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15 May 2023

Dear Roger Trapp,

### **RE Sevenoaks Tunnel Cutting – Network Rail works**

Thank you for your letter to our chief executive, Andrew Haines, of 10 May 2023 about the emergency earthworks stabilisation that we are carrying out in the Sevenoaks railway tunnel cutting. I am sorry that you and the community that you represent are unhappy with this project, and with the way that we have communicated what is happening and why.

At the outset I would like to reassure you that following the feedback we received at our virtual drop-in session and from residents directly, we will not be using Sevenoaks Weald as the principal route for our lorries to access or leave this site.

In your letter to us you have raised a number of concerns about the work itself as well as our approach to communicating with local residents. I hope that this letter addresses your concerns and provides you with reassurance that Network Rail is committed to being a considerate neighbour, and that we work closely with local communities to minimise the impact of our work on them so far as that is possible.

### **The works – what we are doing and why**

The Sevenoaks railway tunnel cutting is in danger of failing due to problems with its drainage. Our monitoring has shown that the ground has begun to move, increasing the risk of a landslip or loose material falling onto the track that could pose a direct and serious safety risk to the travelling public. Our work is therefore essential, and we have had to work quickly to understand the condition of the cutting and then commence our stabilisation works. This will include the re-grading of the earthworks to reduce its height and angle, and this work necessitates the removal of a considerable amount of soil from the site. The only way this soil can be removed from site is via tipper lorries.

I am sorry that you felt that our presentation of our work at the recent virtual drop-in event was a *fait accompli*, but fundamentally with work of this sort we don't have any option other than removing a very substantial amount of soil from the site, together with other activity such as installing soil nails and a catch-fence in order to shore-up the earthworks further and prevent loose material from falling onto the tracks.

You have also raised concerns over our work to remove vegetation along the cutting. Re-grading the failing earthworks requires the removal of approximately 100 metres of vegetation. As you

say, this area is an AONB and this has been done with all the necessary licenses in place. We have worked with the Environmental Officer of the Local Authority to ensure that we are working in a proportionate manner than minimises our impact so far as possible on the environment, for example by avoiding removing trees during birds' nesting season or disturbing dormice. We will be replanting the crest of the ridge after the completion of work.

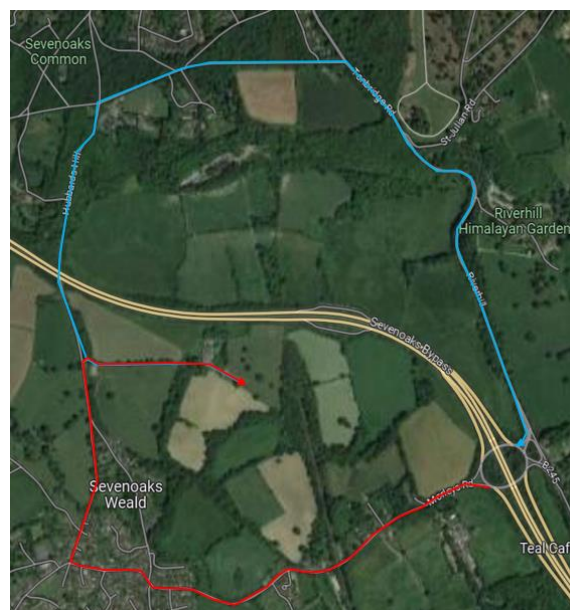
You have also requested that we use the soil we are removing from the cutting to create a noise-barrier between the village and the A21. This is not something that we are planning to do. Constructing a new earthwork by the road would be an expensive project that we are not funded to deliver, and we do not have access to land that would be suitable for this purpose. Additionally, constructing earthworks is a technically complicated endeavour and building something that will be stable requires more planning than just heaping up spoil from another site. Furthermore, we do not know if the material that we are removing from the failing cutting (itself a man-made earthwork) is suitable for re-use, or whether it would need to be treated to bring it up to the correct specification, and if so, how.

Our works programme starts in May and we expect work to conclude in November 2023. We will keep local residents updated on our progress, as well as on any overnight or particularly noisy works that may be required.

### Listening to local feedback on lorry movements

Following the feedback that we have received both from the virtual drop-in meeting and from other residents' feedback we have worked with the project team to reduce, so far as possible, the number of lorry movements through Sevenoaks Weald.

The map below shows the change that we have made to our plans following the feedback that we have received. Originally, we had intended to run all lorries through the village along the red line on the map. Following feedback, we adjusted this to half the number travelling through the village; this plan would have seen lorries moving in a clockwise direction from Morley's Roundabout and travel through Sevenoaks Weald to access the site following the red route on the map below; before leaving by again moving clockwise along the blue route (via Gracious Lane). This pathing would ensure, so far as practicable, that lorries travelled in the same clockwise direction and so would not have to pass each other on country lanes.





Following further feedback we have adjusted our plans again, and lorries will now primarily – but not exclusively, as I shall explain – use the blue route via Gracious Lane to travel to and from the site.

At our virtual drop-in event we heard loud and clear from you and from residents that lorry movements are a substantial concern, and we are pleased that this feedback has been adopted into our programme and in this way we have reduced the impact of our work on the local community.

That said, there may well still be some large vehicle movements through the village. While the route via Gracious Lane is our primary route to get both to and from the site, I cannot guarantee that it won't from time to time be necessary for some lorries to travel via Sevenoaks Weald as a secondary route option. Additionally, our earth-moving equipment will require an 'abnormal load' lorry to reach the site, and we are working with the Council now on the route that this will take. The route this takes is a decision for the Council, so I cannot guarantee that this abnormal load won't be routed through the village if that proves to be the best-available option. Whatever route it follows, this abnormal load will travel with a police escort, with traffic diversions, traffic marshals, and road closures where necessary to keep people and property safe during its journey to the site.

In your letter you have questioned the suitability of our lorries travelling via Hubbards Hill and then making the right turn onto Gracious Lane. To confirm, this is now our primary route for the lorries, both to and from the site. This is the next-best alternative to accessing the site via Sevenoaks Weald. This route has the advantage of being suitably wide throughout, and, additionally, not having weight restrictions. We have undertaken a traffic analysis of this route and it is suitable for the level of traffic that our works will be generating and the nature of vehicle that we require.

You have also raised an interesting suggestion of utilising the A21 layby to the north. Creating a new access point onto the public highway and negotiating with the landowner and the highways authority is a more complicated (and therefore lengthier) matter than utilising an existing route via which we already have the landowner's permission to access the railway. Given the condition of the cutting we have had to establish access quickly to determine what works are required to rectify the issue. Furthermore, accessing via the layby would have required trees to be felled just to create the access route – this is not the case on our chosen access route via Hubbards Hill. Finally, creating a new access point onto the property would have security implications for the landowner that could be avoided entirely by using the existing access. For these reasons we have chosen to access the property via Hubbards Hill rather than the A21 layby.

### **Our approach to communication**

You have raised concerns and complaints about the way that we have communicated what we are doing, and why. I agree with you that more consultation may well have avoided creating unnecessary distress locally, and I am sorry for that; however, the rectification of these earthworks does require quick action that does not align with conducting a full local consultation exercise.

I am particularly sorry that you did not learn about our virtual drop-in session until the day of the event itself. We aim to provide residents and stakeholders with ten days' notice ahead of a drop-in event, whether in-person or virtual. We did write to all residents within 500 metres of the work site, as is our standard operating protocol, but unfortunately the bulk of the village is just outside of this threshold. We will adjust this so that inhabitants of the village receive written updates to us on this project in the future. We also wrote, via email, to the District Councillors and Laura Trott MP on 20<sup>th</sup> April giving them advance notice of our drop-in session and works programme, and I regret that we did not include you and your colleagues on the Parish Council in that

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correspondence. I am sorry for this oversight, and I will ensure that the Parish Council is included in correspondence of this nature in the future.

While it is good that you were able to attend our drop-in session, it would clearly have been preferable for you to have received advance notice of this event and therefore of our activity in the area more generally. Nevertheless, I am pleased that we have been able to take on board the feedback we received from local residents and their representatives who attended the virtual drop-in meeting, which has resulted in our adjustment of the lorry paths to the site in the manner described above. In this way I think we have matched our stated principles of working collaboratively and sensitively with the communities affected by our work on the railway.

I hope that this letter has provided you with reassurance that we are approaching these necessary and urgent works in a proportionate and considerate matter, and that we are seeking to minimise the impact of our work on the local community so far as that is possible. I would be very happy to meet with you, along with the project team, if you still have concerns about any aspect of this project.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'W' followed by a long horizontal line that tapers to the right.

William AJG Knighton  
Senior Public Affairs Manager  
Southern Region