

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

SUSAN VAN DE VEN

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR FOR DIVISION OF MELBOURN &
BASSINGBOURN**

C04 NO NAME NO. 20, MELDRETH

INTRODUCTION

1. I have been the Cambridgeshire County Councillor for the Melbourn and Bassingbourn Division since 2009; a continuous, uninterrupted period of 8 years. Prior to this I was a District Councillor in Cambridgeshire from 2004 to 2010; a continuous uninterrupted period of six years and then again from 2013 to 2014; a continuous uninterrupted period of a year.
2. In total I have over 13 years of experience as a Councillor in Cambridgeshire.
3. My address is 95 North End, Meldreth (SG8 6NU). I have lived there since 1994; a continuous, uninterrupted period of 23 years.
4. In 2010 I founded the Meldreth Rail User Group. We were granted Community Rail Partnership status in October 2013. We are in the process of becoming a Community Interest Partnership once we get approval from the Department for Transport.

5. Crossing C04 No name no.20, Meldreth is subject to closure and diversion under Network Rail's (NR) Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) Application and is within my Division as a County Councillor. I will be making my submissions to the Inspector and the Inquiry in that capacity.

GENERAL CONCERNS

6. I have had regular contact and interaction with NR in my capacity as a Cambridgeshire County Councillor. I have been uninspired by these experiences and I believe NR to be an organisation do not follow things up and lack consistency. NR have a tendency to disappear from certain proceedings and cease all contact without explanation.
7. My experiences of NR have shown that they are wasteful of their own resources and seem to have no regard for the resources of other parties that they are dealing with. This is especially problematic when the other party in question has substantially more limited resources than NR, as is often the case with their dealings with Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC).
8. CCC have struggled with managing their resources in opposition to an organisation, NR, which operates from a much stronger and more financially stable bargaining position. NR have made no attempt to understand or to offset this. This has been especially prevalent during CCC and NR's contact throughout the TWAO process.
9. Part of the TWAO Application process requires the Applicant to conduct consultation periods in order to give people affected by the Order an opportunity to voice their concerns. During these consultation periods, I believe that NR were just going through the motions and they did not take the process, nor the concerns of those who attended, seriously. I know that many of my constituents would agree with that statement.

10. I believe that the issues I have identified stem from poor management and because individuals within NR often do not have the backing of the organisation or the authority to act independently. Unfortunately it is not just NR who pay the price as CCC and its constituents are being made to suffer as a result.
11. I invited NR to attend a meeting of our rail user group in order to give them an opportunity to hear our concerns. They stayed for only 10 minutes, which clearly shows they did not take the meeting, nor the opportunity to interact with members of the public, seriously.
12. I would submit to the Inquiry that NR have not acted reasonably throughout the TWAO Application Process.

SITE SPECIFIC CONCERNS

C04 No name no. 20, Meldreth FP10

DIMINISHED ENJOYMENT

13. In my view, the diversion proposed by Network Rail will amount to a serious diminishment of enjoyment of the PROW Network as users will be forced to walk through a chaotic industrial estate. The current route is popular with many of my constituents who walk their dogs and run along the route. The diversion route does not have these amenities and therefore is certainly less likely to be used by my constituents.
14. I am also concerned by the footpath on Station Road becoming part of the diversion route. The footpath, especially over the bridge, is steep and narrow and I believe that people with disabilities, especially people in wheelchairs, or the elderly would struggle making their way along the path.
15. Mr Laurence Smith's Proof addresses the current condition of the existing route compared to the proposed route in more detail.

SAFETY CONCERNS

16. Station Road itself is busy in part due to the nearby Meldreth train station.
Therefore, I am concerned that my constituents will be put into harm's way due to the proximity of the narrow footpath with oncoming traffic.
17. There are often building works being undertaken along Station Road and I am concerned that this will make the diversion route again even more dangerous due to increased traffic flow.
18. The industrial estate which the proposed route would pass through at the entrance to the estate is also a safety issue to my constituents as it puts them into direct contact with heavy goods vehicles. The businesses on the industrial estate are unused to having members of the public walking through there and I am concerned about the increased risk of accidents, were the diversion to be approved.

CONNECTIVITY

19. The current route is important to my constituency as it connects users and communities together. There will be a definite and detrimental impact on this connectivity were the proposed plans to go ahead.
20. In addition, the Meldreth area is currently growing, in terms of population size, at an increasingly rapid pace. This means that the PROW Network is now more important than it has ever been. Extinguishing a part of it in the manner that NR are proposing, in a way that disrupts the connectivity of communities, will have a particularly detrimental effect on a growing community as well as its ties to the surrounding area.
21. NR do not seem to have any regard for the pressure that they are putting the County Council's infrastructure under. By diverting users from crossing C04 to Station Road, there will be an increased infrastructural burden on CCC but this is something that NR have not addressed properly.

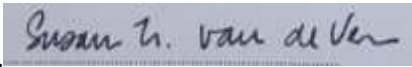
SUPPORT OF CONSTITUENTS

22. I have had individual letters of support from 12 people with regards to keeping crossing C04 open. Some of these are from groups like The Ramblers' Association and so represent the views of a larger number of people.

NOTICE OF PROPOSAL

23. In addition, the provision of Notice locally has been so poor that many of my constituents are probably still unaware that the closure is going to take place.

24. I am also aware that several ardent objectors have been put off the effort of objecting by NR's attitude and by the long drawn out process of the TWAO.

Signed 

Dated 