

My name is Michael Welch and I am a retired Civil and Structural Engineer with over 38 years experience in the railway industry with British Rail, Railtrack, Network Rail and latterly a Design Consultant. My work involved the design, construction and asset management on all types of structures. I also had experience of level crossings in their use, closure, and in the design and operation of temporary level crossings for major construction works by external organisations, such as the Highways Agency and the Welsh Office.

I am now a Councillor with Bures Hamlet Parish Council and I am here to explain why level crossing E54 at Bures should not be de-commissioned.

The Parish Council's objection is on the basis there is no suitable alternative route in place of crossing E54. Sighting distances for pedestrians, motor vehicles (which include large tipper lorries and farm vehicles) and trains are major considerations to be taken into account. Network Rail's own evidence clearly states that sighting distance for pedestrians in both directions are more than adequate for the required minimum. Measured distance each way is 499m. and minimum required is 106m., allowing a crossing time of 5-6 seconds. Sighting under the bridge 891 on Station Hill is minimal in both directions and highly unpredictable.

Some improvement may be made to the visibility at the level crossing if Network Rail managed lineside tree vegetation. Network Rail Standards specify vegetation should be cut back to give 3m. clearance between running rail and foliage for line speeds up to 50mph. Reduction in foliage would help to alleviate the shade sometimes experienced near the crossing.

All trains on the branch line with the exception of the very early morning empty stock and an early morning service train in the down direction stop at Bures Station, therefore the majority of trains pass over the crossing at less than line speed. On very rare occasions on-track machinery may be required to pass over the crossing, but these would be managed movements and more likely to occur overnight.

Network Rail in its evidence states there have been no recorded incidents of misuse at this crossing. If the crossing is closed and walkers, possibly in groups, are forced to pass beneath the bridge on Station Hill, then it may not be too long before a serious incident occurs at the bridge site.

In conclusion the factors that prevail at the level crossing, good visibility in both directions, trains slowing towards the station and moving at slow speed over the crossing in the up direction and just one line to cross make this a ver low risk crossing point. I would therefore urge to Inspector to consider the factors which make the closure of the crossing unsatisfactory since there is no safe alternative route available to pedestrians using footpath No. 30.

Michael Welch
Bures Hamlet Parish Council

