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<b>Snodland</b> Snodland East	<b>570663 161863</b>	<b>10.10.2005</b>	<b>TM/05/03107/LB</b>
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Proposal:	Listed Building Application for the removal of two semaphore signals from the platforms
Location:	Snodland Railway Station High Street Snodland Kent ME6 5AN
Applicant:	Network Rail Infrastructure Limited

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## **1. Description:**

- 1.1 This proposal is for removal of the two semaphore signals and their mountings from the railway platforms. The works are part of improvements to the Snodland Railway Station. The new signals have been erected trackside and not on the listed platform and did not require Listed Building Consent. The new signals have been erected as permitted development by the Statutory Undertaker, Network Rail.
- 1.2 The applicant indicates that the Town Council have requested that the semaphore signals be donated to the Snodland Millennium Museum. The north bound semaphore signal was erected 1938, whilst the south bound semaphore signal was erected in 1931.
- 1.3 The applicant has also submitted a supporting statement setting out their reasons for removing the semaphore signs following the introduction of the new colour lights signals. As reasons are briefly as follows:
  - To minimise any possible risk of driver confusion between new and old signals, and to minimise general distractions;
  - Temporary coverings and white crosses are flimsy;
  - Decommissioned signals have been found to be a target for vandals and for railway enthusiasts;
  - Permanent covers or shrouding would be undesirable.

## **2. The Site:**

- 2.1 The application site lies within the urban confines of Snodland and within the Conservation Area. The site lies on the northern side of the High Street and the railway level crossing. The station buildings are Victorian and Grade 2 Listed. The railway station has a footbridge linking the two platforms. The semaphore signals are sited at the end of either platform, with the southern signal close to the footbridge and level crossing.

**3. Planning History (most relevant):**

- 3.1 TM/00/01780/LB Approved 22.09.2000  
Listed Building Application: Station regeneration works.

**4. Consultees:**

- 4.1 TC: No objection.
- 4.2 Private Reps: 54/0X/0S/1R. One letter receiving objecting on the following grounds:
- The Medway Valley is a unique line;
  - The safety systems will tear away our heritage;
  - The lights have been installed;
  - The semaphore signs should remain for posterity, however, the better option is that they are used and incorporated into the new system.
- 4.3 EH: No comment.
- 4.4 Action in Rural Kent (Medway Valley Line Partnership): No response.
- 4.5 CPRE Historic Buildings Committee: Since all Network Rail semaphore signals are being superseded by coloured lights, we suggest that removal to other locations is not a realistic option, but in any case your Council is, we suppose unlikely to endorse the removal of historic features from listed buildings on the grounds that they can be used on other property owned by the applicants or sold on the open market.
- 4.5.1 Of the applicants' contentions: a) *driver confusion* – can surely be eliminated by instruction and by clear signage (not something so *flimsy* that it can *be torn away in adverse weather*); b) the risk of vandals and thieves is surely no greater with railway signals than any other important visual feature of any listed building; c) shrouding would of course be equally unacceptable because the whole point of these historic features is that they should be seen.
- 4.6 Press Notice: No response.

**5. Determining Issues:**

- 5.1 The main issue to be considered is whether the proposal will harm the character and integrity of the Listed Buildings.

- 5.2 Semaphore signals are not listed in their own right, but are curtilage listed and which do enjoy the same status and protection as a statutory Listed Building. The semaphore signals stand on the platforms, within the curtilage of the Station buildings and were installed before 1948.
- 5.3 The replacement new signals have not been erected on the platform or any other curtilage listed structure, as they are further along the trackside. These replacement signals have been installed under permitted development rights by the Statutory Undertaker.
- 5.4 Policy P4/1 of the TMBLP 1998 has a presumption in favour of the retention of Listed Buildings. The policy states "*proposals involving the total or substantial demolition of a Listed Building will be considered in light of the architectural or historic merit of the building, the cost of repair in relation to the importance of the building, the setting of the building and its contribution to the local environment, and the merits of alternative proposals for the site (including whether there are substantial community benefits which decisively outweigh the loss of building). Proposals must also provide clear and convincing evidence that all reasonable efforts have been made to retain the building in use.*"
- 5.5 These semaphore signals form an important part of a historic nature of the listed railway station, such as the station building, signal box, footbridge and platform. The removal of the semaphore signals will significantly detract from the historic context and setting of the station and its listed buildings and structures. These are important industrial architectural structures, which enhance the setting of this listed station.
- 5.6 I acknowledge that Railtrack have some practical concerns over the retention of the semaphore signals now that they are redundant, however, I am not satisfied on the evidence before the Council that a permanent solution for covering or indicating that these signals have been decommissioned can not be found. In terms of the matter of vandalism and removal of the semaphore signs by "*train enthusiasts*" this matter of site management and it is also Network Rail's duty of an owner of a Listed Building to prohibit such activities. Network Rail also indicates that the retained signs may lead to confusion, however, they have not demonstrated that all reasonable efforts have been made to retain the semaphore signals, such as finding a permanent solution to cover, shield or clearly indicate that the semaphore signal is no longer operational. Therefore, the proposal will be contrary to policy P4/1 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Plan 1998.
- 5.7 In light of the above considerations, I am unable to support this proposal and recommend refusal.

**6. Recommendation:**

6.1 **Refuse Listed Building Consent** as detailed by letters dated 10 November 2005 and the 7 October 2005 and by supplementary information dated 5 October 2005 and by plans and photographs received on the 10 October 2005 for the following reason:

- 1 The removal of the semaphore signals from the railway platforms would significantly detract from the character and visual amenity of the locality. The proposal would result in the loss of important historic features at this Listed railway station. As such the proposal would be contrary to policy P4/1 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Plan 1998.

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