OBJ/036/W3/1 S27 BARRELLS CROSSING

THE PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL (SUFFOLK LEVEL CROSSING REDUCTION) ORDER

PUBLIC INQUIRY, 13 FEBRUARY 2018

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT REFERENCE: TWA/17/APP/04

OBJECTION BY **THE RAMBLERS** TO CLOSURE OF S27 BARRELLS CROSSING

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF **DEREK FISHER** of Church Barn, Church Lane, Norton, Bury St Edmunds IP31 3NB

Introduction

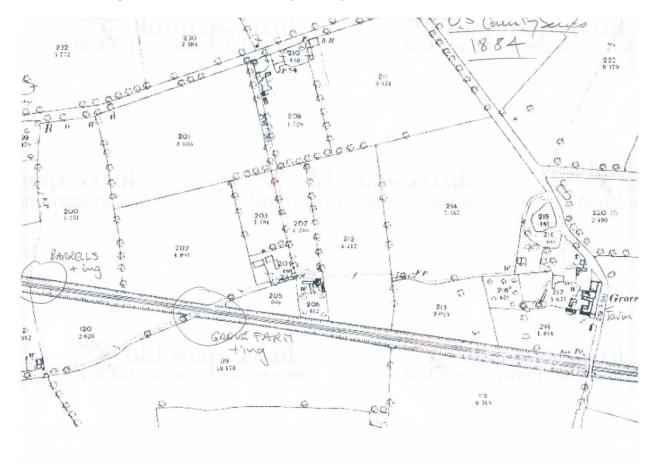
- 1. My name is Derek Fisher, a volunteer joint Footpaths Secretary over the past three years for Bury St Edmunds Group Ramblers. I have responsibility for rights of way matters over 32 parishes to the east and south of Bury St Edmunds, in the part of Suffolk stretching in a southerly direction from the Cambridge–Ipswich east–west railway line, including the town of Bury but ending just north of Sudbury. As well as my responsibility on behalf of Ramblers for public rights of way in this area, I have frequently led groups of up to 45 members on planned walks in Suffolk and, previously, in the county of Kent.
- 2. The Ramblers organizes itself through constituent parts known as "Areas", loosely based on traditional counties. The Suffolk Area carries out the Ramblers' objects through seven territorial Groups, together covering the whole county. Each Group has a Footpaths Secretary (in the case of one Group, two Footpaths Secretaries). These are authorised to make representations to the appropriate authorities concerning proposed changes to the rights of way network. They make these representations following decisions made by themselves with other suitably experienced members of the Group, usually as a committee. For county-wide strategic issues or

issues affecting the territories of two or more Groups, reference may be made either to the Suffolk Area Footpaths Committee which consists of an Area Footpaths Secretary, all of the Group Footpaths Secretaries, Access Officers and, *ex officio*, the Area Chair or alternatively the Area Council consisting of the Area Officers and delegates from each the Groups.

The present proposal

- 3. The Ramblers objects to the proposal to close S27 Barrells crossing.
- 4. I understand that under the legislation, the alternative route has to be suitable and convenient. Where a path is used for leisure walking (or mainly for leisure walking), the alternative route needs to be enjoyable (or enjoyable for the most part) as a leisure path as well, for it to be 'suitable' as an alternative. It needs to be perceived to be safe in order to be suitable—recreational walkers as far as possible do not choose to use routes where they do not feel safe—and the alternative path needs to actually be safe (that is, safe in road safety assessment terms) in order to be suitable and convenient.
- 5. This pedestrian crossing forms a part of an extensive network of footpaths enabling walkers to travel between Ixworth and Pakenham villages to the north, Norton to the east, Thurston and Bury St Edmunds to the west and Beyton and Rougham to the south.
- 6. Some of the existing footpaths are ancient; for example the existing footpath running north–south at Barrells appears as 'Packway Lane' on the Ordnance Survey County Series map of 1884, but is believed locally to have been the drovers' route connecting Thurston with Ixworth. It passes through Great Green just to the north of this crossing.

Barrells crossing on 1884 Ordnance Survey County Series—



- 7. Because the existing footpath Thurston 005 runs at right-angles to the railway line, walkers' enjoyment of the rural environment is affected only for the 2 minutes (if the line is clear) taken to use the crossing, and their very brief encounter with the railway causes little interference to their walk.
- 8. On the other hand, the NR proposal involves walkers staying alongside the railway line on both the north and south sides for extended periods, which takes away much of the enjoyment of the way. The result is an unreasonable extension of the walk with lowered amenity, this added length being right beside the railway. It seriously impinges on the enjoyment.
- 9. These arguments of course apply whether the footpath Thurston 005 is being walked from north to south, or vice versa.

- 10. Walkers attempting to avoid the problems brought about by the NR proposal by using the Barrell's Road bridge, which crosses over the line some 0.22 miles to the west of the existing pedestrian crossing, will encounter a blind hump-back bridge (photo 6 attached) where oncoming traffic cannot be seen until a vehicle reaches the crest of the bridge, when there is no refuge for walkers as the grass verges are only 2 feet wide and are both sloping towards the roadway.
- 11. Overall, the walk resulting from the proposals is not suitable as an alternative to the status quo. It is not safe to use the road bridge at Barrells Road. So, concerns about the safety of using the route, coupled with the long sections which go right along the railway, would make the walk as a whole unenjoyable and less convenient.

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

DEREK FISHER

8 JANUARY 2018

Photographs follow . . .

Photo 1, looking south along the Thurston 005 footpath as it approaches Barrells crossing south of the railway, showing clearly a well-used grassy path—



Photo 2, the immediate southern approach to Barrell's crossing—



Photo 3, the south side of the line—



Photo 4, along the line facing West, Barrell's Road bridge in the distance. Good sighting for at least 2 miles along the perfectly straight line—



Photo 5, along the line facing east, the Grove Farm road bridge in the distance. Good sighting for at least 2 miles along the perfectly straight line—



Photo 6, the hump-back bridge on Barrell's Road showing blind approach from the South and verges—



