

PUBLIC INQUIRY

APPLICATION BY NEWTWORK RAIL UNDER TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992

PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL SUFFOLK LEVEL CROSSING REDUCTION ORDER

OBJ/84

PROOF OF EVIDENCE – S22 Weatherby

Dr. Rachel Wood

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Trustee of All Saints Under Fives Preschool, Newmarket

TOPICS

Objection to the closure of the Weatherby Crossing regarding:

- A. Network Rail's analysis of the risk posed to users of the Weatherby Crossing and the creation or increase of risk which would arise from its closure*
- B. Damage to the connectivity of the town, both physical and social*

Comment on possible solutions

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Rachel Wood. I am a governor at All Saints' CEVA Primary School and a trustee of All Saints Under Fives Preschool. I am representing people connected with these two organisations and members of the wider community they serve. I have consulted widely and 45 people completed questionnaires or comment sheets.¹

PRIORITIES

2. My priorities are the well-being of local children and families, and the growth of a strong community.

POINTS IN BRIEF

3. We object to the closure of the Weatherby Crossing regarding:
 - A. Network Rail's analysis of the risk posed to users of the Weatherby Crossing and the creation or increase of risk which would arise from its closure.
 - B. Damage to the connectivity of the town, both physical and social.

We also comment on possible solutions.

A. RISK

A.1. Comparative risk

¹ I have included scans of all completed Comment Forms (CF 1-26) in Appendix 1.2 and Questionnaires (Q 1-19) in Appendix 1.3. Q19 is completed by the Joint Site Manager of New Cheveley Road Allotment Site on behalf of 100 members.

The early questionnaires did not include a declaration that the respondent authorised me to give evidence at Inquiry on their behalf, so I have also included Declaration sheets (D 1-4), so that those who had completed questionnaires could make such a declaration. These contain 32 signatures, but 7 of these had also signed on a Comment Form, leaving just 25 new signatures. 10 of these did not make any written comment. 4 people filled in questionnaires but did not sign a declaration – I have not quoted from these in my proof. Therefore, in total, 51 signed a declaration (of these 26+15=41 made a written comment and 10 did not).

Please note that 38% of the children at All Saints' School speak English as an Additional Language (EAL), and a number of their parents find writing in English particularly difficult. In a few cases, such parents asked others to help them fill in the form, but each person signed their own form to show that this was their true opinion.

I would also like to record that very many of these parents with EAL had absolutely no idea that there was a move to close the crossing until I asked for their views; this includes one mother who lives directly across the road from the crossing, on the south side of the railway, and who would be severely inconvenienced if the crossing were to shut. Consequently, I would like to know what action Network Rail took to find out about the communities which would be affected if the Weatherby Crossing was closed, and whether they made information available in other languages.

4. Network Rail refer to 8 near-misses at the Weatherby Crossing since 2006², but Paul East (a parent) comments that it is “[a]s safe as crossing the road, or safer.”³ It is instructive to compare the Weatherby Crossing with what Vanessa Hooley (a school governor) calls the “dangerously busy area” outside All Saints’ School,⁴ where children going to and from school face:⁵

- parking along Vicarage Road (sometimes illegal), blocking the view
- busy junctions used by cars, pedestrians and horses
- unpredictable traffic - congestion and dangerous driving
- no official crossing point, so pedestrians cross all along the road

There have been at least 4 near-misses since January 2016.⁶

By contrast, the Weatherby Crossing has⁷:

- a long, clear view in both directions
- no junctions
- only one train at any one time, doing no more than 40mph
- a single crossing point and a clear process to follow in order to cross safely

I would like to know what analysis Network Rail has made of comparative risk with other crossing points around the town – users clearly consider the Weatherby Crossing to be far safer.

A.2. Creation of new risk on the railway

5. Network Rail passes over the risk of people crossing the track illegally.⁸ I agree with the implication that this risk is not currently serious. However, like C. McKay⁹ and Karen Tuite¹⁰, I am extremely concerned that if the Weatherby Crossing is closed, the temptation to climb the fencing and cross illegally and dangerously may prove irresistible to some, especially older children who currently use the

² NR26, p. 82.

³ See Appendix 1.3, Q4

⁴ See Appendix 1.2, CF11

⁵ See Appendix 2.4, Photographic evidence from outside All Saints’ School.

⁶ See Appendix 2.1, Statement from Melanie Pettitt regarding near-misses at All Saints’ School.

⁷ See Appendix, Photographic evidence from Weatherby Crossing.

⁸ NR26, pp. 82-84.

⁹ See Appendix 1.2, CF14

¹⁰ See Appendix 1.2, CF25

crossing as a short-cut. Therefore, closing the crossing would inadvertently be creating a new risk.

A.3. Shifting risk to other locations in the town

6. Many residents indicate that if they could not use the Weatherby Crossing, they would drive.¹¹ Congestion hotspots (e.g. All Saints' School, the Town Football Ground, and routes into the Town Centre) would have to cope with even more cars, raising the risk of accidents. Closing the crossing would not remove risk for residents – it would simply relocate it, and magnify existing risk. Edna Cruikshank (School Office Manager) concludes that increased car use would be “disastrous to an already very congested area”.¹²
7. Two respondents also noted that more traffic would increase pollution.¹³

B. CONNECTIVITY

B.1. Physical connectivity

B.1.1. Strategic importance

8. The Weatherby Crossing is considered an integral part of a key route through the town. Michael Jefferys (Town Councillor) cites the 2013 findings of the Prince's Foundation, that “Newmarket should seek to transform itself into a genuine ‘walkable town’”¹⁴ and that walkable links should be developed around a primary route running from the Yellow Brick Road to Cricket Field Road, via the Weatherby Crossing.¹⁵ It seems inconceivable that, rather than developing this walkable network, we are now contemplating severing its primary route.
9. Network Rail's own 2013 data places the Weatherby Crossing as the third most used of 2,331 crossings surveyed, with 400 uses over 24 hours,¹⁶ matching the

¹¹ See Appendix 1.1, Spreadsheet Col “More car journeys”.

¹² See Appendix 1.2, CF3

¹³ See Appendix 1.2, CF6 and Appendix 1.3, Q19

¹⁴ See Appendix 2.2a, *Enquiry By Design*

¹⁵ See Appendix 2.2b, *Enquiry By Design* Map

¹⁶ See Appendix 2.3, Network Rail “level crossing census input”. This spreadsheet was issued in 2014, but I would like to ask Network Rail to confirm what period of time it covers. I would also like to ask Network Rail to state what rank Weatherby holds in the most up-to date data, in terms of numbers of users. I would be grateful if they could next confirm whether or not this data covers all the pedestrian level crossings in the country, because if this is so, this would indicate that the Weatherby Crossing was the third most used pedestrian level

most recent figures.¹⁷ Local people are very conscious of how frequently the crossing is used, and how many would be affected if it was closed.¹⁸

B.1.2. Inefficient movement around the town

10. Many respondents said the alternative route would require people to walk further and for a longer time, at considerable inconvenience.¹⁹ This is no trivial matter: parents with several small children may walk to and fro three times a day to drop off and pick up from both nursery and school; 6x10 minutes is one whole hour extra walking. Raazia Khan (a parent) takes 5 minutes to walk to school via the Weatherby Crossing – using the alternative route takes 15-20 minutes.²⁰ Conversely, Newmarket Academy students who live south of the railway are already faced with a 30-minute walk twice a day. If the crossing was closed, they would be walking for 40 minutes each way.

B.1.3. Restricted access to key facilities

11. 70% of respondents specified that closing the Weatherby Crossing would restrict access to key facilities, including:

- All Saints' School, All Saints Under Fives Preschool and Newmarket Academy
- the Town Football Ground, New Cheveley Road Allotments, New Cheveley Road Playground and shop, and All Saints Church
- the Town Centre
- places of work, local businesses and organisations²¹

B.2. Social Connectivity

B.2.1. Person to Person

12. Closing the Weatherby Crossing would be detrimental to a close-knit community. Many have family or friends across the railway. Saba Shawani takes 15 minutes to walk to her sister's house, but if the crossing was closed she would take 25

crossing in the country in 2013; I would like to know whether or not this was the case. I believe that this would be further evidence that the Weatherby Crossing should be given special consideration.

¹⁷ NR26, pp. 82-3.

¹⁸ See Appendix 1.1, Spreadsheet Col "Strategic importance"/"Used often/ by many".

¹⁹ See Appendix 1.1, Spreadsheet Col "Loss leads to inefficient movement".

²⁰ See Appendix 1.3, Q6

²¹ See Appendix 1.1, Spreadsheet Col "Loss makes it harder to access:".

minutes,²² isolating her and others like her. Similarly, it would be harder for parents and children to pop in to see grandparents, eroding relationships between generations.²³

13. More generally, Denise Davies noted that the Weatherby Crossing “helps to keep the community together”²⁴ and Katie Thompson described it as “a great connection point”.²⁵ In fact, the crossing is so well-used that it is difficult to use it without meeting others. A connected community is a strong community.

B.2.2. Health and well-being

14. Not only does the Weatherby Crossing encourage exercise, e.g. running or cycling,²⁶ it also contributes to public health by offering a short-cut which is more convenient than driving. People are less inclined to walk the replacement route because they know this route would be much quicker by car.

15. A further health benefit of the crossing is that it allows easy access to community resources which encourage physical activity for all age groups,²⁷ e.g. the New Cheveley Road Playground, the Town Football Ground and New Cheveley Road Allotments, whose joint site manager, Ray Holmes, explains that many of the 100 members who would be affected by closing the crossing are “retired or elderly, this is their hobby, pastime and a means of keeping fit”.²⁸

16. Superficially, the longer replacement route may seem advantageous in that it would compel people to exercise more, but on discussing this, it is clear that those with cars would drive²⁹ (consequently losing this opportunity for exercise entirely), while those who do not drive would suffer. In particular, this would affect the very

²² See Appendix 1.2, CF21

²³ See Appendix 1.3, Q9, Q14, Q15

²⁴ See Appendix 1.2, CF6

²⁵ See Appendix 1.3, Q14

²⁶ See Appendix 1.1, Spreadsheet Col “Physical and Mental Health”/“Enables/ encourages exercise”.

²⁷ See Appendix 1.1, Spreadsheet Col “Physical and Mental Health” “Access to Football grnd/ allotments/ play-grnds/ churches” (omit Q13, as this respondent indicated church).

²⁸ See Appendix 1.3, Q19

²⁹ See Appendix 1.1 Spreadsheet Col “More car journeys”.

young, the elderly and infirm. For some residents the extra distance would entail actual physical pain.³⁰

B.2.3. Heritage and Sense of Place

17.The Weatherby Crossing is part of Newmarket's history; using it gives a sense of connection with the past, not only with those known to us who used it over past decades,³¹ but also reaching much further back: the route has been used for centuries and is recorded on Chapman's map of 1787.³² This continuity is reassuring; the sense of walking straight into the historic heart of the town is uplifting.

18.Even those who do not currently use the Weatherby Crossing wish it to be retained, because they know it is particularly useful at certain stages in life (e.g. secondary school, parenthood, retirement).³³ They wish it to be available to themselves, their children and others in the future.

B.2.4. Access to donations made to benefit the town

19.Between 1869 and 1885, Charles, Duke of Rutland, and his brother Lord George Manners MP made significant gifts to the people of Newmarket, including the sites of All Saints' School, New Cheveley Road Allotments and the Town Football Ground.³⁴ These gifts were made in full knowledge that they would entail public use of the Weatherby Crossing.³⁵ They were intended to be enjoyed by future generations;³⁶ implicit in this is maintaining ease of access.

Finding a solution

20.For around 150 years the people of Newmarket have benefitted from the access afforded by the Weatherby Crossing. We judge it to be a safe, convenient way to cross our town and we enjoy using it. We most definitely do not want to lose it,

³⁰ See Appendix 1.3, Q13

³¹ See Appendix 1.2, CF1, CF9

³² See Appendix 2.6a. The route is also shown on an earlier version of Chapman's map, attributed to 1768, but this date is not certain; see Appendix 2.6b.

³³ See Appendix 1.2, CF9; Appendix 1.1, Spreadsheet Col: "Physical and Mental Health/Effect on fams with young children/ elderly/ infirm".

³⁴ See Appendix 2.7.

³⁵ See Appendix 2.8.

³⁶ See Appendix 2.9.

but we would be prepared to work with Network Rail to develop a solution which maintains this access in a way appropriate for this century. One economically viable possibility is to install a warning system at the crossing.³⁷ Alternatively, many support the idea of a bridge;³⁸ if this were agreed, I think all parties should work together to create, as proposed by C. McKay, a “well-designed bridge” to improve both railway and town, and be an “attractive ‘feature,’” inspiring future generations.³⁹

³⁷ Ass proposed by David Rippington; see Appendix 2.10.

³⁸ See Appendix 1.1, Spreadsheet Col, “Bridge”.

³⁹ See Appendix 1.2, CF14