

Subject: Weatherby Crossing Closure

Date: Monday, 19 March 2018 at 13:51:33 Greenwich Mean Time

From: Graham Edwards

To: Noonan, Sara

CC: Rachel Wood, Kevin Grainger

Dear Ms Noonan,

I understand from Rachel Wood that the use of our stadium was raised as an issue during the Public Inquiry last week into the planned closure of the Weatherby level crossing. I am writing to clarify the situation as I gather that the Inspector may not be fully aware of the extent of our activities and the adverse impact that the closure of the crossing would have on our members and users.

It is true to say that our average paying attendance at first team games is about 100 people. This does not however include the players, officials and match day volunteers who add about another 50 people to the attendance. In total there are about 7,500 person journeys to and from our stadium per year for first team games alone.

However this is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of use of our stadium as we also operate 4 other adult male and female teams and 20 youth teams for boys and girls aged 6 to 16 who train and play almost all of their home matches on our 3G artificial pitch. Prior to 2016 our youth teams trained at other venues in the town and played their matches on grass pitches at a site near the village of Dullingham. This necessitated parents driving their children to football activities each week. One of the motivations for us investing £750,000 in a state of the art 3G pitch was to enable young children to walk or cycle to football in Newmarket itself rather than be driven several miles out of town. Our 3G pitch is also hired out to both Cambridge Utd FC and Ipswich Town FC who run weekly outreach training sessions for other youngsters living in Newmarket.

Our stadium is therefore used intensively every evening from Monday to Friday and in the mornings and afternoons every Saturday and Sunday during the football season which runs from August to May annually. The only exception to this pattern of use is during the school holidays when youth training is largely suspended in favour of daytime out of school activities.

As a result of all of the activities described above up to 1,000 or more players, parents, spectators and officials pass through our stadium each week. This results in about 60,000 or more person journeys to and from our stadium per annum. Without a full survey of our users I do not have an accurate assessment of how many of these people use the Weatherby crossing to arrive at and leave from our stadium. I would imagine however that a significant minority do use this route to and from the venue. I have also used the crossing many times myself when I have been attending to the Club's business in the town. I'm not sure if all of these crossings will have been picked up by Network Rail's own usage surveys bearing in mind that nearly all of the visits to our stadium take place either in the evenings or at weekends.

In June of this year we are investing a further £15,000 in our Clubhouse

to turn it into a Sports Bar with a pool table, darts board and big screen televisions showing live football and other sports. We plan to market these facilities to residents in the surrounding area later this year. Our largest catchment area will be in all of the neighbouring residential streets on the other side of the railway line and this will result in even more people needing to use the Weatherby crossing to gain access to our stadium.

Finally I should point out that the land currently owned by our Club together with the allotments over the road was originally leased by His Grace the 6th Duke of Rutland in the nineteenth century for the benefit of the people of Newmarket. Unfortunately there is currently no public access to the original documents in the archives at Belvoir Castle to prove the point but I would imagine that His Grace would surely have wanted the railway crossing kept open in perpetuity in order to allow access by foot from the town to the new sporting and recreational facilities on the other side of the railway.

I have already objected in writing to the closure of the Weatherby crossing on behalf of our Club as this will have a detrimental effect on some of our users who will be forced to make a lengthy detour to get to our stadium. I would be happy to give oral evidence to the Inquiry when it resumes if necessary.

Honorary Councillor Graham Edwards B.Sc
Secretary
Newmarket Town FC

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