



TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992

Transport and Works (Applications and Objections Procedure) (England and Wales) Rules 2006

THE NETWORK RAIL (STALYBRIDGE TO DIGGLE (SADDLEWORTH) ENHANCEMENTS) ORDER

Statement of Common Ground between Natural England and Network Rail

NR/SOCG/NATURALENGLAND

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Authorised Agreement

Name	Organisation	Position	Date	Signature
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1. OVERVIEW OF SCHEME

- 1.1.1 On 7 November 2025, Network Rail (NR) submitted a Transport and Works Act Order (TWAo) application to the Secretary of State for Transport for the “TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU) Stalybridge to Diggle (Saddleworth)” scheme. The TWAo included an Ecology Technical Appendix (Chapter 6 of the Environment Report (ER) (**NR14**) which presents an appraisal of the proposed Network Rail enhancements. The wider TRU programme involves the electrification of the railway (installation of overhead line equipment (OLE) and associated infrastructure), removal, remodelling, and replacement of bridges and structures to accommodate OLE, track and signalling upgrades and structural strengthening works.

2. METHODOLOGY

- 2.1.1 AtkinsRéalis ecologists have carried out the following surveys in accordance with best practise guidelines. Natural England (NE) and NR agree that the appropriate surveys have been conducted for the scheme as follows:

- A desk study reviewing online resources and existing documents covering the Scheme;
- UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) Survey of the Scheme and up to a 50 m buffer;
- Arboricultural Assessment (Chapter 8 in Volume 1 of the Environmental Report (**NR14**));
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) condition assessment surveys of habitat parcels within the Scheme;
- Bat Ground Level Tree Assessments, and Preliminary Roost Assessments of buildings;
- Bat emergence surveys on rail bridges;
- Bat likely presence/likely absence surveys based upon Natural England approved Proposed Tunnel Methodology; and
- Badger walkover surveys.

2.2 Results and Mitigation

- 2.2.1 NE and NR note the approach taken by AtkinsRéalis in identifying and developing mitigation measures in response to the survey results and potential impacts. NE acknowledges the proposed mitigation approach as presented as being sensible and proportionate, but stresses that the decision as to whether licensed approaches are required or not is a matter for NR informed by the advice of AtkinsRéalis. It is currently anticipated that a

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European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) will not be required for the Scheme, although a disturbance notification may be necessary for future works within Stalybridge and Scout Tunnels:

- No statutory sites for nature conservation will be impacted, as confirmed by a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) (Stage 1) which is appended to the Ecology Appendix;
- Five non-statutory sites for nature conservation – Sites of Botanical Interest (SBIs) – are located within the Scheme. Three will be directly impacted, resulting in vegetation removal of up to a total of 1.05 ha.
 - A BNG Baseline Report has been produced internally. Network Rail are committed to delivering 10% BNG across the Scheme despite BNG not being mandatory for TWAOs schemes. Net gain will be secured through a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) as described in Section 4.4 of the Code of Construction Practice (CoCP) Part A (**NR17**). Habitats will be restored to their previous condition where feasible.
- Widespread Invasive Non-native Plant Species (INNPS) were recorded across the Scheme. An INNPS Management Plan will be produced including measures to avoid and treat INNPS accordingly.
- Brown long-eared bat (5 individuals – transitional), soprano pipistrelle (5 individuals – transitional), and common pipistrelle (5 individuals – transitional and 5 individuals – hibernation) and were identified likely roosting within Scout and Stalybridge Tunnels.
 - The use of European Protected Species Licencing (EPSL) is not anticipated as no direct impacts to protected species are proposed. The Scheme will mitigate for indirect impacts to bats at Stalybridge and Scout Tunnels through a disturbance notification, of which three have already been approved for pre-commencement works.
- A main badger sett was identified approximately 4 m east of the Scheme. Mammal paths were identified crossing the Scheme at multiple locations.
 - Works adjacent to the main sett comprise of minor de-vegetation restricted to hand tools for the purpose of maintaining a footpath. A Precautionary Method of Working (PMW) and Ecological Clerk of Works (ECOW) will be secured during works.

2.2.2 The scheme will follow the mitigation hierarchy avoid, minimise, compensate and enhance. Appendix 6A of the ER details what general, specific and additional mitigation are incorporated within the design.

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2.3 Consultation Overview

Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (representing Oldham Council and Tameside Metropolitan Council)

- 2.3.1 Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) advised that the mitigation hierarchy should be followed and enhancement would happen within the SBIs impacted by the scheme where feasible. This is evidenced through de-vegetation consultation with Ecologists, Designers and Contractors that has resulted in minimised vegetation loss.
- 2.3.2 NE and NR agree with the recommendations made by GMEU that will be implemented in assessing any future required works in the SBI as part of the scheme.
- 2.3.3 NE confirms the following:
- It is supportive of Network Rail's commitment to deliver 10% BNG; and
 - Advised that the mitigation hierarchy should be followed.

Environment Agency

- 2.3.4 Jim Pearson (Environment & Consents Manager) for TRU route-wide has separately consulted the Environment Agency.

3. SUMMARY

- 3.1.1 NE and NR note that an appropriate level of ecological assessment has been undertaken for the Scheme to date, and that a mitigation strategy has been developed in response. NE acknowledges the approaches undertaken and proposed; which appear sensible and proportionate based on the information presented to NE for review to date.