

***DESIGN & ACCESS AND HERITAGE STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF
PROPOSED INSTALLATION OF NEW PARAPET GUARDRAIL TO
SOUTHERN SIDE OF RIVER SOWE VIADUCT***

June 2020



Introduction

This document is intended to outline the programme of works proposed to be undertaken at the River Sowe Viaduct in Coventry. The scheme proposals involve undertaking a programme of works to install a new safety guardrail to the southern side of the viaduct.

The 'proposals' section below explains the works in further detail, setting out the rationale and justification for the proposals. This will also include analysis of the proposals' heritage implications to satisfy the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework and relevant local planning policy.

Planning Policy

Relevant National and Local planning policy is outlined below:

National Planning Policy Framework

The NPPF sets out the Government's vision for planning to help achieve sustainable development. Central to this is that economic, social and environmental gains should be sought through the planning system. The NPPF's approach to Heritage is fundamentally unchanged from that of PPS5, in that there is still a focus on the identification of 'heritage assets', outlining their 'significance' and considering any impact upon that significance as a consequence of any proposed works.

NPPF paragraph 128 establishes the information requirements for an application for consent affecting a heritage asset. Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. 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.

Paragraph 129 details the policy principles that should guide LPAs in determining applications in relation to heritage assets. It states that in considering the impact of a proposal on any heritage asset, Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

When determining applications, LPAs should take account of (paragraph 131):

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing 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 vitality;
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Paragraph 132 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.

National Planning Practice Guidance (2014)

The NPPG underpins national policy set out within the NPPF. Further guidance in relation to Conserving and enhancing the historic environment states that:

In the case of buildings, generally the risks of neglect and decay of heritage assets are best addressed through ensuring that they remain in active use that is consistent with their conservation. Ensuring such heritage assets remain used and valued is likely to require sympathetic changes to be made from time to time.

COVENTRY CITY COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN - Adopted 6th December 2017

The following policies at the local level are of relevance to this application:

Policy HE2: Conservation and Heritage Assets

1. In order to help sustain the historic character, sense of place, environmental quality and local distinctiveness of Coventry, development proposals will be supported where they conserve and, where appropriate, enhance those aspects of the historic environment which are recognised as being of special historic, archaeological, architectural, artistic, landscape or townscape significance. These Heritage Assets include: a) Listed Buildings and Locally Listed buildings; b) Conservation Areas; c) Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Archaeological sites; d) Registered Parks and Gardens; and e) Other places, spaces, structures and features which may not be formally designated but are recognised as significant elements of Coventry's heritage and are positively identified on the Coventry Historic Environment Record.

2. Proposals likely to affect the significance of a heritage asset or its setting should demonstrate an understanding of such significance using currently available evidence.

3. Development proposals involving heritage assets in general and listed buildings in particular, should acknowledge the significance of the existing building and the area by means of their siting, massing, form, scale, materials and detail.

Policy AC6: Rail

1. Proposals which improve the quality of local rail services and access to stations and rail interchange facilities will be supported.

Significance of Heritage Asset

In order to assess the heritage significance of the viaduct, in accordance with the provisions of the NPPF, it is important to make reference to heritage values as defined in the Historic England document Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidelines, which can be summarised as follows:

- Evidential value – the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity (i.e. archaeological interest)
- Historical value – the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life are connected through a place.
- Aesthetic value – the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place (i.e. architectural and artistic interest)
- Communal value – the meanings of a place for the people that relate to it.

Having regard to the above, the viaduct can be said to provide both aesthetic value, as a consequence of its architectural qualities, and historical value as to how the London to Birmingham railway was originally conceived and constructed.

Having regard to the viaduct's historic value, the Historic England document '*Designation Listing Selection Guide: Transport Buildings*' (2017) is of particular importance when assessing the historic value associated with railway infrastructure. This sets out four 'ages' of railway construction which, in descending importance, is as below:

- • The pioneering first phase, 1825–41;
- • The heroic age, 1841–50;
- • The third phase 1850s–1870s, the consolidation of the network; and
- • The fourth period, up to 1914, the completion of the network.

Given the construction date of 1838, it is apparent that the viaduct stems from the 'pioneering first phase' of railway construction. Therefore, by virtue of the viaduct's age there is strong historic significance attributable to it. The viaduct forms part of the original London to Birmingham railway line and, as noted in the List Description, this was to be the first main line railway between London and another major city.

Further historical significance is attributable to the association between the site and the engineer responsible for overseeing its design and construction – Robert Stephenson, who is most famously associated with his father, George Stephenson – known as ‘The Father of Railways’

Turning to the aesthetic value attributable to the viaduct, there is clear significance by virtue of the structure’s scale, materials and architectural detailing. The viaduct was listed at Grade II on 21 December 2015. The associated List Description (see below), states:

Reasons for Designation

The Sowe Viaduct, completed in 1838, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * Date: an early example of a viaduct dating from the pioneering phase of railway development; * Architectural and engineering interest: the viaduct is well detailed and shows a skillful handling of the engineering challenge of crossing the River Sowe; * Historic interest: designed by Robert Stephenson, one of the most important transport engineers of the C19.

History

The London and Birmingham Railway was established in the 1830s to build the railway line between London and Birmingham, with Robert Stephenson appointed as the company's chief engineer. This was to be the first main line railway between London and another major city. The first parts of the line were opened in 1837, with the remainder opening in 1838.

Much of the line was widened during the 1960s, but this work did not reach beyond Rugby. The viaduct over the River Sowe at Coventry forms part of the original construction phase of the railway and was completed in 1838. The viaduct is shown in an original sectional drawing for the railway, marked with Robert Stephenson's name as engineer. It is also shown in two wash drawings of 1837 and 1839 by John Cook Bourne, who documented the construction of the railway.

Details

A railway viaduct by Robert Stephenson of 1838, for the London and Birmingham Railway.

MATERIALS: The viaduct is constructed of brick with stone dressings to the arches, stringcourses and cornice.

PLAN: The structure is orientated roughly east - west.

DESCRIPTION: The viaduct carries the main London to Birmingham railway over the River Sowe and consists of a large central arch flanked by three smaller arches on either side. The arches have large ashlar voussoirs with pointed ends. Within the piers supporting the side arches there are smaller pointed arches with blind panels. The voussoirs and stringcourses all have carved vermiculation. The underside of the central arch has a sprayed concrete coating.

There are giant pilasters flanking the central arch, with stone springing points for the central arch

which continue across the base of the pilasters. The upper levels have dentilled cornices of ashlar with brick blocking course above and stone cappings above that. The cornice continues along the length of the viaduct, but without the dentils. There are further pilasters at each end of the viaduct. There is much replacement engineering brick across the structure.

Proposals and Assessment of Impact upon Heritage Significance

Network rail is proposing to undertake works to install a new protective guardrail to the southern side of the viaduct. The viaduct already features a guardrail to the northern side and the proposed works will provide coverage from this safety feature throughout the viaduct. The guardrail works are necessary in order to provide edge protection to any persons, such a railway maintenance operatives, on the structure, which is required to be provided in accordance with railway safety standards. The guardrails will be constructed from GRP in a Steel Grey colour.

The interventions proposed in this application are all benign and intended to enable safe maintenance access to the viaduct, which will assist with ensuring that maintenance and inspection of this heritage asset are undertaken on a regular basis, assisting with the structure's continued role and purpose as operational railway infrastructure.

The installation of the guardrails will involve only minimal intervention to existing historic fabric and this will be undertaken using a sensitive methodology, ensuring the intervention is kept to the minimum.

Turning to the effect of the works upon the portal's aesthetic value described above, it is clear that the works are of a small scale and will not detract from the overall appearance and architectural detailing of the viaduct as a whole. The new materials are of an appropriate visual quality and have been designed to be read as clearly distinct in terms of vintage and era of construction to the original nineteenth century viaduct. The works will not impact in any way on the structure's historical value.

Conclusion

It is considered that the works proposed are respectful to the character and appearance of the listed structure. There is a sound justification for the proposed works. This will be done in a manner that is respectful to the heritage significance of the site.

In light of the above, the proposals are considered to be in accordance with relevant policy. Consequently, it is requested that Listed Building Consent be granted for the proposed development.

Network Rail
One Eversholt Street
London
NW1 2DN

www.networkrail.co.uk