

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

Brian James

C27 Willow Row Drove, Littleport

1. My name is Brian James. I live at 25 Primrose Lane, Impington, Cambridge. CB24 9PX.
2. I have worked in engineering and manufacturing all my life. My last role was as Engineering Director at Xaar on the Cambridge Science Park. I retired in June 2015.
3. I used to be a workaholic and work 12 hours a day for 5-6 days a week. I have always been a walker and a biker, but now I'm retired I can enjoy these things more. I have been riding since I was 17, some 39 years. I took up 'green laning' about a year ago and I am now doing more and more. I am also doing a lot more walking. I'm a member of the Histon & Impington Walking Group.
4. Green laning enables me to see and enjoy the countryside, improve my riding skills (some of the skills required for green laning are different than those required for the road), keep fit (For the uninitiated riding off-road is quite hard work) and indulge in photography, another hobby of mine.
5. I have been a member of the Trail Riders' Fellowship (TRF) for a year. We ride responsibly, with due regard to other byway users. We try to keep as many byways open as possible for the future enjoyment of all. When crossings are closed some byways become dead ends which makes them useless for all practical purposes. See a photo of some of the Cambridge TRF riders out on a group ride on 19.3.17 in Appendix 1.

6. Because I'm retired, I can go during week days when the byways are often less used. I normally ride by myself and often go exploring. Sometimes this means I don't necessarily know what routes are available until I see them. I usually go northwards through Rampton up to Aldreth, ride around here and then up to the Isle of Ely area, all with hardly any riding on the road.
7. When I heard about the closure of these route at the group meeting in September, I was concerned enough to take a look. I rode there on the 21st October 2017 and realised I had been there before, about nine months ago when I had been exploring. Appendix 2 shows the route I took.
8. When I got to the crossing on the 21st October there was a freight train coming, so I waited for it. It was travelling very slowly. When it had gone, I looked carefully for other trains. Then I parked the bike, opened the first gate, rode my bike across, and closed the first gate. I was able to open the second gate easily and push my bike through before shutting it and going on my way.
9. I'm concerned about the closure because I'm aware that some byways have been open for hundreds of years. To close them or to severely reduce access to them reduces access to the countryside for perpetuity.
10. Having formerly worked in industry, I understand concerns about safety, risk and asset liability. However, this line is very straight, it's single track, and easy to cross. I'm not aware of any incidents with members of the public here. Where does one draw the line? Surely it cannot be the right answer just to close all the crossings? Of course motorcyclists can use roads, but closure of the crossing would mean green laners (motorcyclists) cannot sensibly use Willow Row Drove and the byway that leads back down to A10. There aren't any other byways up there. As closures of byways and or access to them continue, current and future users, including motorcyclists such as myself, will be forced to use metalled roads only. Another public amenity allowing access to the countryside will effectively have been lost.
11. The Poplar Drove solution is fine as it still allows motorcycles. The road is in a very poor state where it meets the byway, but it is not a problem for motorcycles suitable for green laning as they can cope with ruts and potholes. It's an entirely different matter for

road going motorcycles where potholes etc, can be extremely dangerous, especially when visibility is reduced.

12. For me this is about the permanent loss of a valuable amenity for all users, myself included. Now I am aware of the route I will probably use it about once every six months. I believe that other riders may use it a lot more.

13. If this route were closed I would have to go down Poplar Drove and then into the network. However I would feel that it might not be worth my while going there. As I live in Impington it's a reasonable ride of about 17 miles to reach the network. I find it difficult to understand why Network Rail would exclude motorcycles with the proposed bridleway link between the crossings.

14. I believe the facts stated in this proof of evidence are true.

Signed 

Dated 29.10.17