

Objection by Wareham Town Trust to proposal for pedestrian ramps and closure of pedestrian crossing at Wareham Railway Station  
PDC Refs 6/2015/0478 (Planning application)  
& 6/2015/0479 (Listed Building application)

1. The Town Trust strenuously objects to these applications on the following summarised grounds, which are addressed in more detail below:
  - The design and materials of the ramps would fundamentally harm the character and appearance of the area and the significance of the listed station building and bridge contrary to adopted local and national planning policy
  - There is no 'fall-back' position in that the previous scheme for ramps approved in 2013 cannot be implemented
  - The design and layout of the ramps would significantly reduce access between the two sides of Wareham on the north and south of the railway line due to their length and gradient and the consequent time taken to negotiate them including for people with disabilities and their carers and this would be contrary to the Equality Act 2010
  - The ramps would be likely to increase crime or at least the fear of crime owing to their inappropriate cage-like design
  - These combined effects would lead to adverse impact on the vitality and viability of Wareham town centre in that it would be likely to lose trade
  - There are alternative options to improve safety at this crossing which would not result in the significant harm indicated above

Harm to character and appearance of the area and to listed building

2. Wareham Station is a Grade II listed building and the recently refurbished adjacent footbridge falls within its curtilage and is also therefore part of the listing, as acknowledged by the Council in requiring a listed building application. **The LB application should be considered together with the planning application at the Committee on 30 September and not under delegated powers.** The station building and bridge are modest Victorian railway structures which define the entrance to Wareham for passengers arriving by train.
3. The same cannot be said for the proposed ramps. They would be an industrial-scaled standard engineering solution akin the pedestrian ramps and bridges over major trunk roads, entirely inappropriate in design for a small country town like Wareham with its restrained listed station building and bridge, to which these ramps would be attached.
4. The ramps would dominate the local area including the existing bridge and station building dwarfing their simple forms and spoiling their significance as listed buildings. The Council's planning officer admitted this is respect

of the extant 2013 permission and this proposal is for a structure of a similar size.

5. The ramps would be very large structures. They would be nearly 200m long and in their main sections run above each other giving an enclosed tunnel effect as well as being of substantial total width and reaching a height of nearly 6m. The bulk of the structures would be exacerbated by the high brick walls to the southern ramp, the galvanised railings to both the northern and southern ramps, and by the privacy screens at the eastern end of both ramps. This insensitive design approach would give the ramps a solid bulky appearance which would increase the impact of their mass at odds with the simple design of the listed station building and bridge.
6. It is clear that a standard engineering safety solution has been adopted at the cheapest possible cost, which ignores the listed building and the wider context of the town within which they would permanently sit.
7. Purbeck Local Plan Part 1 (PLP) **Policy D** states that the Council will expect development to positively integrate with its surroundings and demonstrate a positive approach to sustainable development through site layout and building design. The ramps would fail to do so for the above reasons and would therefore fail to comply with this Policy.
8. S16(2) & 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 state that in considering whether to grant listed building consent and planning permission respectively the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting.
9. PLP **Policy LHH** states that development will be expected to conserve the appearance, setting and character of heritage assets and wherever appropriate enhance and improve them. Paragraph 131 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets.
10. The proposal does neither and would mar the significance of the listed station structures. It would lead to **substantial harm** to the listed building in terms of paragraph 133 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as admitted by the planning officer in his 2013 Committee report. This states that permission should be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits. In this case the claimed benefits in terms of railway safety would not be substantial and there are alternative ways of improving this (see below).

11. In summary, the substantial harm to the character and appearance of the area and the loss of significance to the listed building contrary to adopted local and national planning policy constitute sufficient reasons in themselves to refuse both applications.

#### No 'fall-back' position

12. The extant 2013 permissions do not constitute a fall-back position in planning terms because the appellant has confirmed that the ramps the subject of those permissions cannot be manufactured and erected. These permissions should therefore be disregarded as material considerations in assessing the current applications.
13. Although the Council's planners may feel impelled to recommend them for approval following their positive pre-app advice to the applicants, there is no case to do so because the 2013 permissions are immaterial for the above reasons. The proposal should be treated on its own merits in terms of the development plan and other relevant material considerations.

#### Access between the north and south of the town

14. The crossing is the only pedestrian access between the northern and southern parts of Wareham – there is no other pedestrian access because the flyover does not have a footway.
15. The 1:20 gradient ramps are obviously designed to accommodate the ambulant disabled, those in wheelchairs and buggies, and parents pushing children in pushchairs/prams. However, at present everyone merely has to cross the short distance over the railway tracks at the pedestrian surface level crossing. In contrast the above groups of people will have to walk nearly an extra 200m on a slope of 1:20.
16. There have been several objections from members of the public on this ground alone. This is unsurprising because the effect of these ramps and this additional distance would constitute a serious impediment to access between the Northport, Northmoor & Carey and Wareham town centre. The above groups would be particularly seriously affected to the point that the ramps would effectively cut the town in half. People who are quite content now to use the surface level crossing would be deterred from crossing the railway lines.
17. This would not only be the disabled and parents with young children. It would also include the general population, especially the elderly because whilst it would still be possible to use the retained staircases instead of

the long ramps these stairs are steep and would put off many people from using them. The stairs and ramps would not be comparable with the current ease of access afforded by the surface level crossing. Whilst the ramps specifications would enable use by all relevant groups of users the proposal would not comply with the Equality Act 2010 because it would severely constrain and realistically substantially reduce access for disabled people and their carers. Network Rail has a duty to comply with the Equality Act. It has been stated that they could in any case simply close the existing crossing in 2038 but that is not the case because they must comply with the Equality Act.

18. This would be contrary to PLP **Policy IAT**, which states that improving accessibility within Purbeck will be achieved through better provision of local services and facilities that reduce the need to travel, especially by car. The effect of the proposed ramps will be to significantly worsen accessibility between the southern and northern sides of Wareham essentially cutting the town in half. This will encourage additional car journeys. Once people get in their cars they are often just as likely to drive to Poole than to use the facilities in Wareham town centre and the ramps would therefore be very likely to contribute to loss of trade to the shops and other businesses in the town centre, detrimental to its overall vitality and viability.
19. Policy IAT also states that development should provide for improved safety and convenience of travel, including improved access to local services and facilities by foot, cycle and public transport. The proposed ramps would fail to do this because of their length and gradient. On the contrary they would lessen access to local facilities, especially access by those living on the north side of the railway line to Wareham town centre. They would discourage walking and cycling.
20. In summary the proposed ramps would significantly reduce access between the two sides of the railway line, which would impact particularly hard on people with disabilities and the elderly who currently use the surface crossing. The applicant states that this is a busy crossing so the proposal would affect many people. The proposal would reduce access by people on foot and cycling to local facilities and encourage additional use of private cars detrimental to Wareham town centre. It would therefore be contrary to PLP Policy IAT and to advice on sustainable modes of transport in the NPPF.

#### Impact on crime and the fear of crime

21. As the photo montages submitted by the applicant show, the doubled up ramps with their brick walls and railings would be very forbidding and

unpleasant to potential users in the same way that led the applicant to rule out creating subways.

22. The montages clearly show that users would feel themselves to be hemmed into what would feel like a tunnel on the lower ramps because the galvanised railings on both ramps would constrain light to and views from the ramps. This would create an oppressive constrained feeling and would also make crimes of assault or harassment easier to perpetrate. Whether or not such crimes actually took place the fear of such possible crime would be sufficient to deter a number of people, especially frail elderly people, from using the ramps in the same way that people avoid using underpasses. Indeed the ramps would be worse in this respect because both the northern and southern ramps are considerably longer than the average underpass, for example those in Poole town centre.
23. Again, crime or the fear of crime would further reduce accessibility between the two sides of the town, discouraging walking and cycling and adversely impacting on the vitality and viability of the town centre.

#### Alternative safety options and implications for these applications

24. The applicant's case is predicated on the basis that these ramps are the only viable way of improving safety for those crossing the railway line. This assumes that the present crossing is fundamentally unsafe. But this is simply not the case. There have been no accidents involving people crossing the line in living memory, let alone any fatalities.
25. The applicant has apparently ruled out a subway, lifts or indeed simply retaining the crossing whilst linking its closure to the approach of trains, which would be the most sensible option and possibly the cheapest.
26. Whilst proposals for development do not have to be demonstrated on the basis of need, there is actually no need for these ramps. Given the significant objections indicated above which are each sufficient in themselves to warrant refusal of the applications, the lack of need for these expensive ugly ramps which would significantly reduce accessibility by foot and cycle between the two sides of Wareham is a material factor that should be taken into account. The applicant's engineer conceded at the consultation event in Wareham Town Hall in June that if the applications were refused the applicant would have to consider alternative safety improvements including the possibility of retaining the existing surface level crossing.
27. Whilst not a planning issue as such, it is worth pointing out that the Office for Rail Regulation must consider not only the safety of those

crossing the railway line when considering closing an existing crossing but also the effect on the local community. The applicant appears to have given no consideration to the latter in making this proposal.

### Conclusion

28. The Minister for Transport with responsibility for railways wrote to the Trust recently and confirmed that the planning application(s) are the relevant time to consider the benefits of the ramps and the proposed closure of the surface level crossing.

29. For all the above reasons these applications should be refused and the surface level crossing retained.

Nick Fagan  
Chairman of Wareham Town Trust