

# **SEVERN VALLEY RAILWAY**

## **BRIDGNORTH STATION**

Design & Access Statement

November 2015

Revised subsequent to pre-application meeting ref:  
PREAPP/14/00573 of 12 January 2015

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## 1.0 SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

Location: Bridgnorth Station, Severn Valley Railway, Hollybush Road, Bridgnorth, Shropshire, WV16 5DT.

Application: Full (plus LBC for Grade II listed station building).

Name of agent: Oxford Architects LLP, Bagley Croft, Hinksey Hill, Oxford, OX1 5BS.

Name of applicant: Severn Valley Railway (Holdings) PLC, Number One, Comberton Place, Kidderminster, DY10 1QR.

### 1.1 Description

All the development works proposed relate to the applicant's commitment to enhancing facilities at Bridgnorth station for both visitors and staff alike. The development will also provide facilities and accommodation which will replace those which are outdated and enable the Railway to operate more efficiently.

The proposals comprise five distinct but related works as follows :-

- Purchase of 4.47 hectares of land to the west of the station site to provide accommodation for additional car parking spaces at the north end of the site for both visitors and staff, on a field that has been used as the Severn Valley Railway overflow car park for the last 46 years. It is also proposed to provide a new exit driveway to Oldbury Road around adjacent fields.
- Removal of temporary buildings and enhancement of the pedestrian route from the car parks to the station via the existing station driveway.
- Internal alterations and refurbishment of the original single storey 1862-built Grade II listed station building.
- Construction of a new single storey station building to accommodate toilets, staff messroom, kitchen and refreshment rooms, located towards the south end of platform 1.
- Construction of a new 2-storey complex to accommodate a workshop, stores and office on the ground floor, plus kitchen, staff messroom and 53-bed staff hostel accommodation on the first floor, located opposite the west side of existing boiler shop.

Pre-application advice was sought from Shropshire Council towards the end of 2014, and that advice was given in a document ref: PREAPP/14/00573, dated 12th January 2015. A considerable part of the document related to the consultation with English Heritage concerning the impact of the proposals on the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Pan Pudding Hill and also other possible archeological sites.

Subsequent to the receipt of the pre-application comments, we met on site with English Heritage and listened to their concerns, and in particular with regard to the proposed locomotive stores and water tank building which was due to be located close to a site that English Heritage considered to be sensitive in terms of its history. They expressed the wish that the proposed building should not be

located close to a possible Civil War artillery site. In response to their concerns, we have abandoned that part of the original proposal, and have now been able to make provision for the locomotive stores elsewhere away from the application site.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

The Severn Valley Railway is a 16-mile long railway running mainly along the banks of the River Severn, from Kidderminster in North Worcestershire to Bridgnorth in South Shropshire, with intermediate stations at Bewdley, Arley, Highley and Hampton Loade. It was established in 1965 and is now a major national and international tourist centre attracting up to 250,000 visitors per year, far in excess of the numbers using the railway when under the ownership of British Railways. Indeed, it celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, which represents more than double the length of time the line was in the ownership of British Railways.

Much of the built infrastructure remains intact from the day it was first constructed. There are a few buildings with listed building status though some of the railway property falls within local authority conservation areas.

The number of passengers using the line has created its own problems in that they are carried on an infrastructure which dates back to 1862, and on a railway that was never designed for such a volume of traffic. Many of the facilities at Bridgnorth are now outdated and inadequate for the demand that is placed on them, and these proposals are designed to improve the physical environment for both visitors and staff.

The Severn Valley Railway is an essential part of the local economy. The large number of visitors contribute directly to the local economy by using local facilities, as does the Railway itself with trading partners located within the region. It was very noticeable in 2007, when flooding prevented the railway from operating for several months, that local traders indicated their turnover had been severely affected. It was estimated at the time by SQW on behalf of Advantage West Midlands that the Severn Valley Railway contributed £16.3 million and 283 jobs to the local economy.

The Railway is also used as a means of transport to and from the towns and rural areas it serves, both locally and beyond. There is an important link at Kidderminster with the national rail network, and it is possible to buy tickets from anywhere in the country to stations on the Severn Valley Railway, or to travel countrywide from stations along the line. Railway tour operators also use the link to provide access to and from the Severn Valley Railway for their excursion trains, some steam-hauled, some hauled by more modern motive power.

## **3.0 BRIDGNORTH SITE CONTEXT**

### **3.1 Assessment:**

Lying within a deep and narrow valley immediately to the west of Bridgnorth High Town, the station site, running NNW to SSE, extends for some 540 m from Hollybush Road at the north to its bridging point over the Oldbury Road at the south. 78 m at its widest point, the site comprises an area of some 2.86 hectares, virtually all on made-up ground, with a steep embankment bounding its eastern flank.

The site has considerable historic significance. It illustrates a large branch line station, with remarkably complete passenger, goods and operational structures built between the 1860s and 1950s. It is not possible to experience such an intact and coherently presented historic railway environment on the national network, due to modernisation since the steam era. Preservation period buildings have detracted a little from its historic character but future development will be more sympathetic.

Ever since its completion in 1862, the station site has been a prominent feature on the edge of Bridgnorth, providing a key focal point when viewed from the Castle Grounds and the High Town. The entire station site now lies within a Conservation Area, though most of the adjoining land does not. To the east, the valley bottom between Hollybush Road and the railway is occupied by mid-late C20th light industrial buildings, while to the west the steeply sloping valley side remains in (albeit neglected) agricultural use, forming a verdant backdrop to the station.

Opposite the southern end of the station site, immediately to the west, stands Pan Pudding Hill, a Scheduled Ancient Monument comprising a C12th seigewerk situated on a high promontory overlooking the railway. Most of this site is included within the package of land recently acquired by the Severn Valley Railway.

## **4.0 DESIGN APPROACH**

The Severn Valley Railway has recently revisited the strategic aims of the organisation as it is now a very different climate and culture from the day it was established. The company reaffirmed that it aims to be a ‘working steam railway of the past’, transporting visitors back into the past when steam trains were the principal means of transport. The core business comprises the locomotives, the carriages and the infrastructure, all of which relate to a period of time before steam power was removed from the national rail network.

This ‘time-capsule’ concept is essential to the visitor experience, and any restoration or new development is designed to be within a particular time frame in appearance to maintain the atmosphere and character of a past age.

In order to oversee this concept, the Railway set up a Conservation & Heritage Committee, through which all development proposals are considered. This Committee with one or two extra persons has formed the Project Team for the Bridgnorth station site proposals.

One of the first tasks of the Team was to produce a Conservation Statement for the station, and this document has been approved by the Severn Valley Railway Board as their official policy. It is within

the framework of this document that the proposals being submitted to the Council are designed, and a copy of the Conservation Statement is therefore attached to this submission as background information.

During the preparation of the plans for Bridgnorth, extensive consultation has taken place. Since virtually all the proposed works will comprise positive enhancements to existing SVR facilities within the railway boundary, their impact will be largely confined to visitors and staff; hence consultation to date has been focussed upon these groups. There has also been extensive dialogue with the SVR's shareholders who largely capitalise such SVR projects, and with SVR staff, including the many volunteers who effectively subsidise the operation of the railway throughout the year.

Informal discussions have also taken place with representatives from English Heritage and the Conservation Officers from Shropshire Council. These centred around three specific issues in addition to the general development proposals:

1. the 'time capsule' concept
2. the listed building and
3. the scheduled ancient monument of Pan Pudding Hill, and in particular the alignment and construction of a new driveway from the new car park towards Oldbury Road. Following these meetings, English Heritage has responded positively to the Severn Valley Railway's proposals as follows:

'It is re-assuring to see how the scheme is progressing, and to hear that the architects are now engaged. I confirm that English Heritage will in this case support a high quality historicist approach to architectural design. It appears to us that the scale and location of the new services and hostel buildings, together with a much more sympathetic proposal for the use and display of the grade II listed station building will be beneficial to this historic place. We note that you intend to put in a planning application for all three phases of your proposals, and we support that strategic approach.

I confirm that English Heritage can see the rationale for a circulatory traffic management system, and that further design work (informed by an archaeological evaluation) should be carried out to determine how this drive could be laid across this sensitive landscape.

## **5.0 DESIGN PRINCIPLES APPLIED TO THE PROPOSAL**

Any proposals for restoration or new building will be carried out in a wholly authentic manner using known layouts and details which have been determined through genuine research rather than as a result of conjecture.

## **5.1 Use:**

Within the station site and the adjoining land to the west three areas have been identified to accommodate new or relocated facilities:

1. south of the listed building on Platform 1 – the new toilet and tea room building
2. west of the locomotive shed – the new accommodation, workshop and stores building.
3. west of the station site – the additional car park for visitors and staff

## **5.2 Amount:**

Most of the new accommodation proposed is broadly equivalent to existing on-site provisions, increased and adapted where necessary (e.g. toilets, disabled access) to meet current standards and expectations. The positioning of new buildings on the site has been determined by a desire to minimise their impact upon the long established design and layout of the station, with most of those facilities not visually compatible with the ‘time capsule’ concept (e.g. car parking) hidden from view. The outcome of this policy is that the overall appearance of the station site should be markedly improved after implementation of these proposals, with only the modestly-scaled new station building evidently added to the scene. To the west, the new car park will be extensively screened on all sides by trees and hedges, while the flat-roofed hostel block, located opposite the end of Station Lane will be barely visible behind the boiler shop. As far as possible, public and staff facilities will be clearly separated to minimise conflict of access routes both to and within the site.

## **5.3 Layout:**

Within the physical constraints of the site and the SVR policy decision to accurately reflect former Great Western Railway practice, the positions identified for all the proposed new buildings have been determined by historical authenticity tempered by practical issues of accessibility, topography, and aspect/prospect considerations. The principal outcomes are that the hostel will lie adjacent to the rear of the locomotive depot and boiler shop, much as it would have done in GWR times. The new station building, meanwhile, will be close to the original building on platform 1, permitting ready public access at the front, and service access at the rear. In order to reduce the overall length of the new building, the tea rooms have been accommodated within a rearward extension, with an adjoining outside terrace, from which a fine southward prospect will be offered down the Severn Valley.

To the west of the station site, Pan Pudding Hill and the two adjacent fields to the north will remain largely unaltered, save for the provision of a driveway from the car park which will be routed around the perimeter of the fields. A scheme to manage and access the Scheduled Ancient Monument is being drawn up by the Severn Valley Railway in conjunction with English Heritage, and will involve the removal of some trees, but at the same time some tree planting will take place in the adjacent field, with a view to restoring both Pan Pudding Hill and the field back to the condition they were in the early 1900s.

## 5.4 Scale:

The overriding design challenge on this site has been to provide the necessary levels of accommodation and facilities to serve a greater number of visitors (up to 250,000 pa) than the station was ever designed to accommodate, whilst still maintaining the form and character of a typical market town station on a cross country line. The principal outcomes will be:

- To clear all but disabled access car parking away from the station drive in order to enhance visitors' first impressions of the station upon arrival via the station drive.
- Wherever possible, to relocate staff related accommodation and facilities to a new building to be located to the west side of the boiler shop.
- To remove as many temporary and portable structures from publicly accessible areas as possible, and to rationalise, relocate and/or screen any remaining ancillary accommodation from view.
- To fully utilise the interior of the original station building, including the cellar, whilst restoring all the principal public rooms and external envelope to near original form. This will ensure that more areas within the listed building will be opened up for the visitors' use and appreciation.
- To incorporate such additional essential accommodation that is required within a new-build structure designed to complement, but not compete with, the adjacent Grade II listed station building.

On the western edge of the site, the proposed hostel complex will not only be screened from the station by the boiler shop, but will be peripheral to the railway scene. The scale of accommodation proposed there is a direct response to the SVR's need to relocate and upgrade volunteer staff sleeping accommodation from five old coaches currently stabled at the south end of the station, and to provide permanent offices, workshops and storage accommodation for the ever-expanding range of engineering services undertaken on the site.

## 5.5 Landscaping:

Landscaping will play an important and intrinsic role in enhancing two key areas of the proposed development works, namely around the new car parks and the pedestrian links to the station, and along the boundaries to the existing station drive and the new station building.

Additional shrub and tree screening will be provided around both the public and staff car parks to conceal them from the station, the Castle Grounds and the High Town, while existing mature trees and hedges around these sites will also be retained.

Selective trimming of trees and shrubs on the embankment adjoining the station drive will open up views both to and from the Castle Grounds and High Town, while additional planting of evergreen shrubs and trees around the station will re-establish a long lost GWR feature that will also partially conceal the presence of the new building when viewed from the Castle Grounds. The listed building is regarded by the Severn Valley Railway as the 'jewel in the crown' of the station site, but is currently

totally obscured by vegetation when viewed from Castle Hill, and it is proposed to use an early C20th photographic view taken from Castle Hill towards the station and Pan Pudding Hill as the reference for this work

Porous surfacing materials are proposed for the new car park, while traditional paving materials, comprising mostly granite setts and Staffordshire Blue pavers – both widely used by the Great Western Railway - will be applied to the service areas and terrace adjoining the new station building.

## **5.6 Appearance:**

As a result of an approved SVR policy in 2013, it was resolved that all proposed new works on the Bridgnorth station site would be designed in the style of the Great Western Railway to accord with a ‘time capsule’ approach to conserving and developing the railway’s infrastructure on an historically consistent theme. In compliance with this policy, all current design proposals have therefore been prepared in the form and style of typical GWR buildings of yesteryear. Although replicas, such buildings will be authentically detailed inside and out and will thus readily harmonise with the existing GWR infrastructure and vintage trains, whilst still providing quality accommodation and facilities for both visitors and staff. The first two new buildings to receive this treatment will be as follows:

1. The new station structure (177.40m<sup>2</sup>), which will be designed in the style of a typical GWR ancillary building dating from c.1895-1910, will comprise a single storey block with pitched roof and gable ends fronting onto the platform, with a slightly later c.1920 flat-roofed rearward extension. Principal materials will be Staffordshire Blue Brindle engineering bricks and Welsh blue grey slates, with Forest of Dean Pennant sandstone cills, copings and chimney cappings. The rear flat roof will be finished with a traditional zinc batten roll roofing system. With an eaves level of just 3.40m, this unostentatious design has been specifically selected to minimise its impact upon the adjacent listed station building.
2. The new hostel/offices/workshops and stores building (528.70m<sup>2</sup>), will be based upon a ‘modern movement’ staff hostel complex designed and built by the GWR in 1940. The Bridgnorth version will comprise one single-storey and three two-storey blocks grouped around a quadrangle, with a services tower located within. Principal materials will comprise light red/buff facing bricks, with brown brick and white concrete bands, surmounted by a flat roof with projecting fascias above all elevations. All windows will be Crittall horizontal pane steel-framed units. The SVR’s need to provide new staff hostel accommodation, combined with the GWR’s adoption of this distinctive style over 75 years ago, has provided the impetus to recreate this long-lost building type, which should prove to be an attraction in its own right.

In addition to the above, the Grade II listed station building is also to receive comprehensive repair and refurbishment works. Subject to listed Building Consent, these works will also include some internal alterations to restore the booking hall/ waiting room and ladies waiting room, and to create a new retail and heritage display area within the northern end of the building. Externally, the building will remain unaltered save for two door/window transpositions, a new rear entrance door into the bar, and provision of some rooftop louvred screens to conceal the bar’s modern condenser units. These screens match those which existed throughout most of the station’s existence under the Great Western Railway and later British Railways.

## 6.0 ACCESS PROVISION

Within the constraints of a largely Victorian infrastructure, and a fleet of railway coaches of mostly 50+ years vintage, the SVR seeks to welcome and accommodate all visitors, arriving by whatever mode of transport. This includes mobility impaired groups, for whom several coaches been extensively adapted to accommodate wheelchairs, and operating staff trained to provide assistance. As indicated in the following section, provision will be made at Bridgnorth station for disabled persons to access all public areas within both the existing station and new buildings.

### 6.1 Site Access Proposals

For clarity, the various site access issues have been separately identified as follows :-

- Car park for visitors (part relocated from station drive): Vehicular access will be as existing via Station Lane off Hollybush Road, thence via a widened existing access road on SVR-owned land. A new vehicular exit is to be provided via a newly-constructed driveway (following the alignment of a former cart-track) to join the existing SVR roadway near the south end underbridge, and thence down to the existing junction with Oldbury Road. A new dedicated and more easily graded footway is to be provided from the car park to the station drive.
- Coach party access for visitors: Coach access will be as existing, from vehicles offloading at the top of the station drive, with near-level pedestrian access to both the existing station and new buildings. The existing parking area for coaches will be retained at the bottom of the station drive, near to the entrance off Hollybush Road.
- Disabled car park for visitors and staff: This will remain as existing, located towards the upper end of station drive, with near-level pedestrian/wheelchair access to both the existing station and new buildings.
- Service deliveries/collections to/from station: This will remain as existing, via the station drive to both the existing station and to the service yard behind the new building.
- Access for emergency vehicles will remain as existing, i.e. via the station drive to the station buildings, and via Station Lane to the locomotive shed and boiler shop, and also to the new Hostel Complex and car park.
- Pedestrian and cycle access for visitors: This will remain as existing, via the (level decked) footbridge from New Road, via the station drive from Hollybush Road, and also via stepped 'Donkey Gallop' footpath from Oldbury Road.
- Pedestrian access for visitors boarding/alighting from trains on platform 2: This will remain as existing, via the footbridge from/ to platform 1, or for disabled visitors, with staff attendance, via improved ramps and a level crossing at the north end of platforms. (Note: The majority of train services arrive/depart from platform 1, adjacent to the station building).

- Disabled access will be provided into all public areas of both the existing station and new buildings and also, wherever possible, into staff areas. A new disabled wc facility will also be incorporated.
- Car park for staff (relocated from station drive): Vehicular access will be as existing via Station Lane off Hollybush Road, thence via existing SVR access road to the point opposite the south end of the boiler shop giving access to a new staff car park in front of the new hostel.
- Disabled access will also be provided into the hostel complex, with accessible bedrooms on the first floor, and showers and wc's on both levels.
- Road vehicle deliveries/collections to and from the locomotive works: This will remain as existing, via Station Lane off Hollybush Road, to points to the north and west of the boiler shop.
- All external pedestrian areas will be hard-surfaced with pedestrian/vehicular areas delineated by flush kerbs of contrasting material and/or colour. Signage will also be of a consistently high quality, and external lighting will be provided in all areas regularly accessed by the public.

Overall, the proposed new facilities are not expected to generate any appreciable net increase in road traffic, though the provision of a one-way system to serve the new car park will generate additional vehicle movements onto Oldbury Road with a corresponding reduction to Hollybush Road.

## **7.0 MAINTENANCE**

Wherever possible, traditional building materials for both new-build and refurbishment works will be of the same high quality as those originally specified by the Great Western Railway company. In consequence, it is anticipated that both the robustly-detailed buildings and their related external works should not only enjoy long service lives, but that they should also age and weather naturally, and require minimal maintenance. A similar policy will prevail towards landscape works, where the Great Western Railway's policy of planting low maintenance ground cover plants, and a select range of evergreen shrubs and trees at many of its stations will be resurrected to create an authentic backdrop to the driveway and the station.

## **8.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

As referred to above, the Bridgnorth Station Conservation Plan is approved Severn Valley Railway policy, a copy of which accompanies this document. Pages 14 to 31 of the Conservation Plan refer to the significance issues, and should be read therefore as part of this document.