

OBJ/036/W4/1 S28 GROVE FARM CROSSING

THE PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL (SUFFOLK LEVEL CROSSING
REDUCTION) ORDER

PUBLIC INQUIRY, 13 FEBRUARY 2018

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

OBJECTION BY **THE RAMBLERS** TO CLOSURE OF S28 GROVE FARM
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 to the Area Council consisting of the Area Officers and delegates from each the Groups.

The present proposal

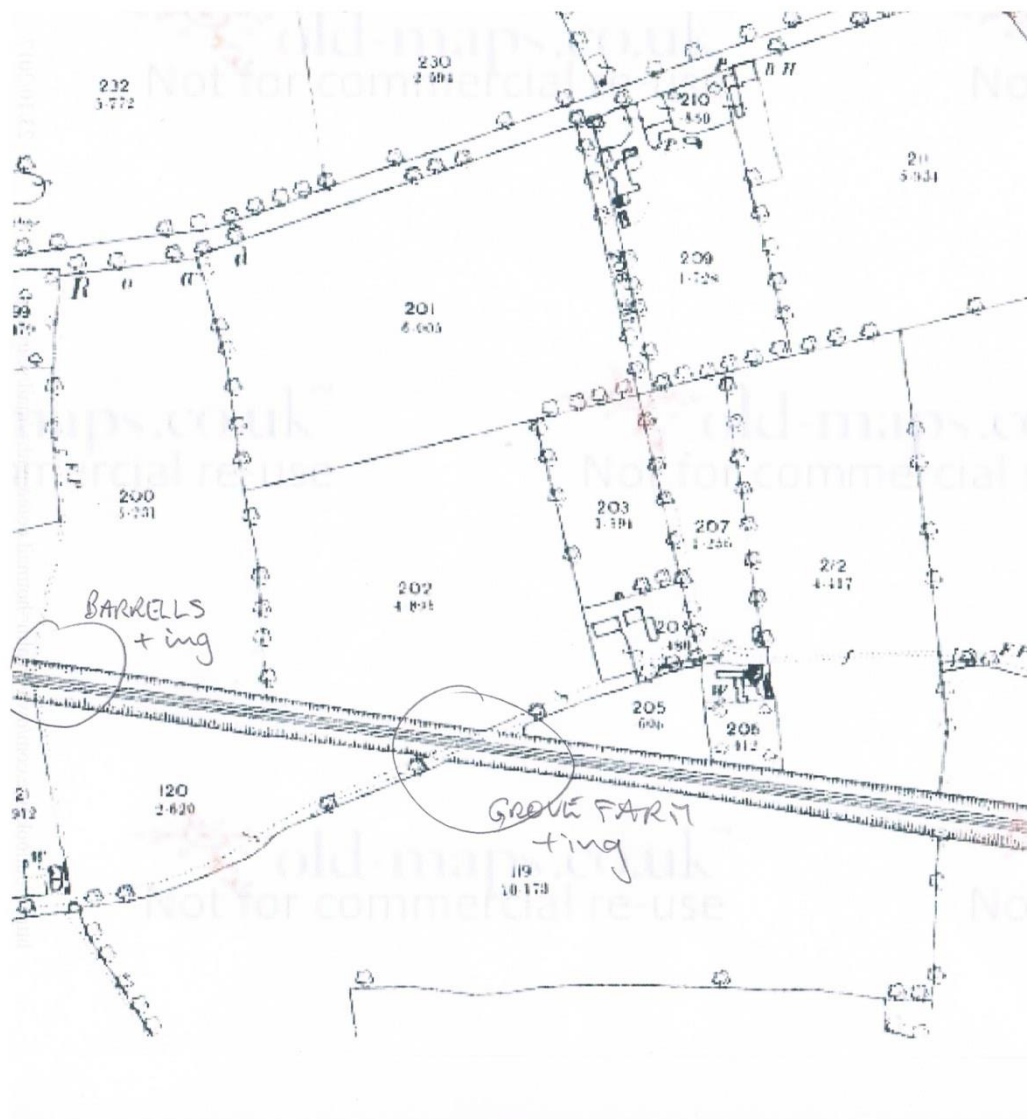
3. This pedestrian crossing forms a part of an extensive network of footpaths enabling walkers to travel between Ixworth and Pakenham villages to the north, Norton to the east, Thurston and Bury St Edmunds to the west and, to the south, Beyton and Rougham.

Looking north-east along Thurston 011 footpath as it approaches the Grove Farm crossing south of the railway, showing a well-used grassy path—



4. Some of the existing footpaths are ancient. For example The Packway is believed locally to be an ancient drovers' route connecting Thurston with Ixworth. It passes through Great Green just to the north of this crossing. The existing footpath running north-east – south-west at the Grove Farm crossing (and now designated Thurston 011) appears on the Ordnance Survey County Series map dated 1884.

Grove Farm crossing on 1884 Ordnance Survey County Series—



5. 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.
6. Because the existing footpath Thurston 011 runs directly across the railway line, walkers' enjoyment of the rural environment is affected by its proximity only for the two minutes (if the line is clear) taken to use the crossing. Their very brief encounter with the railway causes little interference to their walk. The NR proposal would involve walkers who are travelling east to west from the Grove Farmhouse staying alongside the railway line for 50 yards before turning away from the line in a northerly direction to meet Barrell's Road and then using the hump-back road bridge to regain the original right of way at Bird's Road. Walkers travelling from the south west would either be required to use the same hump-back bridge or, alternatively, walk for an extended period (0.31 miles) alongside the line on its south side to reach the roadway at Grove Farm and resuming the local footpaths network. In my submission this is an unreasonable imposition on the amenity enjoyed currently by walkers because much of this added length is right beside the railway.

Along the line facing west. Good sighting for at least 2 miles along the perfectly straight line—



Along the line facing east. Good sighting for at least two miles along the perfectly straight line—



7. 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 0.3 miles to the West of the existing pedestrian crossing, will encounter a blind hump-back bridge where oncoming vehicles cannot be seen until they reach the crest of it, when there is no refuge for walkers as the grass verges are only 2 feet wide and are both sloping towards the roadway.

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

DEREK FISHER

8 JANUARY 2018

Further photographs follow . . .

Blind hump-back bridge: oncoming vehicles cannot be seen until they reach the crest of the bridge, and no refuge for walkers (verges not suitable, through steepness)—



Grove Farm crossing, the immediate southern approach—



Plan showing location and direction of photos—

