

The Network Rail (East West Rail Bicester to Bedford Improvements) Order

Transport and Works Act 1992

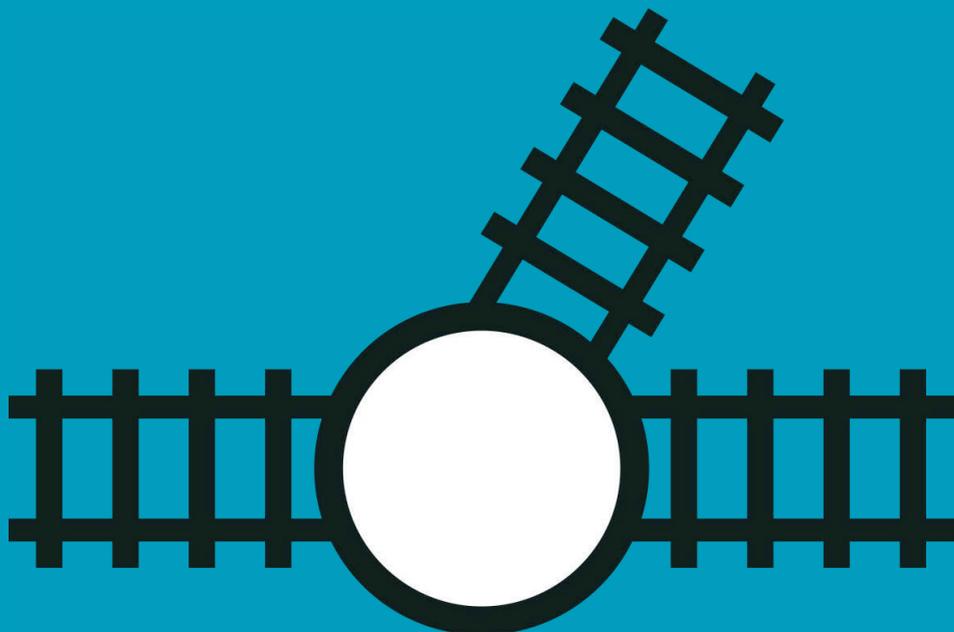
The Transport and Works
(Inquiries Procedure) Rules 2004

Summary of

Proof of Evidence of Jill Stephenson

Planning

NR128



1. My name is Jill Stephenson.
2. I am a Chartered Town Planner by profession with 18 years' experience in the rail industry. My role with Network Rail is that of Town Planning Manager for the London North Western Route and I have been a full member of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) for 12 years and a Practitioner member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) for 2 years. In this role I have been responsible for providing town planning advice in relation to railway enhancement schemes including the Network Rail (Norton Bridge Improvements) Order 2014, the Network Rail (Huyton) Order 2014, the Network Rail (Ordsall Chord) Order 2015, the Network Rail (Manchester Piccadilly and Oxford Road Capacity Scheme) Order (undecided) and The Network Rail (Hope Valley Capacity) Order 2018. I acted as expert planning witness at the Public Inquiries into both the Ordsall Chord scheme and the Manchester Piccadilly and Oxford Road Capacity scheme.
3. In respect of Network Rail's application for the Network Rail (East West Rail Bicester to Bedford Improvements) Order to authorise the Order Scheme, my role has been to advise on town planning matters, including applications submitted in relation to advanced works.
4. This evidence concerns the planning policy context and overall planning balance for the Request for Deemed Planning Permission (NR08) and listed building consent applications, providing reasons why it is considered that the Secretary of State should approve those applications. It explains the reasons for which different elements of the EWR2 Project are authorised by various planning mechanisms. It also deals with the use of draft planning conditions as set out in the Request for Deemed Planning Permission (NR08).
5. The Order application seeks a direction from the Secretary of State for Transport under Section 90(2A) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 that planning permission shall be deemed to be granted for the Scheme works to be authorised by the Order, subject to conditions substantially in the form of those set out in draft within Schedule 1 of the Request for Deemed Planning Permission (NR08).
6. The Scheme is located within the boundaries of five local planning authorities: Cherwell District Council, Aylesbury Vale District Council, Milton Keynes Council, Central Bedfordshire District Council and Bedford Borough Council. It spans two county authorities: Oxford County Council and Buckinghamshire County Council.
7. A number of separate planning applications have been made to the relevant LPA(s) in order that works to establish environmental mitigation sites and set up construction compounds can be brought forward to allow the overall public benefit arising from the Order Scheme to be realised as quickly as possible. The new station at Winslow also benefits from planning permission.
8. Three Listed Building Applications have been made to the relevant LPAs seeking approval for works to Quainton Road Station (Aylesbury Vale District Council), Ridgmont Station (Central

Bedfordshire Council) and Woburn Sands Station (Milton Keynes Council). The applications have been called in for determination by the Secretary of State in parallel with the draft Order.

9. Each application is supported by a Heritage Statement which details the relevant planning policy context and appraises the impact of the proposed works on the significance of the heritage assets, in compliance with the requirements set out paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In each case, the corresponding Heritage Statement concludes that the proposed works will have considerably less than substantial harm, outweighed by the great public benefits of the Scheme, and the sustained use of the stations for the purpose of which they were originally intended. No objections have been raised in respect of the three applications, and detail in relation to materials and finishing will be controlled by conditions.
10. There is clear and convincing strategic policy support for the Scheme, at both a National and Local level, together with very specific recognition of the need for improvements in connectivity within the Oxford-Cambridge arc documented within transport and economic policy objectives. The project is in accordance with the strategic aims of the relevant adopted Development Plans as well as those emerging across each Local Authority area.
11. Sustainable transport is enshrined within the NPPF given its critical role in facilitating sustainable development. Additional policy support for rail development to supplement the NPPF's aims of building a strong, competitive economy is clearly demonstrated in the National Policy Statement for National Networks (NPS). The Scheme accords with the NPS.
12. The revised NPPF contains a strengthened basis for promoting sustainable transport, with the Scheme in full accordance with Paragraph 104 (c) which requires planning policies to identify and protect, where there is robust evidence, sites and routes which could be critical in developing infrastructure to widen transport choice and realise opportunities for large scale development. The route of EWR2 has been identified and protected in such a way within the relevant Local Transport Plans and Development Plans, and is critical in supporting the proposed development patterns envisaged at both a local and national level.
13. The Scheme makes a direct contribution to the goals of National and Local transport planning policy and one of the key aims of the National Infrastructure Delivery Plan. The Scheme will improve connectivity across the "knowledge arc" which will in turn act as an enabler for economic growth. This is clearly in accordance with the Government's desire for the planning system to facilitate the building of a strong, responsive and competitive economy, as set out in Chapter 2 of the NPPF. There is a clear linkage between the Scheme and the Government's stated aim for the planning system to proactively drive and support sustainable development.
14. Draft planning conditions have been submitted with the Order application attached to the Request for Deemed Planning Permission (NR08). Four objections have been received in relation to the proposed conditions and a number of additional comments were received informally from the local planning authorities and County Councils.

15. The draft conditions have been revised in order to address the matters raised, however the revised drafting does not vary substantially from the submission draft, except where two new conditions have been proposed to cater for construction traffic management and noise attenuation. Proper implementation of the planning conditions will ensure that the Scheme can be constructed and operated in accordance with the NPPF and relevant development plan policies. The proposed conditions satisfy the six tests referred to in Paragraph 55 of the NPPF.
16. Railways are recognised as the most sustainable form of public transport, and the Scheme will enhance this role in providing much needed east – west connectivity within the Oxford – Cambridge arc. The pattern and scale of strategic housing allocations along the alignment of the route further underpin the level of weight given to the role of the railway network in facilitating development and supporting economic growth. This is underpinned within the Buckingham Thames Valley Strategic Economic Plan Refresh which states that the Scheme must go ahead without delay.
17. The transport benefits are clearly aligned to the aims of the Local Transport Plans, which all state that delivery of EWR2 should be delivered as a priority to cater for the demand for new homes and to support access to new jobs created within the arc.
18. Each of the Local Planning Authority Areas through which the Scheme passes have allocated sites within their current development plans and included a significant amount of additional growth within emerging policy documents based on the delivery of key infrastructure, including the provision of the EWR Scheme. Without the Scheme the pattern and level of growth envisaged would be severely compromised and would fail to meet the objectives of sustainable development.
19. Delivering new heavy rail infrastructure within a rural environment requires a balanced approach. It should be clear from all the evidence in this case that Network Rail has given very great weight to the relevant local planning and environmental policies, and has put forward sufficient mitigation within the ES to off-set the environmental impact of the Scheme both during construction and operation. Control over the detailed delivery of the Scheme is afforded to the relevant Local Planning Authorities through the proposed planning conditions.
20. The design and delivery of the Scheme also recognises that many areas through which the railway passes are subject to significant growth and change over the coming years from predominantly agricultural land to residential-led development. Suitable mitigation has been included within the Scheme proposals to ensure that the construction and operational phases of the railway development will have limited adverse impacts, which are clearly outweighed by the very significant public benefits of the Scheme. EWR will have no impact on the deliverability of neighbouring development sites, many of which are allocated on the basis of the Scheme coming forward.

21. It is clear in my view that the need for the Scheme and very significant strategic policy support upon which the pattern and scale of new development is predicated, shows the planning balance is plainly in favour of approving the Order.
22. With this in mind, the Inspector is respectfully requested to recommend that the draft Order be made and that the Secretary of State should direct the grant of deemed planning permission and listed building consent, subject to the proposed conditions.