

RE THE NETWORK RAIL (SUFFOLK LEVEL CROSSING REDUCTION) ORDER

OPENING SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Introduction

1. Forest Heath District Council (the “Forest Heath DC”) objects to Network Rail’s proposal to close S22 Weatherby in Newmarket. Forest Heath DC has three key grounds of objection:
 - (i) Network Rail has not sufficiently justified the need to close this crossing in this manner and at this time.
 - (ii) The proposal will have an unacceptable adverse impact on the local community in Newmarket.
 - (iii) The alternative route is not a suitable and convenient replacement for existing users.
- (1) Inadequate justification for the need to close the crossing
2. Network Rail is relying on a three-fold strategic case to justify the need to rationalise at-grade crossing points on the railway.¹ Through the Anglia CP5 Level Crossing Reduction Strategy (NR18), Network Rail has chosen which crossings to include in the Order based, to a large extent, on the simple fact that Network Rail considers there to be an alternative route nearby which would avoid crossing the railway line at-grade.
3. It would appear from Network Rail’s evidence that the specific safety risks at a crossing was not relevant to the decision to close the crossing.² Similarly, Network Rail has not sought to justify the need to close a crossing on *specific* cost-saving or operational-efficiency grounds.

¹ Mark Brunnen’s Proof of Evidence, para 2.3, namely, (i) improving safety, (ii) improving operational efficiency and (iii) reducing costs.

² Mark Brunnen’s Proof of Evidence, para 8.24.

4. In light of this, the Forest Heath DC does not consider that Network Rail has adequately justified the need to close S22 Weatherby. In particular, the approach taken by Network Rail fails to appropriately account for, and balance, the public interest in favour of keeping the crossing open.
5. Furthermore, regarding operational efficiency grounds Network Rail has not provided any crossing-specific details of proposed enhancements to the railway line at S22 Weatherby. Whilst Network Rail may hope that future schemes will be implemented, there is no certainty as to their timescales.

(2) Community Impact

6. By contrast, if the crossing is closed, the impact on the community will be significant and immediate. What is more, the closure will be permanent and irreversible. S22 Weatherby is used on a regular basis by a high number of local residents for everyday amenity purposes. It acts as an important connecting route for pedestrians travelling between the north and south of Newmarket.
7. The impact that closure of S22 Weatherby would have on local residents is apparent from the number of objections that have been lodged to Network Rail's proposals. This is notwithstanding that public consultation on the proposals was constrained by the decision to hold the consultation session in Bury St Edmunds, as opposed to Newmarket itself.

(3) Inadequacy of the proposed alternative route

8. The Forest Heath DC also objects to the proposed alternative route on grounds that it is not a suitable and convenient replacement for existing users. In particular, the Forest Heath DC is concerned about the additional length and gradient of the route, having regard to the purposes for which the crossing is used, and the likelihood that users may choose to drive instead of walking the alternative route.

Conclusion

9. In light of these grounds of objections, which reflect the objections raised by Suffolk County Council and others, the Forest Heath DC requests that the Inspector recommend that the proposal to close S22 Weatherby be removed from the Order.

MERROW GOLDEN

13 FEBRUARY 2018

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