



Pixash Lane Bridge, Pixash Lane, Keynsham

15/03592/DLPAO - Prior Approval for alteration (increase in height) of the existing overbridges parapet walls in connection with the electrification of the Great Western Main Line (Pix Ash Overbridge MLN1 112M 63Ch)

15/03555/LBA - Alterations to existing bridge parapets in connection with the electrification of the Great Western Main Line (Pix Ash Overbridge MLN1 112M 63Ch).

OBJECT

Context

Bath Preservation Trust does not usually respond to applications outside the City of Bath and its immediate parishes. We are responding to these applications because the works form part of the architectural ensemble of the Great Western Railway as it passes through B&NES and in particular through the World Heritage Site and its setting. IN addition we consider that the Keynsham bridges, being listed, are clearly regarded to be of national importance and should be given as respectful consideration as those within Bath.

While we are responding to this application in particular, we also wish to note that from attendance at stakeholders' meetings with Network Rail, and fairly extensive recent consultation, we understand that this bridge solution is still being seen as the 'standard' approach for listed bridges in B&NES. Our objections therefore apply to this bridge but also gain strength by the fact that this solution would be unsuitable for the listed bridges through the World Heritage Site.

We recognise the pressures that Network Rail are under but we regret that these consultations with wider stakeholders (including statutory consultees such as the Georgian Group and Victorian Society) took place relatively late in the design development process and there was therefore little chance to work with Network Rail to develop less interventionist, more aesthetically pleasing and possibly more cost-effective solutions. We note that the 2014 concerns expressed in the documentation from English Heritage about alterations to the coping have not been met by these designs.

Summary of objections

Our objections are sixfold:

- a) Insufficient attention paid to the special qualities and group value detailed in the list description of the bridge;
- b) Harm to historic, evidential, architectural and aesthetic value of the individual listed Brunel-designed bridges is substantial and irreversible, changing their profile for ever and resulting in permanent loss of historic fabric;
- c) Harm to the character and setting of the historic landscape and listed structure by creating an unsympathetic design of overbearing, under-detailed stonework which has given insufficient weight to the conservation requirements
- d) The use of an unattractive metal grille rather than considering a sympathetic use of carefully designed railings as an anti-climb measure;
- e) Absence of consideration of cumulative harm to the ensemble of the GWR through B&NES, in particular through the piecemeal presentation of planning applications; and
- f) Absence of explicit consideration of more sympathetic solutions taking fully into account the minimisation of harm and irreversible intervention to the historic asset. As a result of consultation pressure, such solutions are now being brought forward for Sydney Gardens. It is important that the approach to all listed bridges, not just those in Sydney Gardens, is given appropriate consideration and maintains the interrelationship between them.

In more detail:

IN relation to the **list description** we believe that all the elements in italics below in the list description would be irreversibly and substantially harmed by the works proposed. As such the historic significance, far from being conserved and enhanced, would be damaged, diminished and in large part lost for future generations. The list description says that the bridge is:

an early and mostly intact example of a railway structure dating from the pioneering phase in national railway development; it is characteristically well designed, by the hand of Brunel, with a chamfered four-centred arch and stepped buttresses in a Tudor-Gothic style; it is constructed to a design by Isambard Kingdom Brunel who is widely perceived as one of the most important engineers and architects of the C19; it forms part of a group of architecturally similar over bridges on the section between Bristol and Bath.

The listed building description for Pixash also refers to the parapet and coping as follows:-“..... Parapets with very slight convex profile. East (low mileage) parapet with a limited amount of recent brick patching. West (high mileage) parapet rebuilt in GWR red and purple engineering brick laid in English bond. Both parapets retain substantial step to internal face with quarter-round top as well as original coping flush to the inside face and chamfered to an arris on the outer face.”

To be clear about this harm, the proposals would:

- Alter irreversibly the form, profile, historic fabric section and design intention of the bridge;
- Remove for ever the existence of Brunel-designed structures, in their setting and for which original drawings still exist:

- Specifically alter both the actual coping as described in the listing and alter it so as to be unrecognisable from the original;
- Introduce overbearing, under-detailed high stone parapets which alter forever the experience of these bridges from trackside and from the roadside, and remove the relationship between the users of the overbridge and their experience of an inter-relationship with the railway;
- Introduce an unattractive utilitarian steel grille onto carefully aesthetically conceived structures.

While these comments apply to Pixash Bridge, a delightful Gothic structure, they would also apply to any of the other listed bridges on this stretch of the line. This highlights the fact that it is inappropriate to make a decision on this bridge until plans are released for all the bridges in this magnificent engineering ensemble through B&NES. Cumulative harm is a planning consideration and it is not possible to assess this when considering a single bridge in isolation.

We believe that Network Rail have been looking at this late point at alternative and less interventionist solutions to the listed bridges and while the possibility of such an alternative may be under consideration we do not think it justified to agree to irreversible harm to such an important part of our heritage.

Conclusion

We would either like to see this application **refused** for the reasons set out above and below; **withdrawn** until the potential solutions for the whole of the World Heritage Site and its setting have been developed, or, if the Committee/officers are minded to approve, a condition placed to make clear that this application is approved in their own right only and do not represent implicit approval for a 'template;' through Bath World Heritage Site and its setting.

This application in our view fails to accord with national and local planning policy, specifically Section 12 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), policies; B1, B2 and CP6 of the B&NES Core Strategy and saved policies; D2, D4, and BH2, of the B&NES Local Plan.