

Transport and Works Act 1992: Proposed Rother Valley (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order

OBJ/729

Sir,

Having been a member of Robertsbridge Cricket Club for over 20 years, 10 of which I served as Chairman, I have been requested to represent the Club at this inquiry to raise the concerns and queries of the Club and its' Members. Robertsbridge Cricket Club has been in existence for over 130 years and the ground was purchased from the original Landowners by the villagers in 1944 to ensure that those returning from war could continue to play in the Village. The Club currently has 3 Senior sides playing League Cricket on Saturdays, a Limited Overs team, Sunday Development games, numerous Junior sides, hosts juniors tournaments, coaches junior cricket – over 85 junior members on the books from the surrounding area – and for 50 years has held a very well supported intra village competition. The ground and facilities plays host to the village Stoolball Club for matches and tournaments and also has been used by Gray-Nicolls/Gilbert Rugby for testing equipment and marketing.

Apart from the obvious objections to the proposed new railway – such as 3 new level crossings, devastating ecological damage, irreversible environmental damage, detrimental economic impact – demonstrated on the Rother Valley Railway (RVR) open day when one store in the village had its' worst ever Saturday takings and another had to dispose of the extra food it anticipated in selling that never materialised – and the car parking impact on the village – again demonstrated on the RVR open day when parking became a bigger issue in the village than on a normal crowded commuter weekday – which I am aware have been raised by others – there are two areas that the Members of the Club are particularly concerned about.

In one of the various reports presented to the village by RVR it stated that there were six properties in the village that they could not guarantee would not be affected by any extra flooding the construction of the new railway would produce – one of which was the Cricket Pavilion. In fact since the implementation of the flood defences since the major flooding of 2000, there have been at least 5 occasions – 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017 and 2019 – when the Pavilion has been between 20-50 mm from flooding. The new Pavilion, built prior to 2000 and with Lottery funding, is constructed on 'stilts' in order to ensure it does not flood and when constructed the Club was informed by Rother District Council – in no uncertain terms – that there was no way they would allow 'another brick to be added'. If the Pavilion becomes more susceptible to flooding the insurance for the Club would rise and more than likely become uninsurable which would result in the end of cricket in Robertsbridge. This would not only be a loss to all the adults and children who use the facilities but also ironic that the village that is home to the Cricket Bat – Gray-Nicolls being the worlds' largest bat manufacturer – would no longer have a Cricket Club!

Robertsbridge Cricket Club
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Secondly, and these issues were particularly a concern and raised by the Junior Members of the Club:

- a) What is the 'carbon impact' of not only the construction of the new railway but what will the annual footprint be? The children also wanted to know what mitigating actions would be imposed on Rother Valley Railway during the construction phase and annually thereafter should permission be granted? They are aware that the Government target for zero emissions is 2030, and that the industrial revolution was the start of major damage to the planet so could not understand why anyone would choose to take a step backwards and go against the aim of the Government? They expressed a concern not only on the coal powered steam engines but those powered by diesel which would have an even more detrimental effect. Also the impact of the increased level of road traffic in the village, as demonstrated on the open day held by RVR, not only to the carbon levels but the car parking issues this also caused.
- b) Although the Junior Members were aware of the concerns of the proposed introduction of the 3 new level crossings they felt that the focus had been mainly on the A21 and Junction Road, very little attention had been paid to the Northbridge Street one. The introduction of this extra hazard would have an effect, not only at times when they were playing cricket, but continually as many parents are happy to let their children walk to the Cricket Club, Recreation Ground, village and school unaccompanied at the moment, this would change with this extra hazard – especially as there are no parking restrictions along the Clappers with the increase traffic flow – again demonstrated on the RVR open day.

Finally, on a personal note, I come from a military background my father and his brothers serving during both World Wars gaining one VC, one DSO and three MC's between two of them and I have served full Colour Service loyally and professionally upholding the rights of – what I believe to be – a democratic, civilised and free world. Whilst I fully understand and agree with the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders for Government backed major infrastructure projects such as HS2, I fail to see how, in this case, a CPO can be used to force the sale of lawfully owned land to a charity for little, if any, benefit to the community. It appears to be going back in time and I reflect on the huge sacrifice that our predecessors gave over the past 100 years or so and makes me question whether it was all worthwhile?

Nicholas WF Moor

For and On Behalf of

Robertsbridge Cricket Club

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29th May 2018

Reference: Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order

I am writing to you to raise my objections to the above proposal for the following reasons:

Three new level crossings – I believe that Government Policy is that “other than in exceptional circumstances, no new level crossings on any railway therefore creating no new risks”. I would accept that HS2 would be regarded as an “exceptional circumstance” however this is not the case here. Add to that the reputation of the A21 being the “most dangerous road in the South East” if not the country, to add another hazard and therefore another “risk” would be immoral.

Flooding – The land through which the new railway would run (it would have to be considered as a new railway as there is no existing track bed) is Flood Zone 3. To build a bund across the flood plain could only lead to disastrous consequences somewhere along the line, and despite mans' best efforts to predict the results Mother Nature always has a habit of winning.

Ecological – There has been no ecological survey carried out on the actual proposed route of the railway. I am aware that surveys have been carried out along the opposite bank of the River Rother but this is a distance of a minimum of a river and a field away and therefore would produce very different results so cannot be relied on to give a true reflection of the ecological damage the railway would cause.

Environmental – The stated plan is to run not only steam trains which obviously are not beneficial to the atmosphere but to run diesels which I believe your Government have announced “its commitment to scrapping all diesel-only trains on UK railways”.

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These proposed diesels are not new 'clean' diesels but old 'dirty' diesels and I would not like to leave this legacy for either my or your children.

Economic – Rother Valley Railway have admitted that Robertsbridge would not benefit from this project, this is backed up from when they held an open day some years ago when the takings fell in one village shop and extra food ordered for another had to be disposed of due to lack of custom. The only thing our village would become is a giant car park as happened on the open day.

Impact on Sport – both the village football ground and cricket pitch lie within the Flood Zone 3 and will suffer due to the rise in the water levels that Rother Valley Railway have published and have stated that the Cricket Pavilion will be affected. The Football Club have to change venue for their games and training for both seniors and juniors quite regularly at present, this will only increase. The Cricket Club, of which I am a past Chairman, host Sussex Seniors, have three league teams, a mid-week side, Sunday development side, numerous junior sides and an extremely popular junior training programme – will be affected. Despite the Pavilion being raised (Rother District Council have stated they will not allow 'one brick more' to be added) it will become more susceptible to flooding and my fear is that the insurance premium will rise to such a level or even be declined that cricket will cease in the village – thus ending not only over 125 years of history but the Village that is Home to the Cricket Bat (Gray-Nicolls) will not be playing Cricket at all.

Use of an Act of Parliament that should have been re-peeled – I believe that the last time this Act was used it involved a debate within the House, which surely has set the precedent, and if any progress has been made would also involve a Public Inquiry. My family have served this country for over four generations (one VC, one DSO, one DSC and three MC's that I know of), two World Wars and I served My Queen and Country loyally and professionally for full Colour Service, upholding the rights of – what I believed to be – a democratic, civilised and free world. Although I fully understand and agree with the use of CPO's in the national interest, I fail to see how a small group of individuals, albeit well connected and funded, have the right to use a centuries old Act to force another individual to give up their lawfully owned land. This is going back in time NOT forward. This proposal does make me reflect on the huge sacrifice given 100 years ago this year and by all of those since and whether it was all worth it.

I would therefore respectfully request that not only would you decline the proposal but ensure the Act was re-peeled and therefore leave a lasting and progressive legacy upon which future generations will be proud.

Nicholas WF Moor