

PUBLIC INQUIRY

APPLICATION BY NETWORK RAIL UNDER TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992

PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL (CAMBRIDGESHIRE LEVEL CROSSING REDUCTION) ORDER 200X

OBJ/12-CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PROOF OF EVIDENCE

ALISON ARNOLD

LOCAL USER OF C10 COFFUE DROVE and C11 FURLONG DROVE

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Alison Arnold. I live at 51 Fleetwood, Ely, Cambridgeshire. I have lived there since 2001, a continuous, uninterrupted period of 16 years. In 1957 I was born in Ely and have lived in the area all my life. My family moved from Ely to Chettisham in 1966/7. I remained in the family home until I married in 1978 and lived at I High Road, Little Downham. I then lived at Fen Rose, Seventh Drove, Little Downham from 1992 until 2001. I didn't ride on these routes after then because I had moved to Ely.
2. I have been a Parish Councillor for the City of Ely since 2010, a continuous, uninterrupted period of 7 years. In addition to this I work two and a half days a week at Tesco, by whom I have been employed since 1998, a continuous, uninterrupted period of 19 years.
3. I am an enthusiastic horse-rider and owned horses from 1968, aged 11, until 2001, when I sold my thoroughbred. In addition to owning my own horses, I exercised and competed on other people's horses in Cross Country Events, Show Jumping and Showing. In total I have been doing this for 42 years. I haven't owned horses or ridden the routes concerned since because my friend moved to Soham and I helped with her horses there. In addition,

I found it impractical with my Councillor commitments. However, now I have grandchildren, I will probably like to start riding in the area again.

4. I have completed Stages 1 and 2 of the Horse Knowledge and Management Courses and have experience of working as a Receptionist and Animal Nurse at the Margaret Smith Vets in Ely for 5 years. In addition, I have a year's experience looking after hunters, brood mares and show horses at a private yard in the area of Littleport.
5. During the 42 years I was riding, I used Bridleway No. 25 Ely, Coffue Drove. NR reference C10 and A Furlong Drove NR reference C10 in Little Downham numerous times as part of my many hacks around the area. I am a long distance rider and would generally ride for 10 miles on routes like these in order to bring horses, especially my thoroughbred, up to fitness; for my own personal exercise; and to get some fresh air or even just for personal enjoyment. There's nothing better than you and a horse in the middle of nowhere, and blowing the cobwebs away. With thoroughbreds you had to ride daily, otherwise you have to start again. I would do half roads and half droves in order to condition them.
6. Horse riding is very popular in the area and there are lots of people whose horses are worth more than their houses. There are a lot of Wembley Champions and other Dressage and Show horses. To name just a few Newark, Norwich and Wembley Show are major horse shows which are popular with lots of local people. There is also an events yard at Little Downham where they hold lots of different horse-riding events.

SITE SPECIFIC POINTS

C10 Coffue Drove

7. NR's proposals would divert users to an underpass that runs underneath the Level Crossing C10.
8. I have ridden this route a lot and have usually used the underpass, as it has always been available and is easier than stopping to open the gates and cross the railway. However, I am concerned that the proposal will negatively impact on some horse riders. Some horses,

especially thoroughbreds, will be scared by the noise of a train running overhead. The confines of the underpass make a strange echo sound passing trains will make the horse more likely to be startled and to bolt.

9. In addition, most riders will have to dismount before travelling down to the underpass in order to pass through it. A mounting block should be installed to assist riders with being able to remount their horses. I would like to see something like a bench/tree trunk that has wider benefits, and would allow other users to sit and enjoy the countryside.
10. I would also like to point out that not all riders are able-bodied. I know of many riders who have arthritis and have difficulty with mounting their horses. With gates, if you are with another rider, one can dismount and open the gates for the other rider to pass through. This is not possible with the underpass. NR should mitigate the effect of their proposal by making sure that they do not negatively impact on those with reduced mobility.

C11 Furlong Drove, Little Downham

11. Furlong Drove crossing has always been particularly popular with horse riders locally as it has the benefit of a wide, straight, relatively flat and long track on either side of the crossing. The route stretches for a kilometre on both sides and is one of the few places in the area where horse riders can make use of a gallop.
12. When I lived in Fen Rose, I would go down to the railway along Furlong Drove from the north, and sometimes the crossing was locked. As an alternative, I would turn right and go round the farmer's field and back onto Main Drove. Furlong Drove is also an important route for Show and Competition horses to be put through their paces and be brought up to a necessary standard of fitness. I often used it for this purpose. It was reasonably flat, and there is an upside to ruts in a track, as if you fall off or drop something you can put the horse in the rut and re-mount more easily.
13. NR propose to keep the southern part of the route open but to then close the footpath as it reaches the crossing, which would result in a dead-end route. Horses do not like dead-

end routes and are likely to bolt back in the opposite direction once they reach the dead-end. This is bad for the development of the horse's training as it can teach them bad habits. In addition, it is a safety issue to lose control of your horse's speed at the point where you are turning around. You have to be able to go round in a loop.

14. In addition, the proposed diversion takes users from the south end of Furlong Drove east and then northbound along a busy road which is used by heavy goods vehicles and agricultural traffic. There are lots of arable farms in the area. Being put into contact with this kind of traffic is daunting even for an experienced rider as you are quite often reliant on drivers being considerate of you as a horse-rider. It is my experience that they often are not. The verges along the side of the proposed route are steep and uneven. You could step onto the verges but you have to pick and choose which verges are stable enough for a horse. If you aren't a confident rider you wouldn't do it. A thoroughbred isn't as sure-footed as a cob.

C24 Cross Keys, BR25 Ely and C09 Second Drove, FP50 Ely

15. I also understand that Network Rail propose to close the footpath crossings at C09 Second Drove and C24 Cross Keys. This will mean that the only crossing back towards Ely is BR25 Ely. Therefore, more people will be using it.
16. At BR25 Ely, there has always been a big vehicular gate and is not horse-friendly. It was alright if there were two of you. However, it was difficult if you were by yourself, and you had to dismount, open the gate, hold the horse through the gate, shut the gate, cross, open the next gate, go through, close the gate, and remount. I was always careful and never had any near misses but it was difficult. I would rather have the horse in my hand than tie it up whilst managing the gates.
17. I don't have a problem with NR changing the network, but I think they should improve it for other users too. We should all be able to share it.

Signed Alison Arnold

Dated 30/10/17