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Proposal:	Listed Building Application: Removal of two signals from station and 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 semaphore signals and their mountings from the railway platforms and 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 are now operational.
- 1.4 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;
 - Decommissioned signals have been found to be a target for vandals and for railway enthusiasts;
 - Permanent covers or shrouding would be undesirable;
 - 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;

- 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 on the northern side of Station Road 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:

- 3.1 TM/87/2091LB 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 received objecting 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.

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 Inspector of Railways: 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 **The Removal of the existing signals:** 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 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 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.
- 5.5 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 on safety grounds, which does amount to sufficient reason to offset the historic building implications.

- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 The proposed redundant semaphore signals are to be donated to the Kent & East Sussex Railway, whom plans to re-use these signals on their own railway line.
- 5.8 **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.
- 5.9 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 that the need for this signal in this location is acceptable.
- 5.10 Bearing in mind what I indicated above with regard to the removal of the historic signals, together with the acceptability of the new signals, I am now satisfied that in overall terms and bearing in mind the background to this specific case that I am able to recommend approval.

6. Recommendation:

6.1 **Grant Listed Building Consent** as detailed by letters dated the 07.10.2005 and the 10.10.2005, supporting information dated 05.10.2005, additional supporting statement dated 10.10.2005, and by plans and photographs received on the 12.10.2005 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 Kent and East Sussex Railway.

Reason: In the interests of retaining these historic structures.

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