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Stuart Langer
Devon County Council
Lucombe House, County Hall
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Your Ref:

Our Ref: TR040010

Date: 21 November 2014

Dear Mr Langer

Planning Act 2008 (as amended) and The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2009 (as amended) – Regulation 6

Application by Devon County Council for an Order Granting Development Consent for the Tavistock to Bere Alston Railway Re-instatement and Associated Trails (“the proposed development”)

EIA Screening Opinion

We refer to your letter dated 30 October 2014 requesting an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening opinion from the Secretary of State for the proposed development.

The Secretary of State has considered the information provided by the applicant and taken into account the requirements of the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2009 (as amended). In particular the Secretary of State notes that the proposed development would (if consented) constitute a new rail link between Tavistock and Bere Alston. On the basis of the information provided by the applicant, the proposed development is a Schedule 2 development under paragraph 10(d) of the EIA Regulations.

In accordance with Regulation 7(1) of the EIA regulations the Secretary of State has taken into account the selection criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations in order to decide whether the proposed development is EIA development.

The Secretary of State has based the decision on the following documents and information provided by the applicant:

- Tavistock to Bere Alston railway re-instatement and associated trail routes: Environmental Impact Assessment Screening and Scoping Report, October 2014

The Secretary of State has determined that the proposed development is EIA

development for the reasons set out below.

Characteristics of the Development

The proposed development comprises the construction and re-instatement of approximately 8km of railway linking Tavistock and Bere Alston connecting into the Gunnislake branch line and a new station at south west Tavistock. The proposed development would include the creation of five new trail routes to complement the existing network of routes which aim to increase access to the Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) part of the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site (WHS).

Location of the Development

The proposed development is located in the South West of England in the County of Devon on previous railway land between Tavistock and Bere Alston. The original railway has been decommissioned and largely abandoned. Since its closure in 1968 much of the land has been sold off but a number of structures such as bridges, cuttings and embankments are still in place and may provide a suitable route to enable reinstatement. However, the rail re-instatement route would not utilise the whole of the existing abandoned railway which previously travelled all the way to Okehampton. Instead the proposed development would commence at a new Tavistock station in the southwest of Tavistock, south of the Callington Road before continuing in a south westerly direction for approximately 8km along the alignment of the former railway, meeting the current railway that runs from Plymouth to Gunnislake at Bere Alston station.

Tavistock is the largest settlement in proximity to the proposed development and has been identified as the most sustainable location for the development. In general the proposed development negotiates a route through the rural landscape of the middle Tamar and Tavy valleys. It passes through fields, hedgerows and broadleaved woodland in cuttings and embankments, using bridges, tunnels, retaining walls and viaducts. Much of the alignment passes through the Tamar Valley AONB and is visible from the Dartmoor National Park. The disused railway is also designated as a Conservation Area. Shilliamill Viaduct forms in particular forms a distinct historic feature with Listed Building status (Grade II).

Characteristics of the potential impact

Natural resources

The proposed new trail routes, railway station, landscaping, changes to the existing station may result in changes to the topography of the site. The likely characteristics of these impacts to topography are not described in the Report. The development is large in extent and scale and significant works are likely to be required to ensure the new railway complies with modern requirements, which indicates the potential for significant effects.

The potential loss of agricultural land associated with the trail routes is not yet known. Given the proposed length and extent of the routes there is potential for significant effects.

Invasive Species

Invasive species are identified adjacent to the proposed route corridor. The stated intention to re-use existing material has the potential to spread these species and thereby result in significant effects.

Pollution and nuisances

During construction the proposed development would generate dust and other pollutants as well as noise, vibration, light and heat from plant, equipment and/or workers. The operation of the diesel trains would generate pollutant emissions to air and the proposed telecommunication masts would generate electromagnetic radiation. The characteristics of the existing environment relative to the proposed nature and scale of the proposals indicates that the potential effects of these impacts could be significant

Paragraph 9.2.10 of the Report explains that the Tamar Estuary (approximately 3km from the site) currently has relatively poor water quality (due to agricultural run-off and impact of former mining in the catchment area). The project has the potential to mobilise or generate contaminants which could enter ground or surface water and thereby potentially worsen the existing pollution in the Tamar Estuary. It is possible that standard construction site management measures and the proposed new drainage system could avoid and/or mitigate potential adverse effects, however at this stage these are not defined and the scale/nature of the project indicates that effects could be significant.

Ecology and Nature Conservation

The proposals could result in direct disturbance/loss of protected or other sensitive habitats or species within and surrounding the site during construction and/or operation. These could also be affected by contaminated run off from the site. Features that could be affected include:

- Plymouth Sound and Estuaries Special Area of Conservation
- Tamar Estuary Special Protection Area
- Dartmoor SAC.
- Two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Grenofen Wood and West Down and Tamar-Tavy Estuary and the Tamar)
- Old shaft marsh unimproved County Wildlife Site (CWS).
- UK BAP Habitat.

The scale and nature of works relative to these sensitive ecological receptors indicates the potential for significant effects.

Landscape and Visual

The rail re-instatement route and trails are almost entirely within the Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The site is also partially within the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site (WHS) and approximately 12km from Dartmoor National Park. The scale and nature of works relative to the designations indicates the potential for significant effects.

Cultural Heritage/Archaeology

The project crosses through the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site (WHS). The disused railway is also designated as a Conservation Area and there are listed buildings and other historic structures associated with the abandoned railway line. The nature/scale of the potential impacts to these assets (or their settings) are not yet defined, however the sensitivity of the assets means that potential effects may be significant.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

Will Spencer

Will Spencer
EIA and Land Rights Advisor
on behalf of the Secretary of State