

0 5 MAY 2016



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3 May 2016

Dear Lucy, Henry,

Consultation process for Great Western electrification - Chilterns and North Wessex Downs AONBs

I am writing further to the letter from Simon Maple, dated 19 October 2015, and your recent meetings with my Great Western electrification team. We remain aware of your concerns regarding the visual impact of the overhead line equipment (OLE) that is currently being installed within the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

As we have explained, the Government has confirmed the electrification of the Great Western Mainline as a top priority. It is the intention that the works in the area continue as planned, as this section of the Great Western Mainline will form the test track for the new Intercity Express rolling stock from around September 2016.

I can re-affirm Network Rail's previous commitment to undertake a review of viable design options for the OLE within the AONBs, the output of which will form the basis of a public consultation later this year.

When my team met with you on 11 March 2016, they were able to confirm that we have engaged industry experts, Balfour Beatty, to undertake the review of options. This review will include a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which will be undertaken by specialist consultants, 2B Landscape Consultancy Ltd. We have also committed to set up an Advisory Group to comment on the mitigation options and provide guidance on the impact on the AONB, and we welcome your commitment to engage with this forum. My team plan to give you a further update when you next meet them on 4th May.

I also re-affirm that should the outcome of the design options and the public consultation highlight that Network Rail should undertake retrospective works to alter or replace the installed apparatus, Network Rail intends to undertake such works as are necessary subject to costs and the agreement of funding. The entire project is paid for wholly by public funds so we have a duty to minimize the costs to Government and the taxpayer whilst delivering the economic and environmental benefits that an electric train service will bring.

Such works may result in disruption to the operational railway, and so we are unable to commit to a timescale at this point (as this will depend very much on the nature of the intervention required), but we will continue to engage with your organisations throughout the design and consultation stages.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Mark Carne', written in a cursive style.

Mark Carne
Chief Executive

Cc: Nia Griffiths (Head of Environment & Consents, Great Western Electrification)
Andrew Baker (Natural England)
Ian Haslam (South Stoke & Goring Gap Railway Action Group)