

North Wessex Downs AONB

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Chilterns Conservation Board

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21st October 2015

To:

**Simon Maple,
Route Programme Sponsor (Western) Great Western Route Modernisation,
Network Rail**

By email to: simon.maple@networkrail.co.uk

Dear Simon,

Great Western electrification - Chilterns and North Wessex Downs AONBs

Thank you for your Statement of Intention letter of 19th October 2015 confirming your commitment to review viable design options for the overhead line equipment (OLE) within the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the output of which will form the basis of a public consultation in early 2016.


This is welcome, but we do not support the caveats that altering or replacing the equipment is only to take place if the design option review and consultation results highlight that you should, and subject to costs and agreement of your funders. Network Rail is under a legal duty under section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONBs, not just if a certain number of people want you to or it falls within your budget to do so. Indeed any budget set should have had regard to all statutory requirements and should have recognised that electrification through protected landscapes would be likely to have budget implications. Failure to budget adequately merely adds to the failure to have regard to the need to conserve and enhance the AONB. The Environmental Statement produced for you by consultants Atkins in 2013 had already identified that OLE would have a large adverse effect on the AONBs.

The CRoW Act duty is not restricted to the AONB boundaries but includes outside the AONBs where development would affect the AONBs. We would like to work with you to evaluate which parts of the mainline fall within the setting of the AONB and also require special consideration.

The AONB bodies need the assurance from Network Rail that retrospective work will take place in the future, if we are to allow the harmful installation to continue on the test track section, which we appreciate is your top priority. Without such an assurance the legal avenue remains open.

The clear impression you conveyed at the meeting on 14th October 2015 was that it is your intention to carry out the work to remove and replace the portal structures. Please modify and re-issue the Statement of Intention to reflect that you intend to carry out this retrospective work and that provision will be made for funding. We would welcome involvement now and on an on-going basis with the pre-consultation design work and selection of design options for consultation. Involving the AONBs, the Councils, Natural England and Historic England in an AONB Design Review Panel should help highlight issues at source and minimise costs and delays. Should you require any further information do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Sue Holden
Chief Officer
Chilterns Conservation Board



Henry Oliver
Director
North Wessex Downs AONB

Cc: Ian Halsam (South Stoke and Goring Railway Action Group)