

# REPORT TO THE NORTHERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

Report No.

Date of Meeting	14 <sup>th</sup> March 2012		
Application Number	11/03802/DEM and 11/03798/LBC		
Site Address	Chippenham Railway Station, Cocklebury Road, Chippenham, Wilts. SN15 3QE		
Proposal	Prior Approval for Demolition of Existing Footbridge and Erection of a Replacement and Associated Works		
Applicant	Network Rail		
Town/Parish Council	Chippenham		
Electoral Division	Chippenham Monkton	Unitary Member	Cllr Chris Caswill
Grid Ref	392010 173694		
Type of application	Notification and Listed Building Consent		
Case Officer	Brian Taylor	01249706683	brian.taylor@wiltshire.gov.uk

## Reason for the application being considered by Committee

The applications have been reported to the Area Planning Committee at the request of Cllr Caswill to consider the appropriateness of the design and materials in this prominent and important location

### 1. Purpose of report

To consider the above applications and to recommend that Listed Building Consent be GRANTED subject to conditions and that NO OBJECTION is raised to the Demolition Notification.

### 2. Report summary

The main issues in the consideration of this application are as follows:

- Principle of development
- Impact upon the listed building and the Conservation Area
- Benefits of improved accessibility to the platform at the railway station

The application has generated support from Chippenham Town Council; support from 9 individuals and an objection from the Chippenham Civic Society on grounds of design.

### 3. Site Description

There is an existing pedestrian footbridge on the site of this proposal. It is of utilitarian design, constructed of steel and supported by brick pillars. It is not contemporaneous to the listed railway platform and buildings, although it is by its proximity and attachment considered to be a listed structure. The current footbridge provides pedestrian access across the railway line, it does not provide access to the platform (which can only be accessed via a footbridge at the opposite end of the railway station) and it is accessed via steps only. The route across the railway line is difficult for those who may be infirm or have pushchairs and prams and impossible for those using wheelchairs. Similarly access to the platform for those users is difficult using the station footbridge – access for wheelchair users is only possible with the assistance of station staff.

Whilst the footbridge is rather utilitarian, the station buildings are low lying and elegant listed structures typical of the Victorian Great Western Railway Architecture. The existing footbridge rises well above the existing buildings (as any replacement will). As the station is located at a high point in Chippenham, the existing structure is visible from vantage points well away from the station, including, for example, from the 'Little George' junction along Old Road to the north and the Monkton Park Offices of Wiltshire Council.

There are a number of grade II listed buildings within the immediate vicinity of the footbridge – the station buildings, platforms and canopies; the former British Rail Office in the car park on the southern side of the station buildings (reputed to have been used by I.K. Brunel) and the weighbridge office (on the Old Road side).

4. Relevant Planning History		
Application Number	Proposal	Decision
No relevant applications		

## 5. Proposal

It should be noted that two 'applications' are for consideration in this report. Listed building consent has been applied for as the existing and proposed bridge are physically attached the listed structures of the station. The second 'application' is a notification under Part 11 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. This part of the Act enables statutory undertakers (in this case Network Rail) to carry out works authorised by another Act of Parliament (in this case the Great Western Railway Act of 1835) without permission. There are certain circumstances where Network Rail have to notify the local authority and seek 'prior approval' (specifically where works to a bridge are proposed). The local authority cannot refuse to give prior approval (or impose conditions) *unless* the development could be reasonably carried out elsewhere or where the design or appearance would 'injure the amenity of the neighbourhood'.

The proposal is to replace the existing footbridge. The replacement bridge will incorporate lifts on the southern side of the railway and on the platform of the station to improve accessibility to the train services. Access will still be possible across the railway line from the southern side (Station Road) to the northern side of the railway (Old Road), but there will be no lift on the northern side.

Network Rail has worked with local accessibility groups for some years to bring forward this scheme. There have been pre-application discussions with Officers of Wiltshire Council. All parties agree that improved accessibility to train services at Chippenham Station is a welcome, indeed essential, development. The main issue of discussion has been the design and appearance of the bridge. Network Rail have made great efforts to provide a design, within the technical constraints, that will compliment the listed building and this prominent location.

The proposal is for a footbridge supported by two lift towers and one support column. The lift towers themselves are 9.5 metres high, clad in stone to up to the bed of the footbridge (approximately 4.5 metres) and the upper part clad in zinc cladding (which will weather to a dull grey). The southern lift tower is 2.6 metres by 3.2 metres in footprint, the central platform tower slightly smaller at 2.0 metres by 3.2 metres. In addition to the two lift shafts there are stairways at the northern and southern ends and to the central platform. Sufficient space has been left at the northern side of the bridge to install a further lift tower at some future date should funds become available.

In comparison the existing bridge is at its highest point around 6.0 metres. The existing station buildings are between 4.0 and 5.0 metres high.

Following consultations the number of support columns has been reduced, the lighting columns simplified, materials have been amended and a number of changes have been made to try and reflect the prominent and protected location.

## **6. Planning Policy**

North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011: Core Policy C3, HE1 and HE4

The site lies within a conservation area and the building is listed (grade II)

Central Government planning policy PPS5

## **7. Consultations**

Chippenham Town Council: No objection to the application and welcomes the improvements, especially the new disabled access. It supports the efforts of Wiltshire Council to ensure the new design is in keeping with the character of the building.

Chippenham Civic Society: Object. The Society welcomes the provision of the lifts but are unhappy with the design of the bridge. It gives all the appearance of a cheap brutalist structure that looks more like a prison with watchtowers than a bridge with lifts. Concerns raised about vandalism on the bridge, with what appears to be open access to the lifts which will only encourage vandalism. Would prefer a bridge that was more modern in appearance – there are many examples including a curved bridge at Temple Quay (near Temple Meads, Bristol) and several at Paddington Basin in London. A light airy structure of stainless steel with glass lifts would look much more attractive than the design proposed and would blend in better with the surroundings.

Community Accessibility to Rail Travel (CART) Supports the application. The need for community accessibility has never been more demanding at a time of growing concern of the health and wellbeing of all coupled with the need to be mindful of the carbon footprint. Astonished that concerns have been raised regarding this proposal. Objections to the scheme are threatening the loss of funding for this enhancement.

Wiltshire Centre for Independent Living (CIL) Support the proposal. Whilst the current access via the Barrow Crossing to the trains at Chippenham Station is better than no access at all for those of us who use wheelchairs, it is far from satisfactory and we very much need a passenger lift to take us from one platform to that where the trains are stopping. The Barrow Crossing is very exposed and so very windy, cold and wet particularly in the dark. It is necessary to phone ahead to make arrangements to use the crossing and we are dependent on identifying station staff to accompany us over the crossing which is not always easy now that staffing levels are so low. The journey across the railway track can be quite alarming and there have been incidents of wheelchairs being caught momentarily in the lines. In this day of equality legislation etc, Chippenham Station remains one of the few railway stations not fully accessible to wheelchair users. CIL recognise the importance of historic buildings and their environs, but consider Network Rail have been subject to sufficient representations on this matter for over 2 years and that a satisfactory compromise solution has now been reached to enable approval to be given to this planning application so that work can proceed immediately on providing a safe and equal access to the trains. There is a real danger in these times of austerity that Network Rail will be unable to cling on to the provision of resources for this lift if the application is delayed further.

Salisbury and District Branch of the Multiple Sclerosis Society support the application. The Society are sure that difficulties over listed buildings can be overcome. The important thing is to make life easier for those with disabilities.

## **8. Publicity**

The application was advertised by site notice, press advert and neighbour consultation.

9 letters of letters of support received

Summary of key relevant points raised:

- Improved accessibility for wheelchair users is to be welcomed.
- Existing facilities for wheelchair users is poor, having to make arrangements well in advance of travel, access the platform across the track, relying on station staff to assist.
- Design is business like and appropriate for the task
- Some concerns about potential for vandalism
- Existing structure is very unattractive and has little architectural merit, proposed replacement will be a distinct improvement

## **9. Planning Considerations**

### **Principal of Development**

This proposal is for what is termed operational development and Network Rail would normally be able to carry out such works without consent (subject to a procedure of 'notification'). However in this case because the station is listed and the bridge is located in such close proximity (and the existing bridge is being removed) listed building consent is required in addition to the normal 'notification' procedure. There has been from the outset general consensus that the removal of the existing bridge is not of itself objectionable. It arguably has a certain utilitarian charm, but has no real architectural or historic merit. In general the removal of the existing bridge has been welcomed. There has also been unanimous support for the principal of improved accessibility for the central platform and train services. Many of the letters of support for this proposal explain the difficulties of accessing train services for those who are mobility impaired and those using wheelchairs. The principal of a new bridge is therefore acceptable. The concerns that have been raised throughout the pre-application process and the consultation process on these applications generally relate to the design and appearance of the new bridge.

### **Design and Impact of the Listed Buildings.**

The Councils conservation and urban design officers have been involved in the pre-application discussions with Network Rail, as detailed in the supporting documentation submitted with the application. This documentation records the concerns expressed by officers in relation to the proposals originally submitted. The main thrust of officer's comments was that any replacement bridge needs to be well designed, not draw attention away from the listed buildings on the station and perhaps be of a modern, lightweight design.

In relation to the current proposals the conservation and urban design officers have expressed concern again about the design approach taken – intimating that this is an opportunity lost.

The replacement footbridge will be in the same location as the existing footbridge, which is within a few metres of the listed main station entrance building and former British Rail office on the south side, and a few metres from the listed weighbridge office and Old Road Tavern on the northern side. Any new bridge will inevitably have an impact on the setting of these listed buildings so it is imperative that the new structure is not overbearing and harmful to the setting of the listed buildings.

In pre-application discussions officers provided examples of innovative and exciting designs for footbridges elsewhere on the rail network. There are, for example, modern glass lifts in other railway stations such as Liverpool Lime Street.

From a design perspective the bridge is a little uninspiring, arguably adding little to the site nor reflecting the significance of the heritage assets or their setting. The replacement bridge will be around three metres higher than the existing, and the lift towers are of course more substantial than the existing bridge support piers. It is arguable whether constructing this footbridge at

Chippenham station would preserve or enhance the historic significance of the station and setting of the listed buildings.

### **Accessibility**

However, the concerns expressed about the design and impact on listed buildings must be balanced against the very real and demonstrable benefits the footbridge would bring to users of the station and the wider community. A number of supporters have welcomed the proposal quoting their own personal experiences of accessing the platform at Chippenham Station. From a number of these it is clear that those unable to use the existing station footbridge to access the platforms have to make contact with the station in advance to make arrangements; need the assistance of station staff to access the platform; access the platform by crossing the railway via a 'barrow crossing' (pedestrian level crossing). This is both inconvenient and unnerving experience. The improvement to the accessibility of the station must be taken into account when considering the acceptability or otherwise of the proposals.

Current Government Guidance on Listed Buildings (and other heritage assets, such as conservation areas and unlisted properties with some historic interest) in Planning Policy Statement 5, deals with circumstances where there may be some adverse impact on the asset, but there is some benefit to the wider community. In summary Policy HE9.4 of PPS5 says that where a proposal has a harmful impact on the significance of a heritage asset local planning authorities should weigh the public benefit of the proposal against the harm; and recognise that the greater the harm to the significance of the heritage asset the greater the justification will be needed for any loss.

The improvement to accessibility will have significant benefits to the local community. The lack of convenient access to the station platforms at Chippenham is a significant barrier for many rail users (and potential rail users)

### **10. Conclusion**

Officers believe that the proposed footbridge in its current form potentially fails the test to enhance the conservation area and it is likely to have a degree of harmful impact upon the listed buildings and their setting – due to the size and bulk of the lift towers and the somewhat utilitarian design of the bed of the footbridge. They have sought to persuade Network Rail to adopt a more contemporary approach, which is less bulky and more elegant. However, it is recognized that there are numerous technical and financial restrictions that constrain Network Rail's ability to address all the concerns raised. On balance, the significant improvements to the local community that the lift access to the rail platforms is likely to bring would on balance justify accepting any harm that the bridge might have.

It is recommended that listed building consent be granted and that no objection is raised to the prior notification.

### **11. Recommendation**

**In respect of 11/03802/DEM:**

NO OBJECTION for the following reason:

The proposed demolition of the existing footbridge is considered to have a neutral or positive impact upon the setting of the Listed Building and the Chippenham Conservation Area. The replacement footbridge is considered likely to cause some harm to the Conservation Area and setting of listed building. However, the significant benefit to the community and users of the railway station through the creation of an accessible footbridge to the platform and rail services is considered to outweigh any harm that may be caused by the construction of the footbridge. The proposal is considered therefore to comply with the requirements of PPS5, with specific reference to Policy HE9.4. and Policies C3, HE1 and HE4 of the North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011.

Subject to the following condition:

1. No development shall commence on site until details of the stone work and zinc cladding to the lift towers and finish of the footbridge to be used on the development have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity and the character and appearance of the area.

**In respect of Listed Building Consent 11/3798/LBC**

Listed Building consent be GRANTED for the following reason:

The proposed demolition of the existing footbridge is considered to have a neutral or positive impact upon the setting of the Listed Building. The replacement footbridge is considered likely to cause some harm to the setting of listed building. However, the significant benefit to the community and users of the railway station through the creation of an accessible footbridge to the platform and rail services is considered to outweigh any harm that may be caused by the construction of the footbridge. The proposal is considered therefore to comply with the requirements of PPS5, with specific reference to Policy HE9.4.

Subject to the following conditions:

1. The works for which Listed Building Consent is hereby granted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this consent.

REASON: To comply with the provisions of Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. No development shall commence on site until details of the stone work and zinc cladding to the lift towers and finish of the footbridge to be used on the development have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity and the character and appearance of the area.

3. The development hereby permitted shall be implemented in accordance with the submitted plans and documents listed below. No variation from the approved plans should be made without the prior approval of the local planning authority. Amendments may require the submission of a further application.

Site location plan; drawing Numbers 1031314/CHI/EAR/DRG: 001b; 002C; 003E; 004E; 005F; 006E; 008; and 008.1 and Drawing number 1031314/CHI/A/226 Rev F

Planning Statement Incorporating Design and Access Statement and Heritage Statement

REASON: To ensure that the development is implemented as approved.

