

REPORT TO THE NORTHERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	13 th November 2013
Application Number	N/13/1067/DEM and N/13/01094/LBC
Site Address	Chippenham Railway Station Cocklebury Road Chippenham SN15 3QE
Proposal	Proposed Foot Bridge Following Demolition of Existing Foot Bridge
Applicant	Network Rail Infrastructure Limited
Town/Parish Council	CHIPPENHAM
Grid Ref	392013 173691
Type of application	Full Planning
Case Officer	Brian Taylor

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

The applications have been called to committee by the Division Member Cllr Caswill in order that the impact of the proposed bridge can be assessed

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;

(Previous applications for a bridge in this location were granted listed building

consent. However this proposal has been amended to take account of land ownership issues. The previous application not only received support from the Town council but also from Community Accessibility from rail travel (CART), Wiltshire centre for Independent Living (CIL) The Salisbury and District Branch of the Multiple Sclerosis Society and nine 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. Planning History

Application Number	Proposal	Decision
11/03802/DEM and 11/03798/LBC	Demolition of Existing Footbridge and Erection of a Replacement & Associated Works (Prior Notification and Listed Building consent	No Objection/ Permit

5. The 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 has 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.

This is an amended scheme for a scheme approved by Wiltshire Council in 2011. Due to a land ownership issue the stepped access on the southern side of the railway has had to be amended to avoid oversailing the old 'milk stand'. This has the effect of bringing the structure closer to the listed railway buildings.

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.

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 : National Planning Policy Framework

7. Consultations

Chippenham Town Council: Support the application

8. Publicity

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

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. Letters of support received on the earlier applications 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 Council's conservation and urban design officers were involved in the pre-application discussions with Network Rail, prior to the original submission 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 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. The change in orientation of the southern stairway has brought the construction closer to the existing listed platform buildings. However, the lighting posts are to be omitted to the scheme which will avoid a cluttered appearance.

Since the previous scheme was considered Government Policy has changed to the extent that, in relation to Listed Buildings (or Heritage Assets as they are collectively referred to), PPG5 has been replaced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). However the general thrust of the policy remains unchanged in many cases. Members will be aware of the general national policy regarding the protection of Listed Buildings, however, it is worth referring to the following paragraphs:

“132. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.

133. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

134 Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.”

The Council's Conservation Officer has commented that:

“The existing footbridge is unobtrusive and does not dominate the setting of the heritage assets. The proposed footbridge is far larger than the existing bridge and is utilitarian in its design and materials. The new bridge would dominate the skyline around Chippenham station and would cause substantial harm to the setting of the heritage assets.”

She concludes that:

“The proposed replacement footbridge would not sustain or enhance the significance of the heritage assets, nor would it make a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness as because of the overlarge bulk, materials and impact on the sight lines to heritage assets on the sky line (paragraph 131).”

However, the NPPF does go on to say that where there is harm to the heritage asset this has to be weighed against the public benefit. In this instance if there is a 'public benefit' it is the improved accessibility to the platform. This is discussed below.

Accessibility

As before 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. With regard to the previous application 9 and there is no reason to expect that this has changed) a number of supporters 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.

The Council's Conservation officer is of the view that the public benefits do **not** outweigh the harm caused, as there are alternative ways in which access could be achieved, and she refers to a number of schemes elsewhere on the network. She recommends that the proposal ought to be refused. However, Network Rail have indicated that this is the only way in which they can achieve improved access working with the constraints imposed and resources available to them.

The earlier approved application was only acceptable because of the public benefit the improved access achieved. This revised proposal arguably has a greater impact

on the listed building, but the benefits of access are considered significant enough to outweigh any perceived harm to the surrounding listed buildings that may result. 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.

RECOMMENDATION

In respect of 13/1067/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 The National Planning Policy Framework 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 materials to be used on the lift towers and finish and colour 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 13/01094/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 The National Planning Policy Framework.

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 materials to be used on the lift towers and finish and colour 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.

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