

OBJ/036/W6/1 S01 BRANTHAM SEA WALL

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 CLOSURE OF
BRANTHAM SEA WALL CROSSING

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF **GEOFF KNIGHT** of 49 Bloomfield Street,
Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 5JH

Introduction

1. My name is Geoff Knight. I have lived in Suffolk since 1976. I joined the Ramblers in 1987, and I am the Footpath Secretary for the Ipswich Group of the Ramblers.
2. I have been leading walks for 28 years with the Ramblers and other, less formal groups. I have taken short courses in map-reading for walking for both the U3A and the Ramblers. I always carry a map and keep a note on the parishes where I have walked. So far that is 238 Suffolk parishes out of 477 parishes.
3. I have served on the Footpath Sub-Committee for 20 years or so and frequently contact SCC over Footpath issues. I am particularly interested in wild flowers and the habitat where they are found.
4. 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 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 even the Area Council consisting of the Area Officers and delegates from each the Groups.

The present proposal

5. The Ramblers objects to the proposal to close crossing S01 at Brantham Sea Wall. This is because the alternative routes to replace the length of footpath which will be lost are not suitable alternatives, the path being unique in character.

The existing crossing

6. This crossing caters for a path of rather special quality. As you walk south-westerly along the path which runs parallel to the railway on the north side of it, you are moving along a path with the embankment on your left, and the old factory on your right. You then arrive at the steps to the crossing. As you climb these steps, an enormous panorama of the saltings and the River Stour comes suddenly into view. The contrast can be breathtaking.
7. After crossing the railway, you find yourself on the next part of the path to be extinguished. It goes roughly eastwards, meandering slightly. It has a striking sense of remoteness. To the left of you there is only field; to the right is the river, or mud-flats. You are often alone, just with the birds and the estuary.

8. It is precisely because of the steps that this initial view of estuary and adjacent grassland can be enjoyed. That would be lost. So would this section of path, which is very popular with bird-watchers.
9. Network Rail in their letter of response¹ acknowledge loss² of excellent views by the extinguishment of a “short section of this footpath.” They seem to put it at 350 metres; I think it is nearer 400 metres that will be lost. I do not think the precise figure matters as this location is not about convenience; my point here is that this is a particularly spectacular stretch. NR say that “it is considered [by themselves, presumably] that the proposed diversion will be of the same character as the existing public right of way networks in the area.”
10. I disagree. I grant you that there can be an element of subjectivity in any assessment, but I submit that the remote positioning of the section of path to be extinguished south of the line gives it a special quality above and beyond its proposed replacement. Using the present path, you are walking *beside* the estuary, right against it; you feel as if you are at the land’s extremity, as indeed you are. On the proposed alternative you are walking towards the estuary or away from it. You are not connected to it for as long.
11. I have led Ramblers walks and less formal groups of walkers here for over 20 years to enjoy this experience, which can scarcely be matched in Suffolk.

The alternative route

12. Parts of the alternative route are low-lying and may be boggy or subject to flood in time of wet weather. That, for a start, makes it unsuitable as an alternative.
13. But more generally, the sense of wilderness on the path to be extinguished is to be compromised by the alternative for the most part running parallel and

¹ Letter dated 15 December 2017 to Eugene Suggett, Ramblers Senior Policy Officer, NR ref: Obj/36/SUFF/R001.

² What they have actually written is “... some loss of excellent views will be affected”.

adjacent to the railway on the railway's southerly side. It will somehow make the railway the focus of the walk.

Concluding

14. All in all the new route following the railway cannot compete with the route currently running by the estuary. By any measure, it is a walk of the highest quality. The views enjoyed from it by those whose rights are to be extinguished by this order are unique and should be kept for all to enjoy, by the retention of this crossing and the path it serves. I ask the Inspector to find that the replacement route does not pass the test of being a suitable alternative.

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

GEOFF KNIGHT

10 JANUARY 2018

Photographs, numbered as noted on OS extract at end*Brantham church by Footpath 15—*



1. *View from Footpath 14 just west of the railway line—*



4. *Footpath 13, showing use—*



5. *Lack of effective fencing from railway embankment—*



6. *View from the south-east of the railway crossing, looking south-west—*



7. Another view from the south-east of the railway crossing, looking south-east—



Ordnance Survey annotated to show approximate location and camera direction in above photographs—

