Manager Community Relations
Western House
1, Hollbrook Way,
Swindon
SN1 1BD

20th December, 2015

Dear Sir,

I wish to express my and my neighbours deep concern and distress resulting from your destruction of the wooded area adjacent to the A329 in Lower Basildon.

From Skew Bridge for a stretch of a quarter of a mile there was a wooded area which separated and shielded the railway and the unsightly gantries from the A329. During November this was destroyed leaving a completely open view of the railway.

This has all been done in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where the removal of so many trees and so much shrubbery is damaging both visually and acoustically. It is notable that the adjacent strip of land has been planted with saplings which will eventually hide the railway. How ironic that they are striving to improve the environment and you have, in a few days, destroyed an already established area of mature trees but then planted saplings!

The A329 between Pangbourne and Streatley has been designated by the AA as a Scenic Route. Your actions have apparently no regard for this nor the increased noise levels which the band of greenery helped alleviate.

At the end of October Network Rail held an open event and consultation in South Stoke. The major issue was the unsightly nature of the gantries and associated attachments and, particularly, the fact you had done nothing to mitigate the impact. It would be churlish to suggest that the demolition of this wooded area and all the trees at Pangbourne station was in any way retribution for the concerns expressed by your "Railway Neighbours" but juxtaposition of the timing is an unfortunate coincidence.

You designated us as "Railway Neighbours", and more recently as "Neighbours". During the year I have received well in excess of twenty letters from you and attended the briefing in South Stoke. You have advised us about many issues including noise, disruption to services, safety and track improvements, but nothing about the destruction of the wooded areas. Why?

I would be most grateful for a clear explanation of why you have undertaken this unwarranted vandalism.

As a supporter of electrification I am dismayed by the apparent overall mis-management of timescales and costings. Nevertheless, with issues such as this, you do seem to be going out of your way unnecessarily to provoke the wrath and indignation of your Neighbours.

Yours faithfully,

Charles Hughes

c.c. Mark Carne — Network Rail
Rob Beasley — Chairman, Basildon Parish Council
Ron Bridle — Railway Action Group

Mr C CHughes

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Recvd 2.1.16

Network Rail Reference: 151229-000084

Dear Mr Hughes,

Thank you for your recent correspondence in regards to cutting of tress in Lower Basildon.

The recent work in this area is part of our Railway Upgrade plan to electrify the Great Western Mainline.

This work required the removal of all woody and overhanging vegetation within 6.6 metres of the outside running rail on both sides of the track or up to our boundary fence; whichever we reach first.

This essential work is required to facilitate construction of the overhead line equipment (OLE) and will allow for the safe operation of the overhead line electrification system by removing the touch or fall potential from vegetation onto the OLE when the line becomes energised.

Once cleared, this area will be maintained to avoid vegetation encroachment.

Trees and plants can cause serious safety and performance problems for the railway.

With over 20,000 miles of track and an estimated 2.5 million trees growing on the line-side we have to focus our resources on keeping the railway safe and running as smoothly as possible.

Our climate, variety of trees and train frequency mean that Britain's railway faces more serious challenges than the networks in most other countries.

Unmanaged trees and plants can cause serious safety problems for the railway by covering up signals or falling on to tracks and overhead power lines.

Overgrown trees and plants can also get in the way of our workers finding safe refuge when trains are passing and hamper their ability to see trains approaching.

We are very aware of the impact that removing trees and vegetation can have on local communities.

We know that it can come as a shock for people who have become accustomed to lines of trees or hedges near their homes or workplaces.

But for the safety of our passengers and employees we have no option but to take action to reduce this threat.

With respect to areas with the presence of protected species, we are working closely with Natural England and will apply appropriate mitigation where necessary.

I hope this information is helpful, and I am sorry that I am unable to be of any further assistance on this occasion.

However, if you have any additional questions or concerns about the work taking place in your area please call our dedicated 24-hour National Helpline on: 03457 11 41 41 or visit www.networkrail.co.uk/contactus

Yours faithfully

Clare Dingwall
Community Relations Executive