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(SADDLEWORTH) ENHANCEMENTS) ORDER**

**Network Rail's Response to the Inspector's Request for
Submissions on the Revised National Planning Policy
Framework (August 2026)**

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1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Document

1.1.1 The purpose of this document is to provide Network Rail's response to the Inspector's request dated 2 September 2026 for comments on whether the publication on 17 August 2026 of the revised National Planning Policy Framework ("**the NPPF 2026**"), has any material relevance to the case previously stated by Network Rail regarding how the Order Scheme accords with the National Planning Policy Framework dated December 2024 ("**the NPPF 2024**") (**NR38**), as set out in Network Rail's Planning Statement (**NR15**) (see section 5.1), Network Rail's Statement of Case (**NR30**) (see section 6.3), my Planning Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**) (see section 5), the Historic Environment Proof of Evidence of Sandra Honeywell (**NR/PoE/SH/14.2**) and the assessment of heritage impacts set out in the Heritage Impact Tables in Appendix 1 to the Historic Environment Proof of Evidence of Sandra Honeywell (**NR/PoE/SH/14.3**).

1.1.2 The purpose of this document is to identify any material implications arising from the publication of the NPPF 2026 for the Order application, request for deemed planning permission and associated listed building consent applications.

1.1.3 This document is structured as follows: -

- Commentary on the NPPF 2026 changes (**Section 2**), comprising:
 - Sustainable Development (Section 2.1);
 - Achieving Sustainable Development Policies (Section 2.2);
 - Sustainable Transport Policies (Section 2.3);
 - Climate Change, Environmental and Natural Environment Policies (Section 2.4); and
 - Heritage Policies (Section 2.5).
- Conclusion (**Section 3**)

2. COMMENTARY ON THE NPPF 2026 CHANGES

2.1 Sustainable Development (S1-S6)

2.1.1 The NPPF 2024 addressed the principles of sustainable development and the presumption in favour of sustainable development in Chapter 2 (Achieving sustainable development).

2.1.2 I addressed the relevance of these policies to the Order Scheme at sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.8 of my Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**), in sections 6.3.1 to 6.3.2 and 6.3.22 to 6.3.30 of the Statement of Case (**NR30**), and at sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.9 and 6.2 of the Planning Statement (**NR15**).

2.1.3 The NPPF 2026 now restructures the approach to sustainable development into a dedicated policy chapter. Chapter 4 (Achieving sustainable development) contains Policies S1 to S6. The objective of the policies in Chapter 4 is to meet development needs through sustainable patterns of development.

2.1.4 Chapter 4 is structured into Policies S1-S6; Policy S1 (Positive plan-making), Policy S2 (Producing a spatial strategy), Policy S3 (Presumption in favour of sustainable development), Policy S4 (Principle of development within settlements), Policy S5 (Principle of development outside settlements) and Policy S6 (Neighbourhood plans and the presumption). I have set out what I consider to be the material changes relevant to the Order Scheme below.

Policy S5

2.1.5 The national decision-making policies in Chapter 4 (Policies S1-S6) represent the most significant changes introduced by the NPPF 2026. In particular, Policy S5 (Principle of Development Outside Settlements), which sets out the forms of development that should be approved outside settlements, expressly supports "*engineering operations and infrastructure (including for transport...)*" outside settlements.

2.1.6 Policy S5 is also relevant to clarification of a point raised during my oral evidence to the Inquiry on 8th July 2026, regarding paragraph 5.1.9 of my Proof of Evidence, where I stated that "*elements of the Order Scheme located within the Green Belt constitute either appropriate local transport infrastructure, or represent inappropriate development justified by very special circumstances, consistent with Chapter 13 of the NPPF*". The Inspector queried whether Network Rail's position was that parts of the Order Scheme constituted inappropriate development requiring justification through very special circumstances. In response, I clarified that Network Rail's position is that no element of the Order Scheme constitutes inappropriate development, and that all development within the Green Belt would comprise appropriate local transport infrastructure. Although Policy S5 applies to development

outside settlements rather than specifically to Green Belt land, it nevertheless reinforces the principle that transport infrastructure located outside settlements should not be regarded as inappropriate development as a matter of principle. I set out what I consider to be the substantive Green Belt policy change relevant to the Order Scheme, namely the revised transport infrastructure exception at Policy GB7(1)(f)(i), in Section 2.3 of this Document.

2.1.7 Policy S5 also reflects the Government's increased emphasis on supporting development around well-connected railway stations and the role of public transport in delivering sustainable growth. This provides additional support for the Order Scheme, which will enhance station facilities and accessibility at two locations, thereby improving the attractiveness and functionality of sustainable transport infrastructure.

2.2 Sustainable Transport Policies (TR1-TR8)

2.2.1 The NPPF 2024 addressed sustainable transport in Chapter 9 (Promoting sustainable transport), including the vision-led approach to transport planning (paragraph 109), the focus on sustainable locations (paragraph 110) and plan-making requirements (paragraph 111). The NPPF 2024 also addressed public rights of way briefly at paragraph 105 (Chapter 8).

2.2.2 I addressed the relevance of these policies to the Order Scheme at sections 5.1.2 to 5.1.8 and 8.7 to 8.9 of my Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**), in sections 6.3.4, 6.3.24 to 6.3.30 and 6.7.29 to 6.7.37 of the Statement of Case (**NR30**), and at sections 5.1.7 to 5.1.8, 6.2.6 to 6.2.8 and 6.14 of the Planning Statement (**NR15**).

2.2.3 The NPPF 2026 restructures sustainable transport policy into a dedicated chapter, Chapter 15 (Promoting sustainable transport). Chapter 15 contains Policies TR1 to TR8. The stated objective of the policies in Chapter 15 is to ensure that transport considerations are taken fully into account in the preparation of development plans and the evolution and assessment of development proposals, using a vision-led approach to embed the role that transport infrastructure and choices can play in creating well-designed, sustainable, inclusive and popular places.

2.2.4 The revised sustainable transport policies in Chapter 5 (TR1-TR8) in the NPPF 2026 place greater emphasis on making effective use of existing transport infrastructure to support sustainable patterns of development. The relevant policies in Chapter 15 which I consider in this section are Policy TR1; (Vision-led approach to planning for transport), which is a plan-making policy requiring sustainable transport to be considered from the earliest stages; Policy TR3 (Locating development in sustainable locations), which is a principal decision-making policy on the location of development, and Policy TR8 (Public rights of way), which is a new standalone decision-making policy on PRoW.

Policy TR1

2.2.5 Policy TR1 requires transport issues to be considered from the earliest stages of planning and development proposals through a "*vision-led approach*" to identify transport solutions that support the delivery of "*well-designed, sustainable and popular places*".

2.2.6 The objectives of Policy TR1 are consistent with, and reinforce, the position previously stated by Network Rail in sections 5.1.7 to 5.1.9 and 6.2 of the Planning Statement (**NR15**), sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.4 to 6.3.5 of the Network Rail's Statement of Case (**NR30**) and sections 5.1.2 to 5.1.8 of my Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**). In particular, the case for the Order Scheme has consistently relied upon its sustainable transport, connectivity, capacity, accessibility and modal shift benefits, together with its contribution to the delivery of wider social, economic and environmental objectives. As such, Policy TR1 does not materially alter the conclusions previously reached regarding the Order Scheme's accordance with national planning policy. Rather, it provides further support for the principles already relied upon by Network Rail in demonstrating the planning merits of the Order Scheme.

2.2.7 It should be noted that the Network Rail Statement of Case (**NR30**) referred to the consultation draft of this policy at paragraph 6.3.21. The final version of Policy TR1 is broadly consistent with the consultation draft policy approach and so there is no material change to the consideration previously set out in Network Rail's Statement of Case.

Policy TR3

2.2.8 Policy TR3 (Locating Development in Sustainable Locations) states that:

"Opportunities should be taken to utilise existing or proposed transport infrastructure in optimising the amount or density of development which can be accommodated in different locations, especially where this can support more walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport use" (Policy TR3(1)(b)); and

"In rural areas, opportunities to improve walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport and enhance the connectivity of an area should be taken where they exist and can be supported by the development proposed" (Policy TR3(1)(e)).

2.2.9 These provisions represent a stronger policy emphasis on maximising the benefits of existing transport infrastructure and improving public transport connectivity. Whilst the Order Scheme is not itself a development proposal of the type contemplated by Policy TR3; the revised policy nevertheless provides additional support for investment in railway infrastructure as a means of facilitating sustainable growth and enhancing accessibility. This is particularly relevant given that the Order Scheme will

improve connectivity and passenger facilities at railway stations, supporting wider policy objectives relating to sustainable transport and public transport use.

Policy TR8

2.2.10 TR8 (Public Rights of Way) provides that development proposals should *"maintain the network of public rights of way, including through suitable diversions"* and should also *"take opportunities to extend, link or improve the quality of existing routes"*.

2.2.11 The principles contained within Policy TR8 are consistent with, and reinforce, the position previously advanced by Network Rail in relation to the public rights of way matters considered at the Inquiry. In particular, the Order Scheme incorporates the diversion of existing routes and the provision of alternative and enhanced connections associated with the closure of the Moorgate Halt and Stockport Road level crossings, including works relating to Footpath 244 SADD and the associated alternative route.

2.2.12 In conclusion, Network Rail's view is that the introduction of policies TR1 and TR8 serves to reinforce the existing policy position previously advanced by Network Rail in support of the Order Scheme. Accordingly, Policy TR8 does not materially alter the conclusions previously reached regarding the acceptability of the proposed public rights of way diversions and associated mitigation and enhancement measures. Rather, the policy provides additional support for the approach adopted by the Order Scheme, which seeks not only to maintain connectivity within the public rights of way network, but also to improve the quality, safety and functionality of routes available to users.

2.3 Green Belt, Climate Change, Environmental and Natural Environment Policies

2.3.1 The NPPF 2024 addressed Green Belt policy in Chapter 13 (Protecting Green Belt land), including the categories of development which are not inappropriate in the Green Belt (paragraph 154).

2.3.2 I addressed the relevance of Green Belt policy to the Order Scheme at section 5.1.9 of my Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**), in sections 6.3.31 and 6.7.22 to 6.7.24 of the Statement of Case (**NR30**), and at sections 5.1.10 and 6.3 of the Planning Statement (**NR15**).

2.3.3 The NPPF 2026 restructures Green Belt policy into Chapter 13 (Protecting Green Belt land), containing Policies GB1 to GB8. The five purposes of the Green Belt, the very special circumstances test for inappropriate development, and the Golden Rules are retained. The material change relevant to the Order Scheme concerns Policy GB7(1)(f)(i), which sets out the forms of development that are not inappropriate in the Green Belt, and is addressed below.

2.3.4 Since submission of the application, the NPPF 2026 has replaced the previous exception for *"local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location"* with a broader exception for *"transport infrastructure required in a Green Belt location"* (GB7(1)(f)(i)). In my view, this change reinforces the position that elements of the Order Scheme comprise appropriate development in the Green Belt. The Order Scheme forms part of the strategic Transpennine Route Upgrade programme and constitutes transport infrastructure which, by its nature, must be located within the existing railway corridor, parts of which lie within the Green Belt. The revised policy therefore provides even clearer support for the conclusions reached in sections 5.1.9 of my Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**), in section 6.3.31 of the Statement of Case (**NR30**), and at section 6.3 of the Planning Statement (**NR15**) regarding the appropriateness of those elements of the Order Scheme located within the Green Belt.

2.3.5 The NPPF 2024 addressed climate change in Chapter 14 (Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change), including the requirement for the planning system to support the transition to net zero (paragraph 161). I addressed the relevance of these policies to the Order Scheme at sections 5.1.10 to 5.1.12 of my Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**), in sections 6.3.32 to 6.3.34 and 6.4 of the Statement of Case (**NR30**), and at section 5.1.11 and 6.9 of the Planning Statement (**NR15**).

2.3.6 The NPPF 2026 restructures climate change policy into a dedicated chapter, Chapter 5 (Meeting the challenge of climate change). Chapter 5 contains Policies CC1 to CC3. The objective of the policies in Chapter 5 is to support the transition to net zero by 2050 and to shape places in ways which are more resilient to the effects of climate change. The Chapter is structured into: Policy CC1 (Planning for climate change); Policy CC2 (Mitigation of climate change); and Policy CC3 (Adaptation to climate change). I set out what I consider to be the material changes to the climate change policies relevant to the Order Scheme below.

Policy CC2

2.3.7 Policy CC2 (Mitigation of climate change) is a decision-making policy setting out how development proposals should contribute to climate change mitigation. Policy CC2(1)(a) requires development proposals to: -

"Accord with policies TR3 and TR4 so that sustainable patterns of movement are prioritised, opportunities are taken to improve walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport, and infrastructure is provided to support the transition to zero-emission vehicles."

2.3.8 The policy therefore establishes an explicit link between climate change mitigation and the promotion of sustainable transport. Whilst previous national planning policy recognised the role of sustainable transport in reducing greenhouse

gas emissions, Policy CC2 now directly cross-refers to the transport policies in Chapter 5 of the NPPF 2026 and expressly identifies public transport improvements as a means of supporting climate change objectives.

2.3.9 This revised policy reinforces, rather than alters, the conclusions previously set out in section 6.9 of the Planning Statement (**NR15**), sections 6.3.23, 6.3.32 and 6.3.34 of the Statement of Case (**NR30**) and sections 5.1.2, 5.1.3, 5.1.5 to 5.1.8 of my Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**). The case for the Order Scheme has consistently relied upon its contribution to sustainable transport objectives through improvements to rail connectivity, network capacity, accessibility and passenger experience, together with its role in encouraging modal shift from private car travel to public transport. The explicit linkage now made between climate change mitigation and sustainable transport infrastructure provides additional policy support for those conclusions.

2.3.10 The revised policy also sits comfortably alongside the Government's express commitment to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, reinforcing the conclusion at paragraph 4.1.20 of my Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**) that investment in rail infrastructure makes an important contribution towards the transition to a lower-carbon transport system. Accordingly, Policy CC2 does not materially alter the planning balance or the conclusions previously reached regarding the Order Scheme's climate change benefits but provides further policy support for the position already advanced by Network Rail.

2.3.11 In conclusion, Network Rail considers that the introduction of Policy GB7 reinforces the previous position and strengthens policy support through the removal of the word "local" from the transport infrastructure exception. The introduction of Policy CC2 reinforces the existing position and also provides new policy support by virtue of creating an explicit policy linkage between climate change and sustainable transport policy.

2.3.12 The natural environment is addressed in Chapter 19 (Conserving and enhancing the natural environment), containing Policies N1 to N6. No material changes to the natural environment policies have been identified as relevant to the Order Scheme.

2.4 Heritage Policies (HE1-HE10)

2.4.1 The NPPF 2024 addressed the historic environment in Chapter 16 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment), including the assessment of effects on heritage assets (paragraphs 207–210), the tests for substantial harm and less than substantial harm (paragraphs 212–215), and recording of heritage assets (paragraph 218).

2.4.2 I addressed the relevance of these policies to the Order Scheme at sections 5.1.14 to 5.1.15 and 8.5 of my Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**), in sections 6.3.8

to 6.3.9, 6.3.36 and 9.4 of the Statement of Case (**NR30**), and at sections 5.1.13 to 5.1.15 and 6.4 to 6.5 of the Planning Statement (**NR15**). The heritage impacts of the Order Scheme are also addressed in detail in the Historic Environment Proof of Evidence of Sandra Honeywell (**NR/PoE/SH/14.2**) in particular sections 2.1.6 to 2.1.9 (NPPF heritage policy framework) and sections 5.1 to 5.6 (assessment of impacts on designated and non-designated heritage assets), and in the Heritage Impact Tables at Appendix 1 (**NR/PoE/SH/14.3**).

2.4.3 The NPPF 2026 restructures heritage policy into a dedicated chapter, Chapter 20 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment). This Chapter contains Policies HE1 to HE10. The objective of the policies in Chapter 20 is to conserve and enhance the historic environment, recognising that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource which should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.

2.4.4 The revisions to the heritage policies in the NPPF 2026 do not have any material implications for the conclusions reached in the Planning Statement (**NR15**), Statement of Case (**NR30**), or **Appendix 1** (Heritage Impact Tables) to the Historic Environment Proof of Evidence of Sandra Honeywell (**NR/PoE/SH/14.3**). We have however considered the policy revisions in Policy HE5, HE6 and HE7.

Policy HE5

2.4.5 Policy HE5 (Assessing effects on heritage assets), sets out the framework for assessing the significance of heritage assets and the effects of proposals on that significance. There is a change in language as to how harm is categorised, with the category formerly known as "*less than substantial harm*" now only given the term "*harm*". It is still by definition a lesser degree of harm than substantial harm, so would still accurately describe the level of harm for those assets that are not reconstructions or demolitions.

2.4.6 Policy HE5 provides clarification as to when substantial harm may arise, stating that it will occur where a proposal would "*seriously affect a key element of an asset's significance*". I do not consider this change in the NPPF 2026 to have material implications for the heritage impact assessments that have been undertaken for the Order Scheme as set out in the Appendix 1, (Heritage Impacts Tables) to Sandra Honeywell's Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/SH/14.3**). None of the heritage assessments undertaken for the Order Scheme identified impacts that could reasonably be regarded as being close to the threshold between harm and substantial harm. Accordingly, I do not anticipate any change to the categorisation of the effects previously assessed as result of the changes in the NPPF 2026.

Policy HE6

2.4.7 'Policy HE6, (Weighing harm against public benefits) is the decision-making framework for substantial harm and harm. In Policy HE6, the weight given to the conservation of designated assets is now referred to as "*substantial*" rather than "*great*". It is for the decision-maker to consider how to attribute weight in light of this updated policy, but it is my understanding that this change in wording is for consistency rather than an attempt to change the level of protection afforded to heritage assets. The weighing of heritage harm vs public benefit appears to remain unchanged in this Policy. Substantial harm still requires to be outweighed by substantial public benefits, this fully aligns with the heritage impact assessments undertaken and set out in the Appendix 1, (Heritage Impacts Tables) to Sandra Honeywell's Proof of Evidence (NR/PoE/SH/14.3).

Policy HE7

2.4.8 Policy HE7 (Non-designated heritage assets) addresses assets not formally designated. The requirement for harm to be weighed against public benefit for works affecting non-designated heritage assets has been made more explicit than in the former paragraph 216 in the NPPF 2024. This is of notable relevance for Footpath 209 SADD and the closure of Moorgate Halt level crossing. The approach taken in the evidence supporting the Order Scheme was for the identified harm to the non-designated heritage asset to be considered as part of the wider planning balance and weighed against the benefits of the Order Scheme, see Historic Environment Proof of Evidence of Sandra Honeywell (NR/PoE/SH/14.2) paragraph 8.24: "*This limited impact to the non-designated heritage asset will be considered by the Inspector as part of a balanced judgement in relation to the impacts of the Order Scheme as a whole, and the resulting public benefits from its operation*". This therefore doesn't materially change the situation in relation to how non-designated assets have been treated as part of Network Rail's evidence.

2.4.9 In conclusion, the revisions in the NPPF 2026 do not materially affect the conclusions of the heritage assessments undertaken for the Order Scheme. The NPPF 2026 revisions principally seek to clarify and reframe aspects of heritage policy rather than materially alter the heritage assessment framework that has been applied to the Order Scheme.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1.1 Network Rail has reviewed the revisions introduced by the NPPF 2026 and their relevance to the Order Scheme, the request for deemed planning permission and the associated listed building consent applications. Taking the revised NPPF 2026 as a whole, Network Rail does not consider that the publication of the NPPF 2026 materially alters the planning balance or the conclusions previously stated in sections 8.1.5, 8.1.6

and 8.1.9 of the Planning Statement (**NR15**), section 6.3.37 of the Statement of Case (**NR30**), or section 11 of my Proof of Evidence (**NR/PoE/MG/15.2**),

3.1.2 In several respects, the NPPF 2026 reinforces the NPPF 2024 policy support previously identified for the Order Scheme. In particular, the revised policies relating to development outside settlements, sustainable transport, Green Belt development, climate change mitigation and public rights of way reinforce for the Order Scheme's objectives and benefits, including its contribution to sustainable transport, improved rail connectivity, enhanced station facilities, modal shift and wider sustainability objectives.

3.1.3 The revisions to the heritage policies in the NPPF 2026 do not materially affect the conclusions reached in the heritage assessments undertaken for the Order Scheme and do not alter the conclusions in that assessment of the Order Scheme's effects on heritage assets. Likewise, Network Rail does not consider that any of the revised policies give rise to the need for a different approach to the assessment of the Order Scheme's compliance with national planning policy on heritage.

3.1.4 Accordingly, Network Rail's position remains that the Order Scheme accords with relevant national planning policy and that the revisions introduced by the NPPF 2026 provide further support for, rather than undermine, the case previously advanced in favour of the Order and the associated requests for deemed planning permission and listed building consent.