

Royston Railway Station

2024019

Section 73A Report

February 2025



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Application overview

1.1.1 This application is made under Section 73A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 ('the Act') to vary Condition 4 of approved planning application 10/02085/1SU so that a previously installed public address ('PA') system can remain partially operational at Royston railway station, North Hertfordshire.

1.1.2 RJP town planners ('RJP') has prepared this application on behalf of Govia Thameslink Railway ('GTR'), the train operating company, in consultation with Network Rail ('NR'), the landowner.

1.1.3 It is proposed to vary Condition 4 to read as follows:

Condition 4: The existing public address system on Platform 2, including speakers RYS/P2//22/SPK/04, RYS/P2//22/SPK/06 and RYS/P2//22/SPK/08 as indicated on Drawing RYS002, dated 12/11/2020, must be set to a minimum decibel level of 65 dB(A) and not exceed a maximum decibel level of 90 dB(A) at the source for both manual and automatic announcements, in accordance with the Noise Monitoring Report undertaken by Encompass Engineering, ref: EESL-GTRN-REP-003, Revision 3 dated 20th February 2025. Removed speakers RYS/P2//22/SPK/05 and RYS/P2//22/SPK/07 must not be reinstated.

1.1.4 As this Section 73A variation relates to a prior approval permission under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 ('the GPDO'), it would be appropriate to maintain this decision-making framework for the determination of this application. See Section 2.2 of this report.

1.2 Background

- 1.2.1 Application 10/02085/1SU, approved in October 2011, granted an extension to the “eastern end of 'down' line with 1.5 metre high looped fence to rear” via what is now Part 18 Class A Prior Approval under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (‘the GPDO’). Condition 4 required that “*the public address system shall not be extended to serve the new platform, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority*”.
- 1.2.2 In 2020, GTR installed the PA system on the extended platform without approval from the Local Planning Authority. North Hertfordshire Council (‘the Council’) notified GTR of this breach on 29th October 2024.
- 1.2.3 Following correspondence between RJP and the Council, the Council confirmed the matter could be addressed via Section 73 in a letter dated 2nd December 2024. Correspondence with the Council, including the rationale and agreement for a Section 73 (specifically a Section 73A) application, is included at **Appendix A**.

1.3 Structure of this report

- 1.3.1 This report is structured as follows:
- i. Site and planning context
 - ii. Description of works to be retained
 - iii. Justification for condition variation
 - iv. Summary and conclusion

2.0 SITE AND PLANNING CONTEXT

2.1 The application site and surrounds

- 2.1.1 Royston railway station is located approximately 700m north of Royston town centre in North Hertfordshire. It is a two-platform station run by GTR, serving London King's Cross, Brighton and Cambridge. Vehicle and pedestrian access are both achieved from Kneesworth Street and Old North Road to the east.
- 2.1.2 The station's immediate surrounds comprise open air car parks, with primarily residential development beyond. Leete Place, a residential street, is located just north of the eastern end of the extended Platform 2. Some mixed-use development is located to the east and south east of the main station area, along Kneesworth Street and Old North Road.

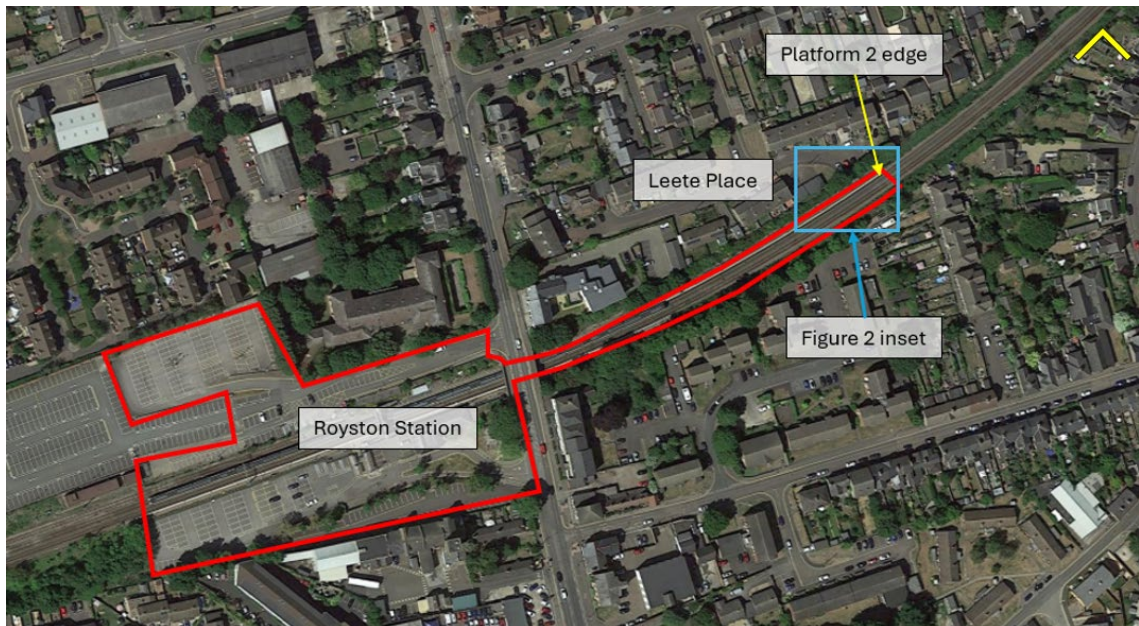


Figure 1 - Aerial location plan (February 2024)



Figure 2 – Leete Place interface inset (February 2025)

2.2 Planning decision-making framework

- 2.2.1 In 2011, 10/02085/1SU was processed as a Part 17 Class A prior approval in line with the 1995 iteration of the GPDO. This has now been superseded by the 2015 instrument, of which the equivalent provision is Part 18, Class A.
- 2.2.2 The PA system was not included in this application as NR did not intend to install one at that time. The Officers' Report confirms that Condition 4 was put in place so that the potential impacts of one could be considered at a later date if relevant: *"I have recommended a condition to ensure that the pa [sic] system will not be extended without our agreement."*

2.2.3 Had the PA system been included, it would have been considered as part of the prior approval process, which limits a decision-making authority's discretion to the following aspects¹:

- i. If the proposal ought to be and could reasonably be carried out elsewhere on the land
- ii. If the design or external appearance of any building, bridge, aqueduct, pier or dam would injure the amenity of the neighbourhood and is reasonably capable of modification to avoid such injury.

2.2.4 As this Section 73A variation related to a prior approval permission under the GPDO, it would be appropriate to maintain this decision-making framework for the determination of this application.

¹ *GDPO 205, Schedule 2, Part 18, Class A, Section A.2*

3.0 DESCRIPTION OF WORKS TO BE RETAINED

3.1 PA system

- 3.1.1 Included with this application is a schematic (Drawing RYS002, dated 12/11/2020) which contains details of the additional PA system implemented in 2020. Eight speakers were installed across Platform 2 (reference RYS/P2/Z2/SPK/01 – 08 on the accompanying schematics) along with associated amps and cabling.
- 3.1.2 The speakers are a combination of “CAD 10/T” and “TOA CS Series” models, designed for “*outdoor commercial sound system applications*”. The specification sheets for both models are also included in this at **Appendix B**, detailing the speakers can operate at a maximum of around 89-100 decibels (‘dB’) when measured within one metre of the speaker.



Figure 3 - Installed speaker system (GTR, December 2024)

3.1.3 The Council and GTR reported complaints had been received from local residents regarding the noise generated from these speakers. As a result, GTR has undertaken the following steps to mitigate the address residents' concerns:

- Removed the existing (pre-10/02085/1SU) speaker adjacent to amplifier RYS/PA/AMP/22/05.
- Removed speakers RYS/P2//22/SPK/05 and 07.
- Turned off speakers RYS/P2//22/SPK/04 and 06.
- Limited announcements to speaker RYS/P2//22/SPK/08.
- Reduced volume levels for longline train/safety announcements.
- Reduced volume levels for roving and station mic levels.
- Adjusted the automatic gain control system (a piece of equipment which is designed to raise the longline announcement volume levels when the ambient noise is louder).

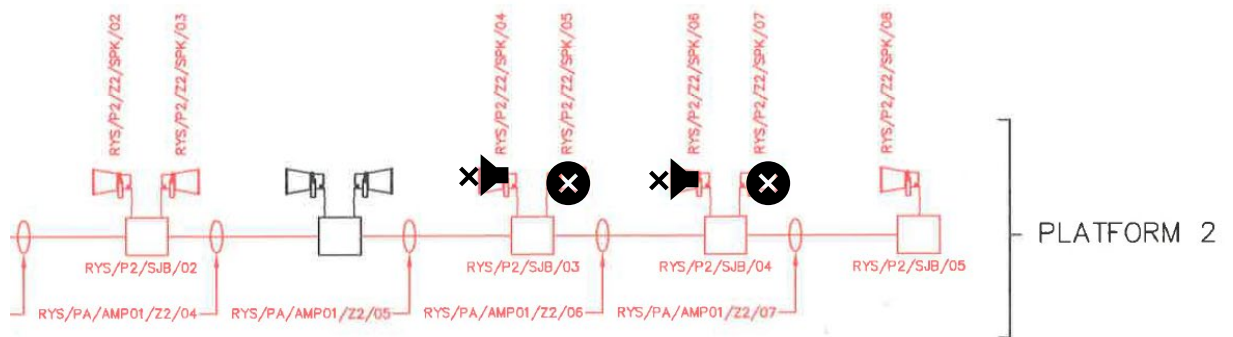


Figure 4 - Visualisation of the speaker removals/silencing at the end of Platform 2

3.1.4 A Noise Monitoring Report was undertaken against the above state and its recommendations have informed the proposed variation to Condition 4. See Section 4 for more details.

4.0 JUSTIFICATION FOR CONDITION VARIATION

4.1 Areas of discretion

- 4.1.1 As per Section 2.2 of this report, it is considered that factors relevant to the assessment of the application are limited to the need for the PA system to be in this location, or if its design would be injurious to the amenity of the neighbourhood. This is assessed in the following sections.

4.2 Ability for the proposal to be carried out elsewhere

Role of the PA system in near miss and close call prevention

- 4.2.1 NR describe a 'near miss' as "*unsafe event or act specifically involving a Train or On Track Machinery or On Track plant*"². A "close call" is a more general event, defined as "*anything that has the potential to cause harm or damage*". PA systems, such as the one at Royston railway station, play an essential role in calling attention to and managing these incidents to ensure the ongoing safety of passengers, staff and the general public.
- 4.2.2 In 2024 alone, there were 19 near miss event and close calls recorded by GTR at Royston. These are summarised as follows:
- Suicide intervention – 3
 - Irregular/unsafe train operation – 4
 - Unsafe construction works – 1

² <https://safety.networkrail.co.uk/jargon-buster/near-miss/>

- Unsafe general conditions – 2
- Passenger accident – 3
- Possession of an offensive weapon – 1
- Trespass – 5

4.2.3 The details of incidents recorded since 2018 is included as **Appendix C**. However, as this is confidential and sensitive information, this has only been supplied to the Council's Enforcement Team and is not submitted as part of the application.

4.2.4 Incidents have occurred across one or both platforms, so it is clear the retention of the extended PA system across Platform 2 is essential for maintaining the safety and wellbeing of railway staff and users.

Role of the PA system during rail replacement events

4.2.5 Royston is a key node on the route between Cambridge and London King's Cross, serving the majority of services that pass through, including key commuter services. For this reason, when there is planned engineering works or a network disruption, Royston often accommodates a rail replacement bus service either to Cambridge or London.

4.2.6 The existing PA system across both platforms is essential in managing passenger diversion, crowd control, customer welfare and delays during these unpredictable periods, and therefore it is critical that it is retained. A Station Operating plan (**Appendix D**) is submitted to the Council's Enforcement Team to demonstrate this. Like **Appendix C**, this information is confidential and sensitive and should not be shared in public.

4.3 Injurious amenity impacts

Noise monitoring report

- 4.3.1 GTR appointed Encompass Engineering to undertake a Noise Monitoring Report of RYS/P2//22/SPK/04, 06 and 08 in order to analyse the noise impact to nearby residential receptors, primarily at Leete Place north of Platform 2, which was the closest.
- 4.3.2 The report has been submitted with this application. The key findings are summarised as follows:
- Prior to the monitoring assessment, the mitigation measures described in paragraph 3.1.3 of this report were in place. Speakers RYS/P2//22/SPK/04 and 06 were turned back on for testing.
 - The sources of noise from the speakers comprise both manual and automatic station announcements. Manual announcements were generally louder. Other sources of noise around Platform 2 include those generated from passing/stopping trains, like horns and brakes.
 - 55 dB(A) is the generally accepted noise guideline for acceptable residential amenity³.

³ World Health Organisation, *Guidelines for community noise*, February 1999, with a variation to 54 dB Lden (daily average) in a 2018 update but omitting location-specific exposure levels.

- In total, 61 speaker announcements were measured. The maximum A-weighted decibels (dbB(A))⁴ measured at Leete Place were 59.96 dbB(A) for manual speaker announcements and 52.83 dbB(A) for automatic. On average, these noise levels measured at 54.00 dbB(A) and 48.12 dbB(A) respectively at Leete Place.
- However, the overall average maximum decibels for any given 60 second interval at Leete Place was 48.98dB(A).
- Following the mitigation measures implemented as outlined in 3.1.3 of this report, the current speaker announcements fall under the maximum Network Rail standard (NR/L2/TEL/30134), but also fall under the minimum standard. This presents a health and safety risk.

4.3.3 As a result, the recommendation is that the noise levels for speaker announcements from RYS/P2//22/SPK/04, 06 and 08 is increased to achieve a stable minimum of 65db(A), assisted by the existing automatic gain control system if ambient noise disrupts this minimum (which it is not anticipated to).

4.3.4 Setting of these speakers at a stable minimum of 65db(A) is projected to reach 50.19 dB for any given 60 second interval at Leete Place, within the WHO guidelines. This recommendation has been reviewed by GTR's Head of Environment and Sustainability and has been confirmed to be acceptable.

⁴ A-weighting takes into account how the human ear perceives noise

Provisions of the Railways Act 1991

- 4.3.5 Section 122 of the Railways Act 1991 enables the use of land in connection with the provision of network services, station services or light maintenance services and with it a defence of statutory authority against proceedings related to 'nuisance'. This is a legislative acknowledgement that railway operations can give rise to a degree of unavoidable noise and disturbance.
- 4.3.6 NR state that where a complaint refers to noise from railway premises, the operator must demonstrate that they have used 'reasonable diligence' to control the noise or vibration⁵. As per Section 3.13, in response to feedback from local residents GTR has applied numerous mitigation measures. However, these adjustments have resulted in the minimum standards of NR/L2/TEL/30134 not always being met. The recommendations of the Noise Monitoring Report are that Speakers RYS/P2//22/SPK/04 and 06 should be turned back on, and those, along with 08, adjusted to meet the 65 dB(A) minimum.
- 4.3.7 RYS/P2//22/SPK/05 and 07 can remain decommissioned. Against the context of the Noise Monitoring Report findings, it is considered that this constitutes "reasonable diligence", as it involves the removal of two of the speakers in response to community feedback.

⁵ <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/communities/living-by-the-railway/noise-and-vibration/>

4.4 Conclusion

- 4.4.1 Section 4.2 of this report confirms that there is demonstrable need for the PA system across the extended portion of Platform 2 and that it could not be reasonably located elsewhere.
- 4.4.2 Section 4.3 describes the findings of the Noise Monitoring Report and confirms the mitigation measures that can remain so that its design would reduce the injurious effects to amenity of the neighbourhood.
- 4.4.3 This must be considered against the backdrop of Section 122 of Railways Act 1993, which is governmental acknowledgment that a degree of nuisance is inherent to the safe and necessary operation of the railway (exemplified by the details in Section 4.2. and 4.3).
- 4.4.4 For these reasons, the PA system should be retained with the following amendment to Condition 4, or similarly-worded amendment subject to agreement:

Condition 4: The existing public address system on Platform 2, including speakers RYS/P2//22/SPK/04, RYS/P2//22/SPK/06 and RYS/P2//22/SPK/08 as indicated on Drawing RYS002, dated 12/11/2020, must be set to a minimum decibel level of 65 dB(A) and not exceed a maximum decibel level of 90 dB(A) at the source for both manual and automatic announcements, in accordance with the Noise Monitoring Report undertaken by Encompass Engineering, ref: EESL-GTRN-REP-003, Revision 3 dated 20th February 2025. Removed speakers RYS/P2//22/SPK/05 and RYS/P2//22/SPK/07 must not be reinstated.

APPENDIX A – CORRESPONDENCE WITH COUNCIL

APPENDIX A – SPEAKER SPECIFICATIONS

APPENDIX C – ROYSTON STATION INCIDENT STATISTICS

Confidential and sensitive information – submitted only to Enforcement.

APPENDIX D – ROYSTON STATION RAIL REPLACEMENT OPERATING PLAN

Confidential and sensitive information – submitted only to Enforcement.