
Snodland Snodland East	570663 161863	10.10.2005	TM/05/03107/LB
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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

1. Description:

- 1.1 Members may recall that this application was withdrawn from the agenda of the Area Planning Committee No. 3 on the 23 February 2006 following the applicant submitting additional information requiring detailed assessment.
- 1.2 This proposal is for removal of two semaphore signals and their mountings from the railway platforms. The works are part of improvements to the Snodland Railway Station. 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.
- 1.3 The new signals form part of the Automatic Warning System for the Medway Valley Line and are now operational.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 The applicant has also submitted supporting statements setting out their reasons for removing the semaphore signs following the introduction of the new colour lights signals. The 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;
 - A white cross welded to the semaphore signals is completely unacceptable as a long term solution, as the screening of the signals is absolutely necessary to avoid any possibility of driver confusion, and raises the question as to the value of retaining them line side;
 - Decommissioned signals have been found to be a target for vandals and for railway enthusiasts;
 - Permanent covers or shrouding would be undesirable;

- Refers to the Health & Safety Executive's document: Railway Safety Principles and Guidance: Guidance on Signalling, which is a good practice guide;
- In particular, this guidance states that mixing of signal types should be avoided.
- While none of the new signals are physically obscured by the old signals, the redundant signals will become clutter in the station environment and thus could be distracting to drivers. Network Rail is keen to minimise driver confusion by ensuring that only the new signals can be viewed;
- We are keen to remove the risk of Signal Passed At Danger to the lowest levels possible by enhancing the clarity of meaning and viewing of signalling systems. Removing the redundant signals reduces the risk of driver distraction and obscuration of the new signalling and provides a consistent signalling system.

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:

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 remove parts of our railway 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 and;

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.

4.7 Kent & East Sussex Railway: I can confirm that the K&ESR has had conversations with Network Rail concerning the re-use of 2 signals from Snodland and 2 from Aylesford. Our plan would be that these signals were installed for use in the medium term.

4.8 HM Railways Inspectorate (HMRI): Where there is a potential for redundant signals to cause confusion to a train driver, or to interfere with sighting of any new equipment by the driver, it is our expectation under health and safety legislation that the redundant signals should be removed at the earliest opportunity. In situations where the signals cannot be removed at the time the new equipment is commissioned, they can be covered over to indicate that they are out of use until such time as they can be removed. In these circumstances we would expect there to be a timebound plan in place for the removal.

4.8.1 Should there be circumstances in which redundant signals can remain in place without causing confusion and risk to the operation of the railway, there would need to be a maintenance programme in place to ensure that they do not become unsafe structures and present a risk to the operation of the railway, or to the persons required to maintain them.

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 and whether there are other factors that should be taken into account.

- 5.2 These semaphore signals are not listed in their own right, but are listed by virtue of being within the curtilage of the 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 and are not subject to LB controls.
- 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 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 Network Rail has raised a number of issues surrounding the safety implications of retaining the semaphore signals. These matters are material planning considerations. I recognise that covering the semaphore signals with a black bag with a white cross can be used as a temporary measure, but clearly this is not an acceptable way of preserving the semaphore signal as they will no longer be visible. The only permanent solution stated by Network Rail under their Code of Practice would be for the arms and spectacle plates to be removed and the remaining structure covered in a box. Such works would clearly change the character of the signals and would lose any significant visual amenity or historic importance. Therefore, the possible alternative works to retain any redundant signals would be equally harmful as complete removal in terms of historic setting. Network Rail claims that this is a significant matter of driver confusion and distraction through the retention of the existing signals in combination with the new signals. I would wish to validate this assessment with an external independent source. To this end I consulted with HM Railways Inspectorate. HMRI (which is part of HSE) states that where there is potential for redundant signals to cause confusion to a train driver and it is their expectation under health and safety legislation that the redundant signals should be removed at the earliest opportunity. HMRI has not commented on the specific nature of this proposal but it is quite clear, by implication, that they would wish to see permanent solution to

avoid conflict for drivers. This is as far as it has been possible to obtain some independent advice. In the circumstances of this case I do not see any alternative. I believe on this basis there is a case for the removal of the signal arms safety grounds, which does amount to sufficient reason to offset the historic building implications.

- 5.7 On this latter matter, Members will note that English Heritage has chosen to not raise any objections to the proposed removal of the semaphore signals. Therefore, given the public safety considerations of this particular proposal, I am satisfied that, on balance, that safeguarding public safety through the removal of the redundant semaphore signals outweighs the historic importance of retaining these curtilage listed structures.
- 5.8 The proposed redundant semaphore signals are to be donated to the Snodland Millennium Museum.
- 5.9 In light of the above considerations, in the circumstance of this particular case, I am satisfied that there is sufficient justification for the removal of these curtilage listed structures, therefore I support this proposal.

6. Recommendation:

- 6.1 **Grant Listed Building Consent** as detailed by letters dated 04.04.2006, 22.02.2006, 10.11.2005 and 07.10.2005 and by supplementary information dated 05.10.2005 and by plans and photographs received on the 10.10.2005 subject to the following conditions:

- 1 The development and works to which this consent relates shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this consent.

Reason: In pursuance of Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

- 2 The redundant semaphore signals shall be donated to the Snodland Millennium Museum.

Reason: In the interests of retaining these historic structures.

Contact: Aaron Hill