

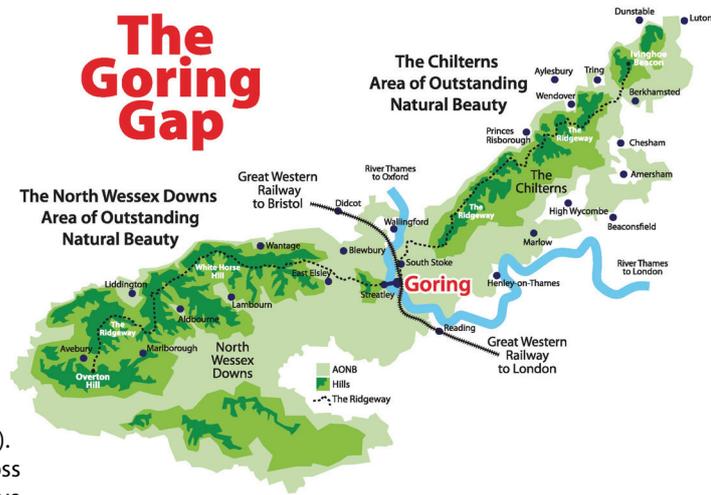
Can you help 'Save the Goring Gap'?

Help is needed to minimise the devastating permanent visual impact of electrification by Network Rail

The 'Goring Gap' is unique in the UK in that it is a valley situated within two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Oxfordshire side is in The Chilterns AONB and the Berkshire side in the North Wessex Downs AONB. With its spectacular views, it is one of the most beautiful valleys in southern England and has been described as a 'Jewel in the Crown' of the Chilterns AONB.

AONBs have similar legal environmental protection as a National Park and therefore when Network Rail started installing its electrification system, it was assumed it would be very much aware of its protected status and would have regard for this fact and modify the standard metal infrastructure it is using throughout the Great Western line from London to Bristol to a more sympathetic and less visually intrusive design in the Goring Gap. **It has not.**

The law says bodies like Network Rail should have regard for the natural beauty of AONBs and even its own **Environmental Statement says electrification will have a major adverse impact on the landscape.** But Network Rail is using a standard design through here: a visually obtrusive metal 'portal' design (Photo A). This design has upright metal stanchions and large horizontal metal portals across the top (for suspending the wiring) and we believe that a far less visually obtrusive alternative could, and should, be found for the 2 mile route through the Goring Gap. For example, Network Rail currently uses a less visually obtrusive design (as seen in Photo B) for the 12 miles of its high speed track for the Heathrow Express service to Paddington, which has 98% reliability. Also, High Speed 2 has specially commissioned aesthetic designs for its electrification. So, it is possible to mitigate the standard design with alternatives which comply with modern standards, if Network Rail chooses. However, it stubbornly refuses to depart from its one-size-fits-all design position. RAG believes this is wrong and is trying to do something about it.



Railway Action Group (RAG) fully supports rail electrification and welcomes the benefits that will result from Greenhouse Gas emission reductions, increased energy efficiencies and noise reduction. It has no wish at all to delay the modernisation programme.

RAG was formed immediately after Network Rail's electrification designs were discovered in March 2015, the same time installation began in the Goring Gap. RAG has representatives from South Stoke and Goring and its purpose is to protect our local environment from the most devastating visual assault the Goring Gap has ever experienced. RAG is working alongside the local authorities and the conservation boards of the AONBs and has the support of John Howell, our Henley MP.

RAG is asking Network Rail to meet its legal obligation to 'conserve the natural beauty of AONBs' by simply using a less visually intrusive design along two short, elevated and highly visible stretches of track through South Stoke and Goring. The law and Network Rail's own Environmental Statement supports this view.

A - The new 'standard design' for the GWR line, including The Goring Gap



Network Rail says "comparative visual intrusiveness is a matter of opinion and not a matter of fact". Do you agree that the difference between Photos A and B is simply just a matter of opinion?

Network Rail is able to install electrification infrastructure on its own land under 'Permitted Development Rights' and does not need normal planning permission. However, it must still adhere to **legislation protecting AONBs, namely Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which states:** 'In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty'. The current installation cannot be described as either 'conserving' or 'enhancing' the natural beauty of an AONB. **RAG believes this is unlawful.**

If Network Rail had regard for the AONBs, and its own Environmental Statement, it would have commissioned a special, lower visual impact and suitably sympathetic variation of its standard design for this section of track. It did not, and this confirms Network Rail had not considered the Goring Gap and the AONBs as a special area and has no regard for conserving its natural beauty. Network Rail refuses to remedy the situation by mitigating the standard design.

RAG has been trying to persuade NR for the past six months to **modify its design** in the two sections of the track which are elevated on embankments where the infrastructure is most noticeable (a total of about 2 miles) in and around Goring and South Stoke. NR has now written to RAG to say it will undertake 'remedial' action - if it is shown to have breached the law. To date, it refuses to accept it has, even with all the evidence that is clearly there to see. **With your active support we believe it is not too late to get NR to modify the design. Please watch the film on our website and together we could still 'Save the Goring Gap' from further landscape damage.**



B - An 'alternative design', currently in use in London

- ◆ For further information or more details visit our RAG website **www.savegoringgap.org.uk**
- ◆ To help in any way or sign the petition visit the '**How to Help**' page of the website.
- ◆ Please forward the website and film on to help spread the word on how to **Save the Goring Gap** from further environmental damage.

Thank you.