

APPLICATION NO.	P17/V1154/LB
SITE	Steventon Overbridge, High Street, Steventon, Abingdon, OX13 6RS
PARISH	Steventon
PROPOSAL	Demolition of listed railway overbridge and provision of replacement bridge. As amended by plans received on 10 August 2017 (as per additional information received 19 September 2017 and OCC Letter received 1 March 2018). Additional options review from PBA received 16 March 2018.
WARD MEMBER(S)	Matthew Barber
APPLICANT	Network Rail
OFFICER	Charlotte Brewerton

RECOMMENDATION

Listed building consent for demolition of the Grade II listed overbridge at Steventon subject to the following conditions:

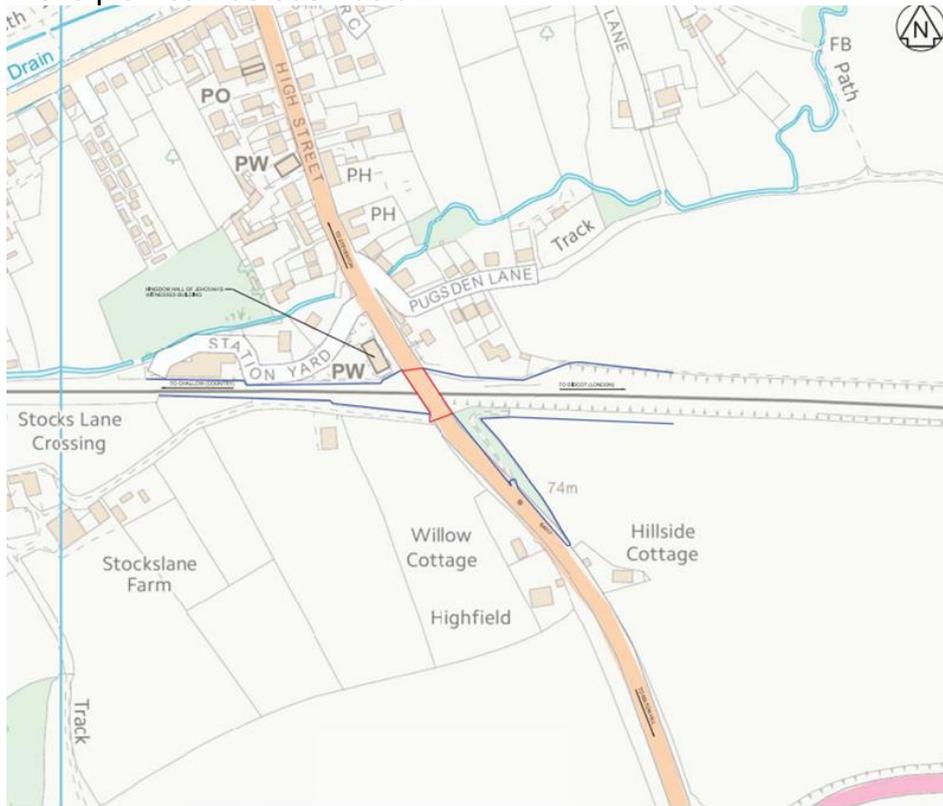
1. Commencement 3 years - listed building consent
2. Approved plans.
3. Sample materials (walls - panel).
4. Historic records.

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSAL

- 1.1 This application has been called to planning committee by Councillor Matthew Barber. The application seeks listed building consent to demolish the Grade II listed Steventon Overbridge.
- 1.2 This application was deferred at planning committee on 9 May 2018 for the following reasons:
- 1) To seek clarification on flooding issues surrounding Steventon Overbridge with a partial and full track lower under the bridge
 - 2) To seek clarification on the use of bi-mode trains and speed restriction issues.
 - 3) To understand the impact of the 25 second delay and train capacity
- 1.3 Additional information has been submitted by Network Rail to clarify issues asked for at the last committee. Their letter dated 5 June 2018 can be seen **attached** at Appendix 1. The Environment Agency have also been consulted on how likely flooding would be in this location. These matters will therefore be addressed in this report with the original 9 May committee report **attached** at Appendix 2. This report should be read in
- 1.4 conjunction with the previous committee report.

- 1.5 This application is for demolition of the listed bridge. Currently the bridge does not have sufficient electrical and physical clearance to allow the safe use of Overhead Line Electrification (OLE) equipment through the bridge. The low clearance through the bridge is exasperated by the need for OLE contact wire to have a minimum safety clearance of 5.8m through the adjacent Level Crossing's, at The Causeway and Stocks Lane, and to maintain a compliant gradient to the contact wire.
- 1.6 There is a temporary solution currently in place along this part of the track to allow electric passenger trains safely along the line by December 2018. NR have advised that this temporary measure cannot be considered long term due to the impact on the train pantograph clearance under Steventon Bridge. Also the wire gradient between the bridge and Stocks Lane Level Crossing will mean that electric trains are limited to 60mph.
- 1.7 Department for Transport (DfT), in their letter dated 9 July 2018, have advised that *'Bi-mode Intercity Express Trains (IET) will, on a temporary basis, operate in slower diesel mode along this part of the track until a solution for the bridge has been found.'*
- 1.8 The railway passes through Steventon east to west dividing the village into northern and southern parts. The bridge carries the High Street over the railway providing access to the northern part of the village.
- 1.9 The primary routes to the southern half of the village are from the northern part of the village utilising two level crossings, one on Stocks Lane and another on The Causeway.
- 1.10 The southern part of the village includes residential areas and commercial properties including a small business park and a farm located near to the structure. These properties all rely on the level crossings for access. There is an unmade track which is a designated BOAT (Byway Open to All Traffic) but this is narrow with tight turns and not suitable for vehicular traffic (except 4x4's and farm vehicles).

1.11 A site plan can be seen below:



2.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

2.1 The full summary of all consultations and representations is contained at paragraph 5 of the original committee report at appendix 2. A full copy of all the comments made can be seen online at www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk.

The following representations have been submitted since the publication of the 9 May Committee meeting:

<p>Steventon Parish Council</p>	<p>Object</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These increased times of between 4.4 and 9.1 seconds are within the “noise” of timetable scheduling i.e. have no significant effect. • Thus trains could run in diesel mode through Steventon without any impact on the timetable. This obviates the need to demolish Steventon Railway bridge.
<p>Drayton Parish Council</p>	<p>Object</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given that alternative technical solutions seem to be ruled out, Drayton Parish Council remains concerned

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the bridge will be closed for a minimum of 10 months. • The negative effects this will have on traffic and local businesses will be both significant and prolonged.
Sutton Courtenay Parish Council	No further comments received
Environment Agency	<p>No Objection – This is based on the red line area around the bridge itself.</p> <p>Email of 18 July 2018 - Further discussions highlighted that any work to the track would result in multiple flood zones being affected with Flood Zone 1, the highest probability of flooding, around Stocks Lane Level Crossing.</p>
Historic England (South East)	<p>No Objection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not object last time so I think our advice can still stand. <p>Email of 18 July 2018 - In light of additional comments submitted it is up to LPA to make their recommendation in line with Para.132 and 133 of NPPF that demolition is demonstrably justified in order to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the loss of the heritage asset.</p>
Conservation Officer Vale	<p>No Objection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As Conservation Officer I seek to retain Steventon bridge • the practicality of retaining the bridge without obliterating the very character and appearance of the bridge that contributes towards its special character and interest has not been possible to achieve. • I wish to see the bridge retained, but regrettably accept the evidence put forward by Network Rail, • that the retention of the bridge is not viable if a fully

	operational high speed link constructed to the necessary safety standards is to pass through Steventon.
Oxfordshire County Council Single Response	No further comments received
Wantage & Grove Campaign Group	No further comments received
Neighbour Approve	No further comments received
Neighbour Object (1)	<p>Strongly object</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood risk area but IEP trains are built to go through flood water • Solka report suggest minimal track lower • Wire gradients and pantograph information questioned • Train capacity questioned • NR re-present same information that demolition required for sufficient bridge clearance for OLE needed under bridge and over crossings • Track has already been lowered in 2015 and OLE clearance found acceptable – March Level Crossing Assessment • New Hitachi Class 800 IET's in operation with diesel power and no reduction in performance. • HE do not use the word object but case is clearly 'unproven' • Reconsider your recommendation and refuse current application
Neighbour (2)	<p>No Strong Views</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • significant local objection to the application. • important that the district council consider the significance of this application both locally and wider national basis.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A rejection of this application could reduce the capacity of the railway through Steventon which is currently operating at capacity.• Ultimately the council weighs the public benefit of demolition against the heritage interest,• it is important that a prompt decision is made on this application.
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3.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

3.1 P17/V1161/P18 – Still awaiting determination

Prior Approval for demolition of Steventon Overbridge and replacement bridge as part of the Electrification of the GWRL.

P14/V2644/PEM - (12/03/2015)

Great Western electrification project, Steventon Overbridge.

P13/V1380/ES - Approved (27/09/2013)

Environmental Statement for the scheme of works to electrify the Great Western Main Line Railway.

4.0 **MAIN ISSUES**

4.1 The main issues to consider are the updated information that has been submitted to address the deferral reasons from the 9 May committee:

- Flood risk issues surrounding a full and partial track lower
- Use of bi-mode trains and time delay
- Weight given to demolition of bridge versus its retention in accordance with Paragraph 132 and 133 of the NPPF.

4.2 **Flood Risk**

The flood risk in this area is a key constraint that affects viability of the options of a full or partial track lower in this location.

Having spoken with the Environment Agency (EA) Officers understand that the bridge itself is located within Flood Zone 3 – the area with the lowest probability of flooding. From this point up to Stock's Lane Level Crossing there are a number of flood zones along the track, leading to zone 1 – the highest level of flooding. Stocks Lane Level Crossing is near to Ginge Brook, classed as a major river. Any works to the track within 20m of this flood zone would require a separate permit from EA.

4.3 Site investigations have been undertaken by Network Rail which includes trial holes to determine the geology below the track bed and ground penetrating radar to determine the depth of each sub layer. Officers understand that in order for an acceptable gradient for the trains to run on 100m of track either

side of the bridge has to be re-laid for every 100mm of lowering. This would result in works up to and beyond Stocks Lane.

4.4 Full track lower

In order to achieve sufficient clearance at both crossings, Network Rail have advised that the track lower at the bridge would need to be approximately 770mm. This would require approximately 800m of track and ballast to be renewed both sides of the bridge along with the lowering of the Causeway, which is Grade II* listed, and would include lowering a four-track section to the east of the bridge.

4.5 In addition to these works it would include excavating approximately 1500mm depth at the bridge to form a new track bed. NR have advised that a dig of this depth would likely destabilise the toe cutting and so require significant earth retaining structures to be installed around the bridge.

4.6 In discussion with the Conservation Officer these additional works to a bridge that already has concrete bracings in the outer arches could undermine its structural integrity. Footings and excavation works should be undertaken as far as possible from a listed structure so as not to undermine it. Given that the track is tight up to the bridge there is little space around in which to carry out these works. The Conservation Officer has advised that excavating in such close proximity to a listed structure could weaken its structural integrity resulting in a high level of structural intervention that would undermine its significance and affect its character and appearance that makes it worthy of its listing status.

4.7 Paragraph 7.12 of my previous committee report considers the issues surrounding a full track lower. Both the Solka report and the PBA report confirm that this is unlikely to be a viable option in this location.

4.8 Partial Track Lower

In order to provide minimum overhead line clearances under the bridge NR conclude that a track lower of 444mm is required. At this depth The Causeway Level Crossing could remain open but it would require the closure of Stock Lane Level Crossing to vehicles due to the height of the overhead wires.

4.9 NR have advised that a partial track lower would result in many of the same issues associated with a full track lower. The extent of track rebuild would be a minimum of 444m either side of the bridge and a total depth of excavation at approximately 1.1m to form the track bed. Again, this would have implications to the structural integrity of the bridge and track closures in order to carry out the works.

4.10 The Closure of Stocks Lane level crossing would require upgrade and modification of the BOAT. This would have traffic implications to the village of Steventon and the local community for the long term. Whilst the PBA report advised that this could be a viable option Officers believe in practical terms it would cause a considerable upheaval to the track and train capacity

inefficiencies in the short term and longer-term traffic implications to the village of Steventon.

- 4.11 NR ascertain that track bed investigations in 2016 and 2017 conclude that a track lower is not possible in Steventon and that options to lower the track over the culvert are highly unlikely due to the reconstructed culvert being unable to obtain a Flood Risk Activity Permit from the Environment Agency.
- 4.12 The Environment Agency have advised that whilst they have no objection to the scheme based on its location within the red line area, located in Flood Zone 3, works to the track adjacent to Stocks Lane Level Crossing, in flood zones 1 & 2 would require an EA Permit so close to a major river such as Ginge Brook. They have not assessed any technical notes or detailed assessments of track lower works in this location.
- 4.13 The EA have not offered any assurances as to whether this would be granted but given its location, probability of flooding and implications to the road network required to secure any form of track lower Officers consider this to be an unviable solution.
- 4.14 Officers consider that retrofitting a scheme around a bridge that is not the best example of a Brunelian structure, further compromising its structural integrity, increasing project funding and delaying the National scheme further, whilst adding local traffic upheaval to residents of Steventon does not appear to be a pragmatic approach. Therefore, on balance Officers weigh in favour of loss of the bridge when considered against a technical solution such as full or partial track lowering.
- 4.15 **Train Capacity**
NR have introduced the temporary measure to allow the OLE to progress which requires reducing the speed of the trains to 60mph. They have however advised that this would increase maintenance costs to the OLE and does not ensure the running efficiency of the track therefore could not be a viable long term solution.
- 4.16 Officers here refer to NR letter dated 5 June 2018, attached at Appendix 1, and their explanation as to what the impact of the 25 second time delay would mean. Whilst 25 seconds does not appear to be significant in the first instance it could result in a timetabling delay of 2-3 minutes per train and this would then have a significant impact on the timetable coming out from Paddington.
- 4.17 Furthermore, NR has responded that '*bi-mode was not the goal of electrification full term along the length of the track*'. The proposal is for demolition of the bridge to improve the running efficiency of the trains along the GWML.
- 4.18 Officers accept that a bi-mode alternative does not improve functionality, efficiency, timetabling of the GWML and could be to the detriment of the benefits offered through the electrification programme.

4.19 **Weight given to demolition of bridge versus its retention in accordance with Paragraph 132 and 133 of the NPPF.**

Paragraph 132 of the NPPF and paragraph 133 of the Framework, states that: Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- The nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- No viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term
- Through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- Conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

4.20 Officers, in acknowledging what the NPPF states, weigh heavily in favour of the substantial public benefits that demolition would lead to.

4.21 Not only would the demolition of the listed bridge allow for a purpose-built bridge to be constructed, reducing the impact on flooding, level crossings works, local highway network upheaval longer term and increased costs but it would allow for the development of the railway line to be improved longer term in line with the overall electrification programme.

4.22 Modernisation and upgrade was a key factor in shaping the railway in the 19th century as it is today in the 21st. The pace of technological advancements continues to offer and allow for upgrading of our transportation network to ensure that its functionality and capacity is at its best. This scheme has been put forward to upgrade the railway network, its capacity, efficiency, functionality to improve the service for all and to 'future proof' it for the longer term.

4.23 Richard Peats of Historic England, has throughout the course of this application considered that the necessity for demolition has to be demonstrated in accordance with Paragraph 132 of the NPPF and that demolition has to be demonstrably necessary in order to achieve substantial public benefits as set out in 133 of the NPPF. He is not objecting to this application.

4.24 Sally Stradling, Conservation Officer for Vale of White Horse has expressed her desires to retain the bridge however notes that '*the practicality of retaining the bridge without obliterating the very character and appearance of the bridge that contributes towards its special interest has not been possible to achieve*'. She notes that it is not the best example of its type and for this reason is also not objecting to the proposal for demolition of a listed structure.

4.25 The Department for Transport have, in their letter dated 9 July 2018 written in supporting the programme. To conclude they write '*The modernisation of the GWML is a nationally significant programme that will improve over 100million train journeys each year, stimulate growth from London through the Thames*

Valley, to the Cotswolds, West Country and to South Wales. The Department for Transport fully supports this application’.

- 4.26 Officers note that whilst there could be an alternative mode along this section of track with the use of bi-mode trains, does this result wholeheartedly in upgrading train efficiency, improving train timetabling in the long term to ensure that nationally our railway network is as efficient as it could be?
- 4.27 In weighing up the balance, having looked at all options presented in detail, Officers weigh heavily in favour of the substantial public benefits that the demolition of the listed bridge will bring. All viable options appear to result in considerable upheaval further along the track in Steventon, flooding issues, lengthy delays, both to the trains and highways, and increased costs, whilst the removal of the bridge would ensure that necessary improvements are being made to the GWML as a whole.
- 4.28 It is regrettable that the scheme would involve closing of the highway over the railway line for several months but this is for the short term and would not present any further logistical problems once the new bridge is in situ.
- 4.29 The electrification project is a national scheme and one that should be supported if we are to upgrade our transportation network and compete with the demands of increased business and trade links with the rest of the country.

5.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 Officers are mindful that loss of a heritage asset should not be considered lightly and this weighing up the balance is important in ensuring historic fabric is not unnecessarily lost.
- 5.2 Having regards to Paragraph 132 of the NPPF, to give great weight to the conservation of the bridge and section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting, whilst there would be significant harm from the loss of a historic asset, demolition is outweighed by the public benefits both locally and nationally.
- 5.3 Demolition and the provision of a replacement structure allows important modernisation to the railway network. Whilst officers are aware that in the short term there would be significant traffic implications to Steventon and the wider area, once the upgrading works are completed there will be no longer term traffic implications to residents and the village of Steventon from its loss.
- 5.4 Given the location of the bridge within Flood Zone 1 and the probability of flooding of the railway line, Officers consider that any lowering of the track would cause severe implications to the running capacity of the track. This is not in the national interest nor would it result in public benefits that the electrification project is trying to achieve.
- 5.5 The closure of the levels crossings and a speed restriction on this part of the line has been discounted due to the extremely disruptive impact it would have

upon running capacity of a busy line. Furthermore, a speed restriction along this part of the line would have implications to the maintenance of the OLE equipment.

- 5.6 There would be no possibility of an alternative route to allow vehicles from this part of Steventon to gain access to the wider surrounding area. The adjacent BOAT is too narrow with any upgrading works needing to be considerable to provide for a heavy flow of local traffic.
- 5.7 Officers therefore consider that having assessed all viable options, on balance and regrettably, the justification for the total demolition of the bridge is necessary to deliver the substantial public benefits that electrification of the Great Western Main Line would bring. This is in accordance with Policies HE1, HE4 and HE5 of the Vale of White Horse Saved Policies 2011 and Core Policies 37, 39 and 40 of the Adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031.

POLICIES

- 9.1 The following planning policies have been taken into account:
- 9.2 Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011 (SOLP 2011) policies;
HE1- Preservation and enhancement- implications for development
HE4- Development within the setting of a listed building
HE5 - Development involving alterations to a listed building
- 9.3 Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1
CP37- Design and Local Distinctiveness
CP39- The Historic Environment
CP40- Sustainable Design and Construction

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