of the demolition of a building'. Part 11, Class B.2(b) details circumstances where an application to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether prior approval as to the method of demolition and any proposed restoration of the site will not be required. This includes

'excluded demolition', which Part 11, B.3 (d) defines as '[demolition] required or permitted to be carried out by or under any other enactment'.

This section of railway was originally authorised by the Berks and Hants Railway Act 1845. This Act incorporated the provisions of the Railway Clauses Consolidation Act of 1845. Section 16 of the 1845 Act incorporates the provisions which permit the original railway company and its successors in title (now Network Rail) to undertake future works, not limited to the construction of the railway, but including powers to 'alter, repair, or discontinue' works and to 'do all matters and things necessary for making, maintaining, altering or repairing and using the railway'.

Our current prior approval application under Part 18 of the GPDO (172192/PNN) is for the erection of the new replacement bridge not the demolition of the old. As you are aware there are limited reasons as to why such an application can be refused and any adverse impact on the amenity of the neighbourhood needs to be demonstrated by the LPA. The wider benefit of providing an electrified railway and other betterment to the station needs to be weighed up against the visual impact of a new taller footbridge.

The purpose of this letter is further to the various meetings we have held with Reading Borough Council and GWR, and to reiterated Network Rail's commitment to working with you to provide a gauge clear footbridge whilst taking account of your future station masterplan aspirations.

In addition to the proposed footbridge as part of the offsetting of any potential impact on the neighbourhood of the new taller footbridge structure (to allow the electrification wires to pass underneath) we have started work to provide a new pedestrian access from street level off Oxford Road onto platform 2 which will be opened before the existing footbridge is removed and these works are being implemented under our permitted development rights. This new pedestrian access is a clear betterment to the station and will be an improvement for the passengers that use the station and the amenity of the neighbourhood. This has been possible by using an existing manufactured replacement bridge that is no longer needed elsewhere on the network and is thus cost effective in enabling additional access to Oxford Road too.

To follow up Monday's meeting and further to the various emails between you and my colleague Ian Wheaton we can now confirm the following points;

- **Location of the replacement structure** – we have asked the question of our designer one more time and for the reasons we have previously outlined in emails the footbridge as proposed is as far north as it can be and we are unable to move it from that proposed due to the position of the Overhead line equipment and the proximity to the steps.
- **Details of the privacy screening from the bridge and steps** – we have previously submitted this to be shown on the top section of steps to stop overlooking. However contrary to discussions at our meeting when we suggested the privacy screen would be perforated we can provide this with a solid screen in a similar manner to that which we propose across the bridge span. The privacy screen would be 1.8m in height from the step surface and by being solid in structure would stop all overlooking. The photo below shows how the parapet would appear 1.8m tall across the bridge span which would ensure there was no overlooking from here.



We would suggest that if officers felt that the privacy screen details contained in drawing 40103 C02 and confirmation of the solid design in this letter was not adequate this detail could be controlled by an appropriated worded planning condition.

- **Proposed landscaping** – we suggest that on the Network Rail owned land at the bottom of the garden of 13a we would plant a number of Poplar trees. These would be reasonably quick growing and would act as a screen to any perceived overbearing nature of the footbridge from the garden of 9a. We suggest that this requirement be controlled by an appropriately worded planning condition, should prior approval be granted. In the meantime, please find below sketch from our GIS mapping with the zone shown with a red line for proposed new trees.



- **Potential overshadowing** - we believe that by planting in this location but further down the embankment from the vegetation that has recently been removed the newly planted trees would cause no more overshadowing of the garden of 13a from that which previously existed prior to being cut back which was too close to the overhead wires about to be installed.

- **Existing planting** – we have now cleared all the vegetation we require to along the corridor of the station which has been done for two reasons, firstly due to the exclusion zone for the overhead lines and secondly to allow for construction access to crane in the new footbridge. We do not need to cut back further vegetation/ trees and the vegetation that remains does act as a screen from the street scene in Brunswick Hill from the footbridge that is proposed with steps. In addition the position of the retained trees on the railway embankment and adjoining land block the direct views from the windows of 13a.

The photos below are taken earlier this week from the street scene and the proposed footbridge will be behind the trees that exist post Network Rail's vegetation clearance. We believe this clearly shows that the bridge as currently proposed does not adversely affect the amenities of the neighbourhood as it will be sited behind the trees in situ and not clearly seen in the street.





We would also like to take this opportunity to further explain why the replacement structure is proposed in this location.

The intention is to minimise the time between removal of existing structure and replacement footbridge. The physical structure that is proposed is one that is already manufactured as a standard design that enables future lifts to be added should funding come forward. In addition a further prior approval would need to be made to the council to consider that design and therefore whilst we show on our submitted plans the location that a lift could be installed this current application does not seek permission for the lift structure. The likelihood is that by time funding becomes available for a lift structure to be added to the bridge the newly planted trees (to be agreed by planning condition) would be established and would act as a screen.

As Reading West is becoming a busier station every year with increased passenger numbers, there is a safety need for a replacement bridge to be located towards the middle of the station to enable the distribution of passengers along the length of the platforms (given that there will be longer trains in the future). In addition there are currently a large number of trespass incidents of passengers running across the railway have occurred (35 trespass

since 2015) and is considered a higher risk location by British Transport Police. By providing a footbridge in a more central location on the operational platform the station will operate much better for the travelling public and local users.

In conclusion it is our view that the design you are currently considering is acceptable and does not adversely affect the amenities of the wider neighbourhood. Any potential and perceived impact on a very small number of residents is off set by the wider benefits to the station, the improved services that will come from an electrified quieter railway and the landscaping and privacy screen mitigation that has been offered during the lifespan of this application. I look forward to reading your committee report recommending approval with appropriately worded planning conditions as suggested in this letter.

Yours sincerely



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Wales and Western Routes