



Rule 10(2) (d)

TRANSPORT & WORKS ACT 1992

Transport & Works (Applications & Objections Procedure)

(England & Wales) Rules 2006

Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order

STATEMENT of AIMS

Introduction and Background

1.1 The proposed Order is applied for by Rother Valley Railway Limited (RVR), working in partnership with the Kent and East Sussex Railway (K&ESR) which operates an existing heritage railway between Tenterden and Bodiam.

1.2 The former railway line between Robertsbridge and Tenterden was closed in 1961. Much of the line remained in place for many years and in 1974 a stretch between Tenterden and Rolvenden was re-opened as the Kent and East Sussex Railway. (KESR). The line was further reinstated to Bodiam (where the National Trust has Bodiam Castle), in 2000, and KESR has become a successful heritage railway and major tourist attraction.

1.3 There has always been an aspiration within KESR to reinstate the original line through to Robertsbridge (where a connection to the main line would be possible) and a separate company, Rother Valley Railway Ltd (RVR), was formed in 1991 to bring this forward.

1.4 After the original line was closed, the railway corridor was sold. RVR entered into long and complex negotiations with relevant landowners with a view to acquiring land or rights over land for the purposes of re-instating the line to Robertsbridge. Land was acquired at the Bodiam and Robertsbridge ends of the line, allowing some track to be laid, but leaving a gap between Junction Road in Udiam and Northbridge Street in Robertsbridge. Re-instatement work to date has

been undertaken mainly by volunteers with input from professional consultants where necessary, and has been financed entirely by voluntary contributions with no call on the public purse.

1.5 When, in 2004, following public consultation, the comprehensive District Development Plan was drawn up by Rother District Council, it included the reinstatement of Rother Valley Railway (RVR), subject to three criteria. The Local Plan (2006) saved policy relevant to the reinstatement of the Rother Valley Railway is EM-8 –Bodiam/Robertsbridge railway. It provides as follows:

Policy EM8:

An extension to the Kent and East Sussex Steam Railway from Bodiam to Robertsbridge, along the route identified on the Proposals Map, will be supported, subject to a proposal meeting the following criteria:

- 1. It must not compromise the integrity of the floodplain and the flood protection measures at Robertsbridge;*
- 2. It has an acceptable impact on the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;*
- 3. It incorporates appropriate arrangements for crossing the A21, B2244 at Udiam, Northbridge Street and the river Rother.*

The overall plan was subjected to a Public Inquiry. In paragraph 45 of the Inspector's report, he recommended retention of the policy of support to the railway as it would have significant benefits for tourism and sustainable travel. The reinstatement is covered in detail on pages 914 and 915 of the report and concludes: - *“Were the landowners to remain opposed to the scheme, the Council could consider whether it wished to seek the use of compulsory powers”* (to acquire the necessary land)¹.

1.6 Over the course of a number of years, planning permission has been obtained for the re-instatement of the railway between Bodiam and Junction Road (permission RR/94/1184/9 in 1994), from Robertsbridge to Northbridge Street (RR/2005/836/P in 2005), for extension through Udiam Farm to Junction Road (RR 2009/114P in 2009), and Robertsbridge Junction Station, (RR/2012/1357/P in 2012). Re-construction of the railway within those sections has now been completed and the station construction is ongoing. The connection to Network Rail was completed in late 2016, and formally opened by Sir Peter Hendry, Chairman of Network Rail in December 2016. The new Robertsbridge Junction Station Platform and the first phase of main station building were formally opened by the local MP, Huw Merriman, on 25 August 2017.

¹

1.7 Following extensive consultation over a period of 6 years (including detailed discussions with all the relevant statutory bodies and the local planning authority, as well as extensive surveys, designs and modelling), planning permission for the remaining 3.6km stretch between Udiam and Robertsbridge was unanimously approved by the Rother District Planning Committee on 17 March 2017 (RR/2014/1608/P).

1.7 The 2017 planning permission provides consent for the development of the missing link and anticipated submission of an application for statutory authorisation under the Transport and Works Act 1992. The proposed Transport & Works Act Order would provide statutory authority for both the new and existing lengths of track and would, in particular, authorise the crossing of the public highway. Importantly, it would also authorise the acquisition of land and rights over land and the temporary use of land in connection with the railway in case it is not possible to acquire the necessary land interests by agreement.

1.8 The reinstatement of the railway would support economic development by helping to unlock the tourism potential of the Rother and Ashford Districts through the provision of new sustainable transport infrastructure. It would allow the operation of the line, as a heritage railway from Robertsbridge to Bodiam, where it would join the existing heritage railway to Tenterden. Robertsbridge Junction Station would provide a new, direct passenger interchange facility with the mainline railway network, enabling users to gain access to various local heritage attractions from Robertsbridge to Tenterden - the most notable being Bodiam Castle - without travelling by car.

1.7 Funding for the works (from benefactors), is already in place.

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