

## COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES  
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL  
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 30 May 2018

ITEM NO. 10

**Ward:** Battle

**Application No.:** 172192/PNN

**Address:** Reading West Station Footbridge, Oxford Road, Reading.

**Proposal:** Prior Approval under Part 18 Class A to Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (the GPDO) for reconstruction of the footbridge to provide the necessary clearance for the OLE which is to run underneath the structure.

**Applicant:** Network Rail

**Date Valid:** 7 December 2017

**Application target decision date:** 1 February 2018 (agreed extension of time)

**26 week date:** 7 June 2018

### RECOMMENDATION

**REFUSE** Prior Approval under Part 18 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 for the following reasons:

1. The proposed bridge, by reason of its height, bulk, and proximity to the neighbouring dwelling at 13A Brunswick Hill, together with its stark functional appearance, would result in an overbearing effect and perceived loss of privacy to this dwelling, harmful to the amenity of occupiers.

The bridge ought to be and could reasonably be carried out elsewhere on the land to avoid the harm described. In accordance with the provisions of Part 18, Schedule 2, Article 3 of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) and Policy DM4 of the Reading Borough LDF Sites and Detailed Policies Document 2012 (amended 2015).

2. The proposed bridge by reason of its height, bulk, stark functional appearance and visually unsympathetic siting relative to existing buildings, would result in harm to the appearance of the streetscene within Brunswick Hill with consequent injury to the visual amenity of the neighbourhood.

The bridge ought to be and could reasonably be carried out elsewhere on the land and the design modified in order to avoid the harm described. In accordance with the provisions of Part 18, Schedule 2, Article 3 of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) and Policy CS7 of the Reading Borough LDF Sites and Detailed Policies Document 2012 (amended 2015)

**Informatives:**

1. Positive and Proactive Statement.
2. Refused drawings

### 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The site at Reading West Station is located to the west of the town centre and lies to the south of Oxford Road and north of Tilehurst Road. Reading West Station provides access to rail services to Basingstoke and Newbury to the south and west and to Reading Station to the east.

1.2 The station platform and bridge sit on an embankment above lower land to either side which includes Oxford Road Community Garden and the Lidl/McDonalds car park to the west and residential flats to the east. The

embankment itself is covered in trees and other vegetation, although much of this has been removed recently.

- 1.3 The railway corridor is identified as a Green Link on the proposals map (Policy DM17) of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document.
- 1.4 The application has been called in for determination by Planning Applications Committee by Cllrs Page and Maskell.
- 1.5 A letter from the Applicant dated 18 May 2018 is attached to this report at Appendix 3.



Site Location Plan (not to scale)



Site photograph

## 2. PROPOSALS

- 2.1 Prior Approval is sought for demolition of the existing footbridge and its replacement with a larger footbridge bridge further to the south adjacent to the rear of number 13A Brunswick Hill (single dwellinghouse) and Brunswick Lodge (flats). The new bridge would be taller than existing in order to provide the increased clearance between the track and bridge that is required to provide overhead electric power lines as part of the applicant's electrification programme.
- 2.2 The submitted drawings indicate where passenger lifts could be provided in the future although these do not form part of the current proposal. The plans have also been amended during the course of the application to show indicative privacy screens to the upper parts of the bridge.

### Drawings:

W1088E-JMS-DRG-ECV-040003 A03 Proposed Site Plan

W1088E-JMS-DRG-ECV-040101 C02 Proposed General Arrangement Plan

W1088E-JMS-DRG-ECV-040102 C01 Proposed Typical Elevation and Section Details

W1088E-JMS-DRG-ECV-040300 P01 Proposed Staircase Elevations (dated 17/5/18)

W1088E-JMS-SKE-ECV-040104 Preferred Sheetting Option (dated 17/5/18)  
(privacy screen)

## 3. PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 150629/PNN - 'Application under Part 18, Schedule 2 of the GPDO 2015 for demolition and reconstruction of Reading West Station Footbridge to provide increased clearance underneath the footbridge to allow for overhead power cables associated with the electrification of the line.' Report to 3/6/15 Planning Applications Committee published. **Withdrawn** by Applicant prior to Committee.
- 3.2 160866/PNN - 'Prior Approval under Part 18 Class A to Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (the GPDO) for 'jacking up' of bridge to increase height of footway over railway, and raising of parapets'. **Approved** (Planning Applications Committee 20/7/16)

## 4. CONSULTATIONS

### *RBC Natural Environment*

- 4.1 There does not appear to be any tree/vegetation related information in order to be able to comment on the impact of the proposal in this respect. It is likely that some vegetation will be lost. In addition, from. Details about access for the works of this is also required due to nearby TPO trees.
- 4.2 If trees/vegetation is to be removed to allow construction, it would be useful to know if NR are planning to carry out any mitigation planting.

### *RBC Environmental Protection*

- 4.3 The proposed works are of concern with regards to noise generation, given the proximity to residential dwellings that have already been impacted by the electrification works of the railway. However, noise will be managed through compliance with conditions of the applicant's contractor's consent under section 61 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 therefore EP have no objections to this application.

### *Public Consultation*

- 4.4 Notification letters were sent to all premises adjoining the site.
- 4.5 A site notice was displayed at the Oxford Road entrance to the station.
- 4.6 10 letters of representation has been received, summarised as follows. The full text is available to view on the Council's planning register website:  
[http://planning.reading.gov.uk/fastweb\\_PL/welcome.asp](http://planning.reading.gov.uk/fastweb_PL/welcome.asp)  
Representations have also been received from Alok Sharma MP requesting that his constituents' concerns are taken into consideration:

- Mature trees have been felled.
- The whole concept of a modern station at Reading West ought to be revisited.
- A new bridge is made unnecessary by the new access to Platform 1.
- A bridge is not required for passenger safety.
- Question whether the width of platforms is really a constraint to improved access.
- Platforms are rarely crowded as passengers spread out and arrive just in time for train.
- If the aim is to ease congestion the bridge should be sited at the southern end of the platforms.
- Reading West station has suffered for years with a lack of disabled access and decent electronic signs. The proposed bridge will be built to "leave space" for lifts but does not guarantee that it will install them. Having lifts would make life much easier for disabled, those with bikes, pushchairs and suitcases to get across the station.
- The bridge would tower over the garden of 13 and 13A Brunswick Hill. It would be better to place it closer to the existing bridge position or find another solution.
- Overlooking of Oxford Road Community Garden.
- Better alternatives involve opening access from Oxford Road or providing lifts to both platforms from Oxford Road.
- Alternative locations close to existing bridge, or at northern end adjacent Oxford Road.
- Loss of trees to embankments.
- Loss of privacy to garden of 13A Brunswick Hill and devaluing of property.
- Noise and disruption during the works.
- How will materials be transported to site without direct street access?
- View of ugly overbearing imposing metal and concrete tower and stairway.
- Detailed report by Planning Direct dated 12<sup>th</sup> January 2018 (see Planning Register website) providing arguments in respect of harm to neighbour amenity, visual harm and alternative siting.

## **5. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT**

### *Prior Approval Application Process*

- 5.1 Network Rail has substantial Permitted Development rights under Part 18 of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (GPDO). This allows development that has been authorised by a local or private Act of Parliament which specifically allows the type of development proposed and specifies the land upon which it may be carried out. In the case of Network Rail, these are the nineteenth century Acts of Parliament under which the Railway was built.

- 5.2 The Railway Clauses Consolidation Act 1845 confers powers for the Railway Company and its successors in title (now Network Rail) to construct works such as bridges, tunnels and embankments etc. as the Company saw fit and from time to time repair or discontinue the works and substitute others in their stead. The applicant advises that the section of line in question was constructed under the Great Western Railway Act 1883.
- 5.3 It is therefore considered that works connected with the development can be dealt with under Part 18 of the GPDO and do not require express planning permission, subject to the limitations set out in the GPDO.
- 5.4 Part 18 of the GPDO requires Prior Approval of the detailed plans and specifications to be obtained from the local planning authority.
- 5.5 For such Prior Approval, Part 18 details that only the location and design or external appearance of a development can be considered. Development is not to be refused, nor are conditions to be imposed, unless:
- (i) The development ought to be and could reasonably be carried out elsewhere on the land; or
  - (ii) The design or external appearance of any building or bridge would injure the amenity of the neighbourhood and is reasonably capable of modification to avoid such injury.
- 5.6 It follows that unless the LPA consider that the location of the bridge is wrong, or its appearance adversely affects the amenity of the neighbourhood, prior approval must be granted.
- 5.7 With this advice in mind the application has been assessed against the following policies as far as they are material to proposals under Part 18 of the GPDO:
- 5.8 **National**  
National Planning Policy Framework  
National Planning Policy Guidance
- 5.9 **Reading Borough Local Development Framework - Adopted Core Strategy (2008)**
- |      |   |
|------|---|
| CS5  | Inclusive Access                                  |
| CS7  | Design and the Public Realm                       |
| CS9  | Infrastructure, Services, Resources and Amenities |
| CS36 | Biodiversity and Geology                          |
| CS38 | Trees, Hedges and Woodlands                       |
- 5.10 **Sites and Detailed Policies Document 2012**
- |      |  |
|------|--|
| SD1  | Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development |
| DM3  | Infrastructure Planning                          |
| DM4  | Safeguarding Amenity                             |
| DM17 | Green Network                                    |
6. **APPRAISAL**
- 6.1 The following points provide some context to the proposals and are considered to be material to the siting and design of the footbridge:
- The works are taking place within the context of the wider Electrification programme which includes the lines from London to Bristol, London to

Swansea/Cardiff, Didcot to Oxford and Reading to Newbury, which are considered to be infrastructure projects of national importance.

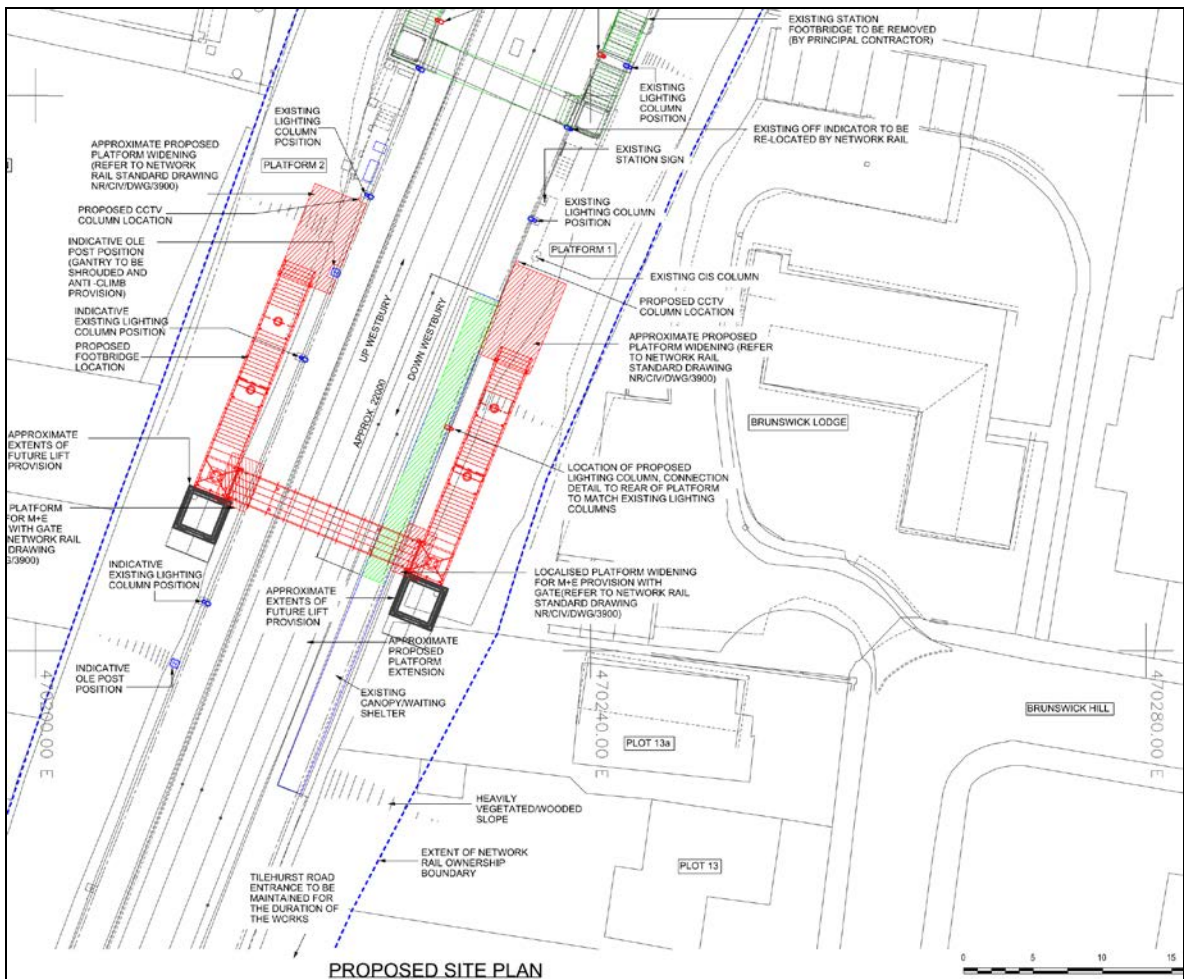
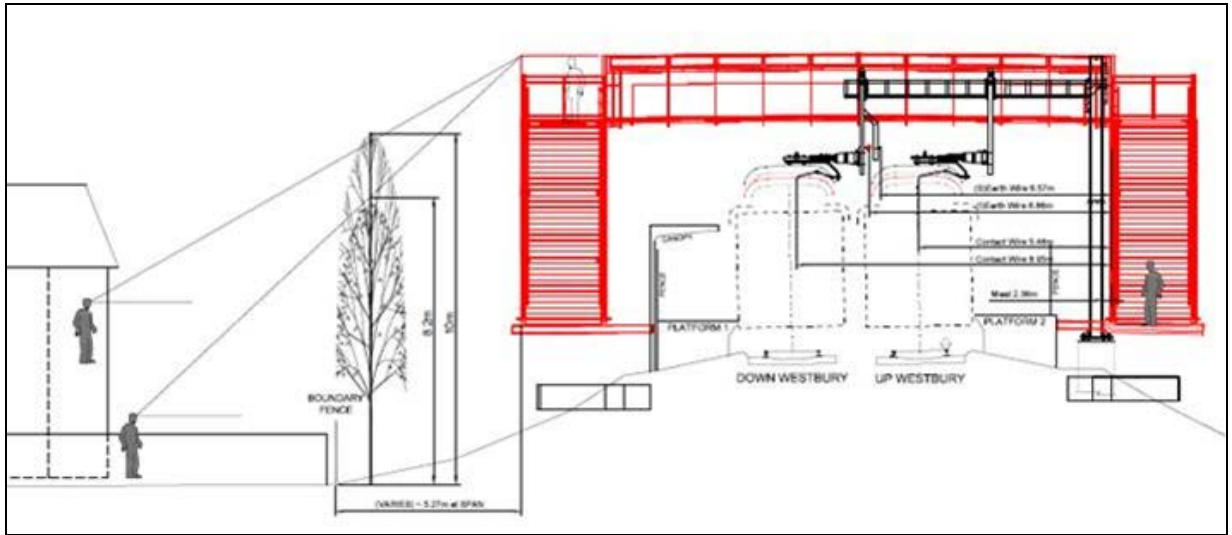
- The works are also taking place within the context of discussions relating to a masterplan for wider improvements to Reading West Station, including improved access from Oxford Road.
- Works are currently underway to reinstate a stepped access to from Oxford Road to Platform 1 (eastern side).
- The bridge proposed under reference 150629/PNN was recommended for approval and was withdrawn solely on the basis of concerns over disabled access. The siting was not a concern per se.
- It is also relevant to note that a scheme involving the 'jacking up' of the existing bridge (siting as existing) was approved under 160866/PNN. Network Rail advise that further assessment has revealed that the existing structure is too weak to allow this to take place.

#### *Siting and Design*

- 6.2 When assessing the previous proposal under reference 150629/PNN, it was considered that the proposed location of the bridge, immediately adjacent to the existing bridge, was reasonable and that there is no particular reason why a bridge should be positioned elsewhere on the platform. That particular bridge would have been sited close to the flank wall of the supermarket to the north and the flank wall of Brunswick Lodge flats to the east. Windows in this flank wall serve a staircase and would not have been unduly harmed by the previous proposal.
- 6.3 The current proposal, by contrast, would sit close to the rear (habitable room) windows and garden of 13A Brunswick Hill, at a distance of approximately 12.5 metres from the rear of the house and close to the north-west corner of the property boundary. Having visited the site it is considered that the scale of the bridge, its proximity to number 13A, and its elevated position relative to this neighbour, would result in a stark dominant and overbearing structure that would harm the amenity of 13A Brunswick Hill in particular. The 'future lift provision', if provided, would further add to this harm due to its bulk and position which would extend further across the rear of the neighbouring plot.
- 6.4 The proposed privacy screening (the Applicant has clarified that this would comprise solid steel panels 1.8m above the surface of the steps as shown on the revised drawings), whilst welcome in general terms, would add to the apparent scale and overbearing nature of the proposal in the proposed location. It is also considered that the screen in itself would not be sufficient to prevent harm to the amenity of the neighbouring dwelling due to the perception or awareness of bridge users passing high above the garden at close quarters with associated privacy implications. It is therefore considered that, whilst adequate modification could be made to the design to prevent intervisibility and direct overlooking to neighbours, the '*siting*' remains a fundamental concern in terms of the impact on the amenity of neighbouring dwellings and 13A Brunswick Hill in particular.
- 6.5 The Applicant has suggested that the impact on the neighbour could be mitigated satisfactorily through the use of tree planting on the embankment between the proposed bridge and the rear of 13A Brunswick Hill. The Applicant has suggested a row of Poplar trees however this would require full landscaping details to be submitted before it could be considered properly. In the absence of such details,

the general concept has been discussed with the Council's Tree Officer. Advice received is that Poplar (assumed to refer to Lombardy Poplar - there are a number of type of Poplar) would be unsuitable as a screen due to their relatively short lifespan and unsuitable on an embankment close to a railway and houses due to their weak structure (resulting from their fast growth habit). A pioneer species such as Birch could be provided on the embankment between the proposed bridge and the rear of 13A Brunswick Street. The more open canopy and dappled shade produced by this species would reduce the risk of the tree being overbearing on the neighbour, which could otherwise result in pressure to prune or fell the tree in the future (it should be noted that the screening potential of such a tree would reduce significantly during winter months).

- 6.6 However establishing a semi-mature tree of a size capable of providing an immediate screen would require a substantial amount of aftercare, including approximately 200 litres of water a week, together with other difficulties associated with successfully establishing a tree of this size on a sloping embankment. The Council would be able to place a TPO on the new tree; however it could not reasonably resist felling if Network Rail applied on operational grounds in the future. An example of this might include works to construct the disabled access lifts shown indicatively on the submitted drawings.
- 6.7 Based on the evidence currently available, officers cannot be confident that a tree capable of screening the bridge could be successfully provided and retained for the lifetime of the proposed bridge. As such it is considered that the possibility of tree planting, and the screening benefits that it could theoretically provide, should not be given significant weight when considering the proposal.
- 6.8 If it were to be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Council that the proposed bridge siting was the only available option, it would *then* be prudent to provide tree planting to improve the situation for the neighbour as much as possible in the circumstances. However where a less harmful site remains available (or where it has not been demonstrated otherwise) it is considered that the use of tree planting is an uncertain and unreliable method which should not be relied upon to screen an unacceptable form of development where alternatives exist.
- 6.9 The Applicant has provided a diagram, copied below, which indicates the relationship between the proposed bridge and the rear of 13A Brunswick Hill and is considered to demonstrate the detrimental impact on this neighbour quite effectively. The top of the tree (suggested by the Applicant as mitigation - not existing currently) is labelled as being 10 metres above the ground level of the neighbouring garden, the bridge is shown higher than this at around 12 metres above the neighbouring land. The second drawing below (site plan) shows the relationship between the structure and 13A in the horizontal plane.



6.10 Having visited the surrounding streets, Officers are also of the opinion that the bridge would appear overly prominent in the street scene when viewed from Brunswick Hill, particularly when looking west from near to the junction of Argyle Street. Whilst the bridge would be screened to some extent by the existing TPO Cedar tree in the car park of Brunswick Lodge, it remains the case that the tallest part of the structure would be readily visible from Brunswick Hill. The proposed solid privacy screens would add to the apparent scale. It is considered that it would appear as a large, stark and functional structure, awkwardly juxtaposed with the roofline of 13A Brunswick Hill. Arguably it would also lessen the visual amenity value of the TPO Cedar tree by interfering with its



setting within the same view. The proposed *siting* would harm the appearance of the streetscene and should be moved elsewhere within the station land to avoid this harm. The stark functional appearance of the proposed *design* in the location proposed would contribute further to this harm and injure the visual amenity of the neighbourhood. The proposals are considered to be contrary to Policy CS7 on this basis.

### *Constraints and Alternative Siting*

- 6.11 The Applicant has provided a number of reasons why, in their opinion, the proposed location is the only siting available. One stated reason is the proposed position of an Overhead Line Equipment gantry (OLE) support post (shown on the submitted drawings). This is located near to the previously proposed position of the bridge (150629/PNN). Officers note that this post has not yet been installed (although piled foundations have been provided in advance). It is noted that discussions relating to wider improvements to accessibility at Reading West had, until recently, assumed a footbridge at or close to the existing bridge location further to the north. It is therefore unclear why the OLE post has already been introduced in this location as a somewhat artificial constraint that fails to consider the wider context. It is considered that insufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the siting of the OLE post (or posts) could not be adjusted to accommodate an improved siting of the footbridge in engineering terms. It is also unclear why the bridge could not be sited adjacent to the existing OLE post position in combination with additional guard screens or other enclosures to separate bridge users from the OLE equipment (in much the same way that bridge users are separated from OLE cables as they walk directly above them when crossing the tracks).
- 6.12 The Applicant has indicated that the proposed siting is the only place which can accommodate the disabled access lifts indicated on the proposal drawings at some point in the future due to the space currently available. This may be the case, however the Applicant has also written advising that an independent risk assessment was commissioned by Network Rail "*which looked at the implications of allowing Persons of Reduce Mobility to access the platforms via lifts or ramps. This risk assessment concluded that if either of these measures were to be introduced then the current platform widths are inadequate. This would mean having to install new platforms to the station at an approximate cost of £10 million.*" It is therefore apparent that there is little realistic prospect of the lifts being provided within the existing station layout and that these would only come forward as part of a more comprehensive redevelopment with wider platforms. It is reasonable to conclude that, if wider platforms were to be provided in the future, the number of places within the station with space for a bridge equipped with passenger lifts would also increase. It is therefore considered that this is not a constraint to the extent suggested by the Applicant, and it has not been demonstrated that the current location is the only available site for a bridge with accessible lifts.
- 6.13 Constraints relating to other telecommunications, lighting and CCTV cabinets have been cited. The Applicant advises that "*Network Rail has not been able to justify further expenditure on the relocation of this equipment; nor has there been a sufficient timescale in which to undertake such works*". In response, Officers consider that some relocation of equipment (or modification of the bridge design) to allow for a less harmful bridge location is not an unreasonable request in the context of the extensive (and far more costly) wider engineering works that are proposed as part of Electrification. It is also noted that the previous 2015 proposal 150629/PNN appears to accommodate the existing

equipment with stairs sitting to one side of the cabinets. It is therefore not clear why this is no longer an option.

- 6.14 The Applicant has also suggested that the bridge should be sited at a midpoint along the platform to encourage "*the overall distribution of passengers along the length of the platform as train lengths and passenger numbers increase coming from both the south, and north of the station.*" The Applicant also suggests that it would deter people from illegally crossing the tracks. This point is noted however it remains unclear the extent to which the 'passenger distribution' issue should dictate the *precise* siting currently proposed. It has not been demonstrated that moving the bridge a relatively short distance to the north, closer to the existing bridge location, would materially affect the convenience of the bridge for passengers, or materially affect passenger distribution. Based on the information provided, it would seem reasonable to conclude that a much larger change in position would be required before this became a significant concern.
- 6.15 It would also appear that moving the bridge further from the main Oxford Road access and existing ticket office could in fact be more inconvenient for many passengers, especially as the Applicant has been unable to confirm whether the new access to the eastern platform from Oxford Road would also include a ticket machine. If no machine is provided, passengers using the new access would still need to cross to the other platform to buy a ticket (with associated risk of rail users being tempted to cross the tracks illegally if a convenient bridge is not available). This issue is very much bound up with the 'siting' of the bridge and based on the current evidence it would arguably be more appropriate for the bridge to be sited as close to the existing ticket office/self-service machine as possible.
- 6.16 Much of the Applicant's reasoning centres on ease of installation and the desire to minimise the period of time during which the station is without a footbridge. This carries some weight a material consideration, but does not necessarily outweigh the harm identified. On balance it is considered that the time taken to install the bridge and any associated inconvenience is only a very small proportion of its lifespan whereas the impact of the structure itself and the associated harm identified would remain for a considerable length of time. It is considered reasonable to expect that the length of time during which a footbridge is missing could be managed within a more holistic approach to the works at the station and does not demonstrate conclusively that the proposed siting is the only one available.
- 6.17 It is noted that the Applicant's stated intention is to install the Overhead Line Equipment wiring and remove the existing bridge over the weekends of 19-20 May and 26-27 May regardless of the possibility of a replacement. If this were to occur it raises the question of whether the existing footbridge location could be re-considered as a potential siting for the bridge.

## 7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 It is apparent that a new taller footbridge is required in order to allow the nationally important Electrification Programme to proceed. It is also the case that bridges of this type are a common feature on the railway and would not appear out of place in general terms.
- 7.2 However it is considered that substantial weight should be given to the harm identified to the amenity of neighbours and to the visual amenity of the area due

to the inappropriate siting currently proposed. It is considered reasonable to conclude, based on available evidence, that the bridge could and should be sited away from the rear façade and garden of 13A Brunswick Hill and in a position which is less prominent when viewed from the street at Brunswick Hill. It would appear that alternative less harmful sites exist within the station which could be achieved through appropriate management of timescales and well-considered engineering solutions. It has not been satisfactorily demonstrated that this is not the case. It is therefore considered that Prior Approval should be refused as per the terms of Class 18 and as being contrary to Policies CS7 and DM4.

- 7.3 Officers have worked proactively with the Applicant to explore the issues relating to the provision of the replacement bridge and remain open to considering further evidence relating to the current proposal. Officers would encourage the Applicant to consider the suggested alternative locations and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Applicant to explore these further.
- 7.4 A letter from the Applicant seeking to address the concerns raised is attached to this report at Appendix 3.

#### **Equality and Access**

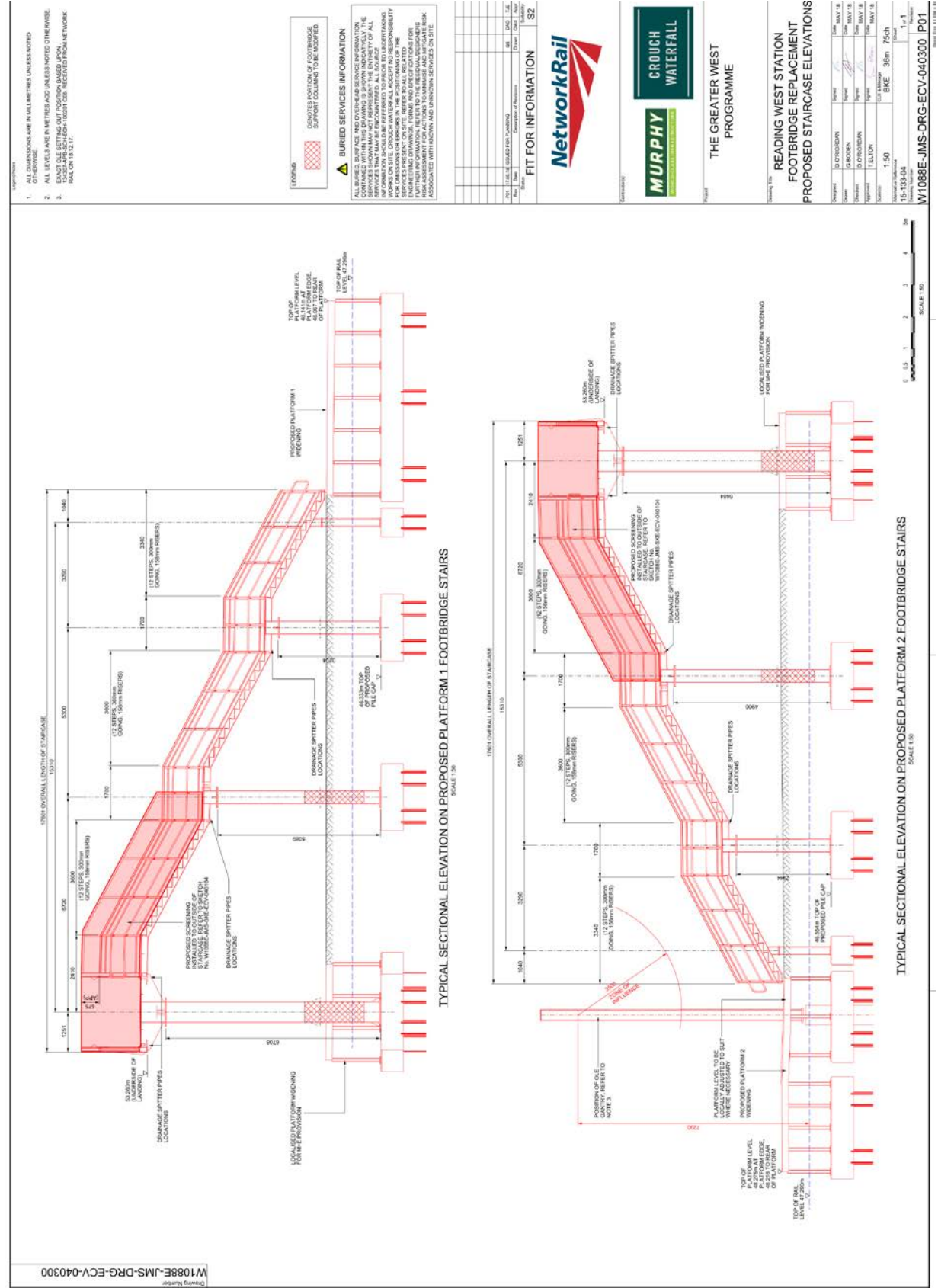
- 7.5 Pedestrian access to the site exists from Oxford Road via ramps and steps and from Tilehurst Road via a long sloping footpath with no steps. The existing footbridge is the only link between the two platforms within the station. The existing bridge has steps with no lift, ramp or other alternative accessibility provision.
- 7.6 The applicant has not taken the opportunity with the proposed bridge to improve on the current undesirable situation whereby wheelchair users can only access one platform. The station is also difficult to use by those with mobility problems or with pushchairs etc. This is considered to have implications in terms of the 'Disability' and 'Maternity' Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
- 7.7 Policy CS5 (Inclusive Access) states that *"All buildings should be located, sited and designed to provide suitable access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people, so that they can use them safely and easily."* Para. 35 of the NPPF states that *"developments should be located and designed where practical to consider the needs of people with disabilities by all modes of transport"*. Section O1 of 'Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations' (Department for Transport, 2015), states that *"Lifts shall be provided where ramps are not available"*.
- 7.8 However advice from the Council's Legal Service is clear; that Part 18 of the GDPO 2015 set out the limits of control which the LPA can exercise. These are restricted to the location of the development on the site (where it ought to be and can reasonably be carried out elsewhere on the land) and its appearance (if it would injure the amenity of the neighbourhood and is reasonable capable of modification to avoid such injury).
- 7.9 It is possible that, in the longer term, a more comprehensive scheme for improvements to the station, including its accessibility, may be adopted. However at this time there is little certainty regarding the form this may take, and funding has not been secured. The Applicant has advised that an independent risk assessment was commissioned by Network Rail which looked at the implications of enabling access to platforms via lifts or ramps this found that *"a ramp of 122m plus intermediate landings would be necessary. The risk*

*assessment concluded that if either of these measures were to be introduced then the current platform widths are inadequate. This would mean having to install new platforms to the Station at an approximate cost of £10m (including the new lifts or ramps, demolition of the old construction of the new platforms & all associated works). This has been deemed to be above the scope of this project and an inappropriate use of public funds, in the context of the existing Stations usage & the fact that a fully compliant station (Reading) is situated one mile away."*

- 7.10 It is considered that the current proposal would fail to comply with policy in respect of accessibility for all potential users of the station. If the proposals were being considered as an application for full planning permission, rather than Prior Approval, it would be unlikely to be recommended for approval without appropriate access arrangements for disabled persons being incorporated in the design. These would most likely to take the form of passenger lifts and improvements to platforms and access into the station from Oxford Road.
- 7.11 The current recommendation in respect of Prior Approval is therefore made solely on the basis of the limitations imposed by Part 18 of the GPDO, which excludes accessibility considerations (a reason for refusal relating to accessibility is not recommended). The recommendation above should therefore not be interpreted as an acceptance of the inadequate accessibility arrangements proposed, either in terms of planning policy set out in CS5 (Inclusive Access) and within the NPPF, or in terms of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

Case Officer: Steve Vigar





Proposed Side Elevations (revised 17/5/18 to show privacy screens)







## APPENDIX 2: Site Photographs



View west along Brunswick Hill towards number 13A. TPO Cedar to right of house.  
The railway line lies beyond, to the west.



View from garden of 13A Brunswick Hill (approximate location of tallest part  
of bridge in location of red barriers laid on embankment)



View from 1<sup>st</sup> floor bedroom of 13A Brunswick Hill



View from 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Bedroom of 13A Brunswick Hill (approximate location of tallest part of bridge in location of red barriers laid on embankment)



Stephen Vigar  
Reading Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
Reading  
RG1 7AE

Colin Field  
Town Planning Manager  
Temple Point, Redcliffe Way  
Bristol  
BS1 6NL

Submitted Electronically

T  
E

17 May 2018

Dear Stephen,

**READING WEST FOOTBRIDGE, READING WEST STATION - RAILWAY MILEAGE BKE 36m 72ch – RECONSTRUCTION OF BRIDGE TO INCREASE HEIGHT OF FOOTWAY OVER RAILWAY AND RASING PARAPETS - UNDER PART 18 CLASS A TO SCHEDULE 2 OF THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (GENERAL PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT) (ENGLAND) ORDER 2015, REQUIRING THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY'S PRIOR APPROVAL. LPA REFERENCE 172192/PNN**

**Grid Ref: E 470129 N 173063 Post Code: RG30 1AS**

Following the useful meeting on Monday 14th May, please find attached / enclosed information requested in support of prior approval for Reading West Footbridge replacement which is further to earlier emails and attachments.

At the meeting we discussed the wider context of the ongoing largest modernisation of the railway since Victorian times and the significant investment being made to the rail infrastructure across the route and in particular within Reading. This includes electrification of the railway line from London Paddington, through Reading West, to Newbury. GWR are introducing the biggest fleet upgrade in a generation, providing new longer trains with more seats and better facilities as well as being quieter and greener. Reading itself has already benefitted from significant investment by Network Rail at the main Reading station less than a mile away which provides fully inclusive and exemplar accessibility.

The existing footbridge at Reading West station will be demolished in June to facilitate the installation of overhead electrification to maintain the programme for of electrification from Reading to Newbury for December 2018. The removal of the footbridge in itself does not need planning consent and would be deemed "excluded" development.

Part 11, Class B of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 permits 'any building operation consisting of the demolition of a building'. Part 11, Class B.2(b) details circumstances where an application to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether prior approval as to the method of demolition and any proposed restoration of the site will not be required. This includes

'excluded demolition', which Part 11, B.3 (d) defines as '[demolition] required or permitted to be carried out by or under any other enactment'.

This section of railway was originally authorised by the Berks and Hants Railway Act 1845. This Act incorporated the provisions of the Railway Clauses Consolidation Act of 1845. Section 16 of the 1845 Act incorporates the provisions which permit the original railway company and its successors in title (now Network Rail) to undertake future works, not limited to the construction of the railway, but including powers to 'alter, repair, or discontinue' works and to 'do all matters and things necessary for making, maintaining, altering or repairing and using the railway'.

Our current prior approval application under Part 18 of the GPDO (172192/PNN) is for the erection of the new replacement bridge not the demolition of the old. As you are aware there are limited reasons as to why such an application can be refused and any adverse impact on the amenity of the neighbourhood needs to be demonstrated by the LPA. The wider benefit of providing an electrified railway and other betterment to the station needs to be weighed up against the visual impact of a new taller footbridge.

The purpose of this letter is further to the various meetings we have held with Reading Borough Council and GWR, and to reiterate Network Rail's commitment to working with you to provide a gauge clear footbridge whilst taking account of your future station masterplan aspirations.

In addition to the proposed footbridge as part of the offsetting of any potential impact on the neighbourhood of the new taller footbridge structure (to allow the electrification wires to pass underneath) we have started work to provide a new pedestrian access from street level off Oxford Road onto platform 2 which will be opened before the existing footbridge is removed and these works are being implemented under our permitted development rights. This new pedestrian access is a clear betterment to the station and will be an improvement for the passengers that use the station and the amenity of the neighbourhood. This has been possible by using an existing manufactured replacement bridge that is no longer needed elsewhere on the network and is thus cost effective in enabling additional access to Oxford Road too.

To follow up Monday's meeting and further to the various emails between you and my colleague Ian Wheaton we can now confirm the following points;

- **Location of the replacement structure** – we have asked the question of our designer one more time and for the reasons we have previously outlined in emails the footbridge as proposed is as far north as it can be and we are unable to move it from that proposed due to the position of the Overhead line equipment and the proximity to the steps.
- **Details of the privacy screening from the bridge and steps** – we have previously submitted this to be shown on the top section of steps to stop overlooking. However contrary to discussions at our meeting when we suggested the privacy screen would be perforated we can provide this with a solid screen in a similar manner to that which we propose across the bridge span. The privacy screen would be 1.8m in height from the step surface and by being solid in structure would stop all overlooking. The photo below shows how the parapet would appear 1.8m tall across the bridge span which would ensure there was no overlooking from here.

- **Existing planting** – we have now cleared all the vegetation we require to along the corridor of the station which has been done for two reasons, firstly due to the exclusion zone for the overhead lines and secondly to allow for construction access to crane in the new footbridge. We do not need to cut back further vegetation/ trees and the vegetation that remains does act as a screen from the street scene in Brunswick Hill from the footbridge that is proposed with steps. In addition the position of the retained trees on the railway embankment and adjoining land block the direct views from the windows of 13a.

The photos below are taken earlier this week from the street scene and the proposed footbridge will be behind the trees that exist post Network Rail's vegetation clearance. We believe this clearly shows that the bridge as currently proposed does not adversely affect the amenities of the neighbourhood as it will be sited behind the trees in situ and not clearly seen in the street.





We would also like to take this opportunity to further explain why the replacement structure is proposed in this location.

The intention is to minimise the time between removal of existing structure and replacement footbridge. The physical structure that is proposed is one that is already manufactured as a standard design that enables future lifts to be added should funding come forward. In addition a further prior approval would need to be made to the council to consider that design and therefore whilst we show on our submitted plans the location that a lift could be installed this current application does not seek permission for the lift structure. The likelihood is that by time funding becomes available for a lift structure to be added to the bridge the newly planted trees (to be agreed by planning condition) would be established and would act as a screen.

As Reading West is becoming a busier station every year with increased passenger numbers, there is a safety need for a replacement bridge to be located towards the middle of the station to enable the distribution of passengers along the length of the platforms (given that there will be longer trains in the future). In addition there are currently a large number of trespass incidents of passengers running across the railway have occurred (35 trespass

since 2015) and is considered a higher risk location by British Transport Police. By providing a footbridge in a more central location on the operational platform the station will operate much better for the travelling public and local users.

In conclusion it is our view that the design you are currently considering is acceptable and does not adversely affect the amenities of the wider neighbourhood. Any potential and perceived impact on a very small number of residents is off set by the wider benefits to the station, the improved services that will come from an electrified quieter railway and the landscaping and privacy screen mitigation that has been offered during the lifespan of this application. I look forward to reading your committee report recommending approval with appropriately worded planning conditions as suggested in this letter.

Yours sincerely

Colin Field MRTPI  
Town Planning Manager  
Wales and Western Routes