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Proposal:	Listed Building Application: A) Removal of two semaphore signals from station and B) install new colour light signal on east bound platform and new banner repeater on west bound platform
Location:	Station Building 2 Station Road Aylesford Kent ME20 7JW
Applicant:	Network Rail Infrastructure Limited

1. Description:

- 1.1 This proposal is for the removal of A) semaphore signals and their mountings from the railway platforms and B) for the retention of new colour signals. The works are part of improvements to Aylesford Railway Station. The signals have been erected on the platforms, with a colour light signal on the eastbound platform and for a banner repeater signal on the westbound platform. The main colour signal on the westbound line is sited further along the trackside and did not require Listed Building Consent. The applicant states that the east bound semaphore signal was installed in 1934, whilst the westbound semaphore signal was installed in 1939.
- 1.2 The applicant states that the need for the repeater banner signal on the westbound platform is due to the curvature of the track, signal sighting and stopping distances. The banner signal stands in close proximity to the listed Station Building.
- 1.3 The new signals form part of the Automatic Warning System for the Medway Valley Line and is now operational.
- 1.4 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 on the northern side of Station and just to the west of Mill Hall and the level crossing. The eastbound platform lies within the Mill Hall employment area, whilst the westbound platform lies within the urban confines of Aylesford. The Railway Station is an attractive ragstone building, dating 1856 and is a Grade 2 Listed Building. The westbound semaphore signal is a gantry mounted signal, whilst the eastbound semaphore signal is a lattice mounted signal.

3. Planning History (most relevant):

- 3.1 TM/87/2091 Approved 22.03.1988
Listed Building Application: Restoration of station buildings and improved facilities for passengers and staff.

4. Consultees:

- 4.1 PC: No objection in principle but would strongly request that no dismantling takes place until the new Steering Group for the Medway Valley Line Partnership have been fully consulted as the heritage tourism attractions are high on their list to promote more use of this line.
- 4.2 EH: No comment.
- 4.3 Action in Rural Kent (Medway Valley Line Partnership): No response.
- 4.4 Private Reps: 21/0X/0S/1R. One letter receiving objections on the following grounds:
- The Medway Valley is an unique line;
 - The safety systems will tear away our heritage;
 - The new 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.
- 4.5 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 issues to be considered are whether the works will harm the character and integrity of the Listed Building.

5.2 **A) Removal of existing semaphore signals:** The semaphore signals are not listed in their own right, but do enjoy listed status as they are regarded as curtilage structures. In this instance, as they were erected before 1948, lie within the curtilage of the Railway Station and stand on the platform, which is also a listed curtilage structure.

5.3 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.*"

5.4 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.

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- 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 is a 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 **B) New signal and repeater banner:** Two new signals have been erected on the platforms without the benefit of Listed Building Consent. These signals form part of the now operational Automatic Warning System for the Medway Valley Line. The colour light signal on the eastbound platform is sited in close proximity to the existing semaphore sign, at the lower platform level and also at the end of the platform. This new signal is less prominent and seen against the industrial backdrop of Mill Hall. I have no objections to the retention of this signal, as it will not harm the setting of the main Listed Building or its curtilage structures.
- 5.8 The banner repeater signal on the westbound platform is located relatively centrally along the platform and immediately adjacent to the Listed buildings. The sign is now in situ and has an impact on the setting of the main listed station building. The banner repeater signal and its mounting are quite industrial in appearance. The applicant has submitted strong evidence stating that the location of this new signal is essential and optimal for safety. In particular, “*the main signal is positioned to allow correct braking distance from the signals either side of it. The curvature of the line is such, however, that the signal cannot be clearly seen until the driver is partway along the platform. This does not provide sufficient distance or time for him to react should it be showing a Stop aspect. Therefore, a banner repeater signal is positioned such that an earlier indication of the main signal aspect is displayed*”. Given these technical and safety circumstances, I am satisfied on balance this signal is acceptable.
- 5.9 In light of the above considerations, I feel that it is appropriate to issue a split decision for these works. The proposed removal of the semaphore signals is unacceptable, whilst the retention of the new colour light signal and repeater banner signal are acceptable.

6. Recommendation:

6.1 **A) Refuse Listed Building Consent (removal of semaphore signals)** as detailed by letter dated the 7 October 2005 and the 10 October 2005, supporting information dated 5 October 2005, additional supporting statement dated 10 October 2005, and by plans and photographs received on the 12 October 2005

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.

6.2 **B) Approve Listed Building Consent (new signals)** as detailed by letters dated the 5 December 2005, 7 October 2005 and the 10 October 2005, supporting information dated 5 October 2005, additional supporting statement dated 10 October 2005, and by plans and photographs received on the 12 October 2005.

Contact: Aaron Hill