

Application Ref: 20/01746/LBC

Proposal: Construction of new steps to Nene Valley viaduct

Site: Nene Valley Railway Bridge, Sutton, Peterborough,
Applicant: Mr Andrew Nash

Referred by: Head of Development and Construction
Reason: A separate application has been submitted for the construction of a footway/cycleway (ref. 21/01026/FUL) which has been referred to Planning and EP Committee

Site visit: 09.02.2021

Case officer: Mrs J MacLennan
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Recommendation: **GRANT** subject to relevant conditions

1 Description of the site and surroundings and Summary of the proposal

Site and surroundings

The application site is the Nene Valley Railway Bridge which is Grade II listed (list entry : 1222196 on 16/11/88), circa 1845 and forms part of a collection of four Listed buildings all connected to the railway infrastructure of the wider site and built for the London and North Western Railway L.N.W.R. Northampton - Peterborough line. Since its closure this section has been repurposed as a leisure attraction which retains the significance of the asset.

The bridge is cast iron with double track and a pedestrian way. The bridge is formed of two parts. The first is the pillars to support the span across the river which are constructed of black engineering brick with stone base. The second element crosses the flood plain up to the embankment and has stone pillars with an open barrier.

Proposal

The application seeks approval for the construction of a new set of steps to the existing bridge structure. The new steps would be wider and longer than the existing steps to allow easier access for cyclists and pedestrians and would include two resting places and a wheeling channel for bicycles. The steps would have lattice work and balustrade to match the existing and would be painted 'Signal Grey' RAL 7004.

A separate application is also under consideration for 'Construction of dual use cycle/pedestrian path and associated earthworks from Sutton village across the meadows to the Nene Valley Railway station' (ref. 20/01026/FUL).

2 Planning History

Reference	Proposal	Decision	Date
20/01026/FUL	Construction of dual use cycle/pedestrian path and associated earthworks from Sutton village across the meadows to the Nene Valley Railway station at Stibbington, including cattle grids, a new 3m wide timber cycle/footbridge over field drain and new flight of steps with wheeling channel to the footbridge across the River Nene	Pending Decision	

3 Planning Policy

Decisions must be taken in accordance with the development plan policies below, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Section 66 - General duty as respects listed buildings in exercise of planning functions

The Local Planning Authority has a statutory duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019)

Section 16 - Impact on Designated Heritage Assets

Local Planning Authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhance the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic viability and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. When considering the impact of development great weight should be given to the assets conservation. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Any harm to or loss of the significance of the designated heritage assets should require clear and convincing justification. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to the designated heritage assets permission should be refused unless it can be demonstrated that substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm. Where harm is less than substantial this harm should be weighed against the public benefits including securing an optimum use of the asset.

Peterborough Local Plan 2016 to 2036 (2019)

LP19 - The Historic Environment

Development should protect, conserve and enhance where appropriate the local character and distinctiveness of the area particularly in areas of high heritage value.

Unless it is explicitly demonstrated that a proposal meets the tests of the NPPF permission will only be granted for development affecting a designated heritage asset where the impact would not lead to substantial loss or harm. Where a proposal would result in less than substantial harm this harm will be weighed against the public benefit.

Proposals which fail to preserve or enhance the setting of a designated heritage asset will not be supported.

4 Consultations/Representations

PCC Conservation Officer - No objection subject to details of materials and treatment to be secured by condition.

The stair arrangement is not original and is presumed to date from the renovation works in the 1970's. Although both planning and LBC permissions are required for the works to replace the stairs, they must be considered on their own merits. Issues which are not related to the potential impact of the works upon the significance of the Grade II Listed bridge should not be taken into consideration. The only exception to this is with regard the vitality and sustainability of the heritage asset. There is no suggestion from the applicant that the proposals are necessary for continued productive use of the site, however part of the justification of the works is that they will enhance the public interaction with the heritage assets on the site. Although no evidence has been submitted regarding the extent of this benefit, it is clear there would be a benefit. Due to the lack of information however regarding the benefit and the existing viability of the asset this has not been a material consideration within this assessment of the proposed works.

The proposal is for the replacement of the existing stairs, while retaining the brick lower section which will not form part of the proposed staircase, instead forming the structural platform. There is a presumption in favour of the retention of the principle of the staircase however it is accepted that the existing staircase has limited significance beyond its function, as its design does not indicate its previous arrangement. On the contrary it is incongruous with the existing decorative ironmongery of the remainder of the Listed bridge.

The proposed design for the stairs replicates the lattice ironmongery of the main section of the bridge and is thus considered a more appropriate design than the existing. An element of the existing staircase is to be retained. This ensures that there is evidence of the previous staircase, which is a positive conservation approach.

Wheel troughs on stairs do make the route easier for cyclist and are usually affixed to heritage assets in such a way that they are reversible. In this instance the stairs are being replaced to make the use of wheel trough more practical. The stairs are not considered detrimental and there is no objection.

PCC Rights of Way Officer – Supports the application as the changes will improve access to the prow network from Wansford station.

The Open Spaces Society - No comments received

Ramblers (Central Office) - No comments received

Huntingdon District Council - No comments received

Nene Valley Railway - No comments received

Peterborough Local Access Forum - No comments received

Sutton Parish Council – Objection. Given the safety concerns, loss of tranquillity and amenity, the availability of superior alternatives, weight of inaccuracies, lack of details and misrepresentation, Sutton Parish Council Strongly objects to the primary application.

Comments to the listed building application to modify steps on the NVR bridge:

1. The new steps are considerably larger than those existing and obscures more of the beautiful bridge structure and supports.
2. During special events and weekends the vehicular and pedestrian traffic visiting NVR can be considerable. Many families with young children visit and extra pedestrians with bicycles will create additional hazards. We have not seen any Health and Safety study or any recommendations relating to the potential change in circumstances.

3. Climbing the stairs with cycle wheels in a trough, especially in the wet, will be a further hazard to consider.
1. Given the points listed above Sutton PC believes this application should be rejected.

Wansford Parish Council - Do not like the idea of use of tarmac and Cattle Grids therefore we are generally opposed to this proposal although we are sympathetic with what Cycle West are trying to do.

Local Residents/Interested Parties

Initial consultations: 0
Total number of responses: 0
Total number of objections: 0
Total number in support: 0

No representations have been received.

5 Assessment of the planning issues

The proposal is assessed against Policy LP19 of the Local Plan which places emphasis on the protection of designated heritage assets and their settings. All proposals that would directly affect any heritage asset should be accompanied by a Heritage Statement.

The proposal is also assessed against section 16 (heritage considerations) of the NPPF. Para 189 requires that applications should describe the significance of any heritage assets affected. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance and para 192 advises that local planning authorities should take account of: a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

A Heritage Statement supports the application. The only change to the listed structure will be the replacement of the existing steel steps which extend from the main span of the bridge down on to the flood plain, incorporating a brick lower section. The steps are not part of the original 19th century structure and presumed to date from the renovation works in the 1970's. The new steps would be built up to the existing footbridge, with a wheeling channel allowing bicycles to be wheeled up more easily and a waiting area.

The new steps would be larger than the current staircase and would extend further along the length of the floodspans. The balustrade of the stairs would match the existing 'lattice work' design of the bridge parapet both in style and colour.

The Conservation Officer has assessed the proposal and considers that the proposed design for the stairs replicates the lattice ironmongery of the main section of the bridge and is thus considered a more appropriate design than the existing. It is also noted that an element of the existing staircase in terms of the stairs at the bottom are retained. This ensures that there is evidence of the previous staircase, which is a positive conservation approach.

The Officer considers that the existing staircase has limited significance beyond its function, as its design does not indicate its previous arrangement. On the contrary it is incongruous with the existing decorative ironmongery of the remainder of the Listed bridge. With regard to the wheel trough these are usually affixed to heritage assets in such a way that they are reversible. In this instance the stairs are being replaced to make the use of wheel trough more practical and is not considered detrimental and there is no objection.

The Officer notes that whilst there is no suggestion from the applicant that the proposals are necessary for continued productive use of the site, part of the justification of the works is that they will enhance the public interaction with the heritage assets on the site. Although no evidence has been submitted regarding the extent of this benefit, it is clear there would be a benefit to the proposal.

The Conservation Officer has responded to comments made by Sutton Parish Council regarding the safety of the new arrangement. As the use of a trough is common, it would be unreasonable to require a safety assessment as suggested and in any event this is not a material consideration for the listed building application.

The Public Rights of Way Officer supports the application as the changes will improve access to the public rights of way network from Wansford station.

Wansford Parish Council are not supportive of the tarmac and Cattle Grids and are generally opposed to this proposal. This is not for consideration as part of the Listed building application.

6 Conclusions

Subject to the imposition of the attached conditions, the proposal is acceptable having been assessed in the light of all material considerations, including weighing against relevant policies of the development plan and specifically:

- It is considered that the work will not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the listed building and would accord with section 66(1) Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and is in accordance with Peterborough Local Plan (2019) and the National Planning Policy Framework (Heritage considerations) (2019).

7 Recommendation

The case officer recommends that Listed Building Consent is **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

C 1 Works to which this consent relates shall be begun no later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of the decision notice.

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

C 2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

- Location Plan
- Proposed route between Sutton and Wansford Station sheet 7 of 7 drg. no. 11965-DWG-PCW-FC-07 Rev C
- Proposed New Steps at Wansford Railway Viaduct Images 1 and 2
- Heritage Statement – November 2020

Reason: In order to preserve the special architectural and historic character of the listed building; in accordance with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended), Policy LP19 of the Peterborough Local Plan 2019 and Section 16 of the NPPF.

- C 3 Prior to the installation of the stairs hereby approved the details of materials and finishing colour shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In order to preserve the special architectural and historic character of the listed building; in accordance with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended), Policy LP19 of the Peterborough Local Plan 2019 and section 16 of the NPPF.

Copies to Councillor: Gavin Elsey