

# **PUBLIC INQUIRY**

## **APPLICATION BY NETWORK RAIL UNDER TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992**

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

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#### **OBJ/12-CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PROOF OF EVIDENCE**

#### **GEOFFREY FISHER**

#### **USER OF C20 AND SOHAM TOWN COUNCILLOR**

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##### **INTRODUCTION**

1. My name is Geoffrey Fisher. My address is 2 Frederick Talbert Close, Soham (CB7 5EY). I have lived there since 1981, a continuous period of 36 years.
2. I am a retired Teacher and Headteacher. From 1990-2004 I was the Headteacher of St. Andrews Primary School, which I opened. Prior to this I was the Headteacher of Soham Church of England Junior School from 1981-1990. I also have teaching experience in Chesterfield, Germany and Oxford over a period of 12 years from 1969-1981.
3. I have been on the Soham Town Council for 35 years continuously since 1982, and have served as the Chairman on two occasions.
4. I am submitting my Proof of Evidence as a Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) witness as a local user of Public Footpath No. 101 Soham, which crosses the railway at the location known as C20 Leonards to this Inquiry. In addition, I am representing the opinions and objections of Soham Town Council from whom I have complete support in this matter.

5. In addition, as a Town Councillor, I am aware of many local residents whom support our objections and do not want to lose this path crossing.

#### **GENERAL POINTS**

6. I am concerned that Network Rail (NR) have not conducted proper site visits and on the ground surveys and that this has largely been a desktop exercise without proper knowledge and information to make an informed decision.
7. Although some members of Soham Town Council were consulted, it was not widely circulated by NR. Personally, I was not consulted by NR on the proposals and was not aware of the consultation at all.

#### **USER OF ROUTE C20 LEONARDS, SOHAM**

8. My use of Public Footpath 101 Soham and this crossing is generally as a dog-walker. I have walked the route once a fortnight for the last five years.
9. The route I take runs south from Soham and then west along footpath 101 towards the C20 crossing, which I cross. I then walk south along footpath 113 and continue on my walk. The map showing my route is at Appendix 1.

#### **OBJECTIONS TO NETWORK RAIL'S PROPOSAL**

10. Connectivity: The current route is important for the wider link and connectivity of Soham to Wicken. It is a well-established footpath and I know it to be popular with other users. I am concerned that removing the current route from the public rights of way (PRoW) network would negatively impact the connectivity of the two areas.
11. Reality of proposal: NR's diversion of Footpath 114 would take users down the western side of Mill Drove farm. In my opinion, I do not think that local users are likely to go down this route as it seems an unnecessarily long diversion. They are much more likely to

continue down Mill Drove itself and then turn south-west down Byway 113 after Mill Drove Farm.

12. Safety: Crossing C20 has the benefit of excellent sightlines on either side of the level crossing for users to be able to see any oncoming trains from a distance away. The infrastructure around the crossing seems to be well maintained and the footpath on either side is well worn. I do not perceive C20 to be a particularly dangerous crossing and I suspect NR see it as a low-hanging fruit in their pursuit of closing all level crossings.
13. Diversion: The diversion route is objectively less pleasant than the current route, largely due to the stretch of the route that proposes that users walk next to Mill Drove. For dog walkers like myself it is obviously less appealing to have to walk alongside a road than to walk along a country footpath where one does not have to worry about traffic. I believe that this demonstrates a clear loss of amenity to local users like myself.
14. Circular route: The proposals would amount to an extinguishment of a circular route that runs north along Mill Drove and then south towards C20 Leonards. This is a popular circular route and one that I have used myself. Circular routes are important to people going jogging or dog-walking as it is more enjoyable than just doubling back on oneself.
15. Developments: Southern Soham is currently being developed and there will be a notable population increase. I have marked the areas of development on my map at Appendix 1. It is therefore important that the PRow Network in the local area is protected and maintained in order to cater for the increased population. Soham has the benefit of having lots of well-maintained footpaths and it is something that the Town Council is very proud of and very committed to protecting.