

**APPLICATION FOR THE PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL
(SUFFOLK LEVEL CROSSING REDUCTION) ORDER**

SUMMARY TO

PROOF OF EVIDENCE:

ANDREW WOODIN – RIGHTS OF WAY AND ACCESS MANAGER

Bachelor of Sciences Honours degree in Ecology

Introduction

1. My name is Andrew Woodin, I am employed by Suffolk County Council (the Council) as the Rights of Way and Access Manager and have held this post since 2003.
2. I have been very heavily involved in Network Rail projects for some years now, both individual crossing-specific projects and, more lately, this Transport and Works Act Order (the Order). The Council has committed an immense amount of resource to assisting Network Rail where it considers Network Rail's proposals are in Suffolk's interests and, in this regard, Network Rail has benefitted a great deal from the Council's expertise and local knowledge, free of charge.
3. Where Suffolk County Council has objected to specific level crossing closure proposals in this Order, it is because it believes the negative impact of the proposal is greater than the public benefit to be derived from it.

Objection to Closure of Higham S23, Public Footpath 1 Higham

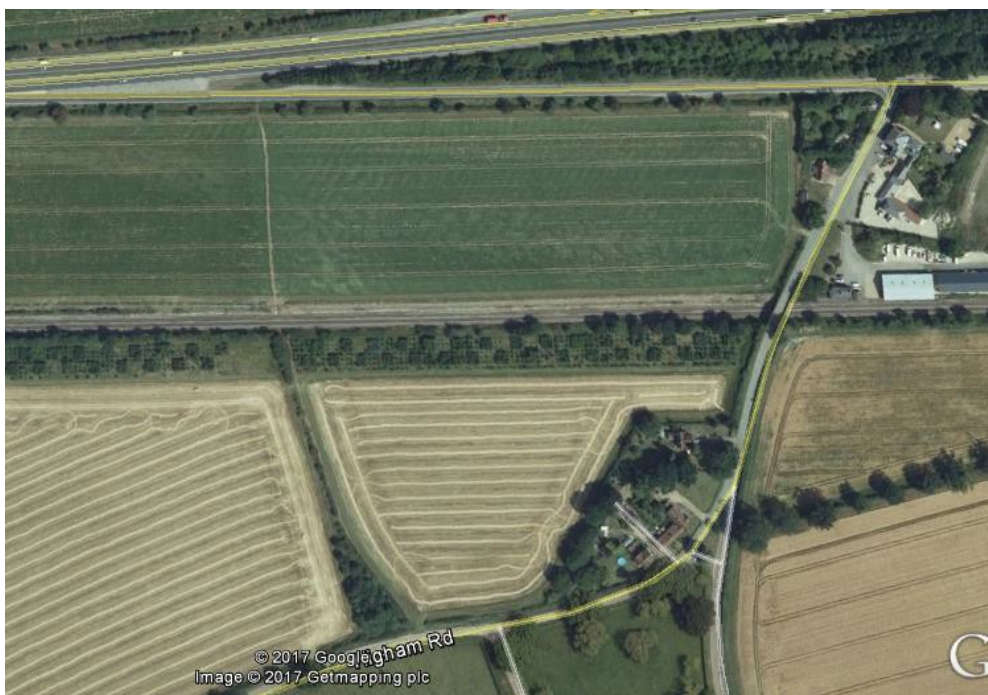
4. This proposal seeks to close the level crossing and adjoining public footpaths and divert users along country roads to re-join the walking route at The Round House on the A14 sliproad. The grounds for the Council's objection to the closure of this crossing are reproduced in my full proof, and are based on road safety and the availability of a safer alternative route.

Background

5. This footpath gives access to the pretty countryside around Higham and Gazeley, and to the Brecks, an area of high landscape and wildlife value, on the other side of the A14.
6. The obstruction of the public footpath by Network Rail at the level crossing, including at the time of the 9 day census, is given in more detail in my proof. At

the time of writing the crossing is still closed without lawful authority.

7. I have shown below an image from Google Earth, showing FP1 north of the railway clearly marked out. I believe the image dates from 2008, but suggests the footpath has been in use. It cannot be used now as it is fenced off by Network Rail.
8. Image from Google Earth showing Higham FP1 clearly marked out:



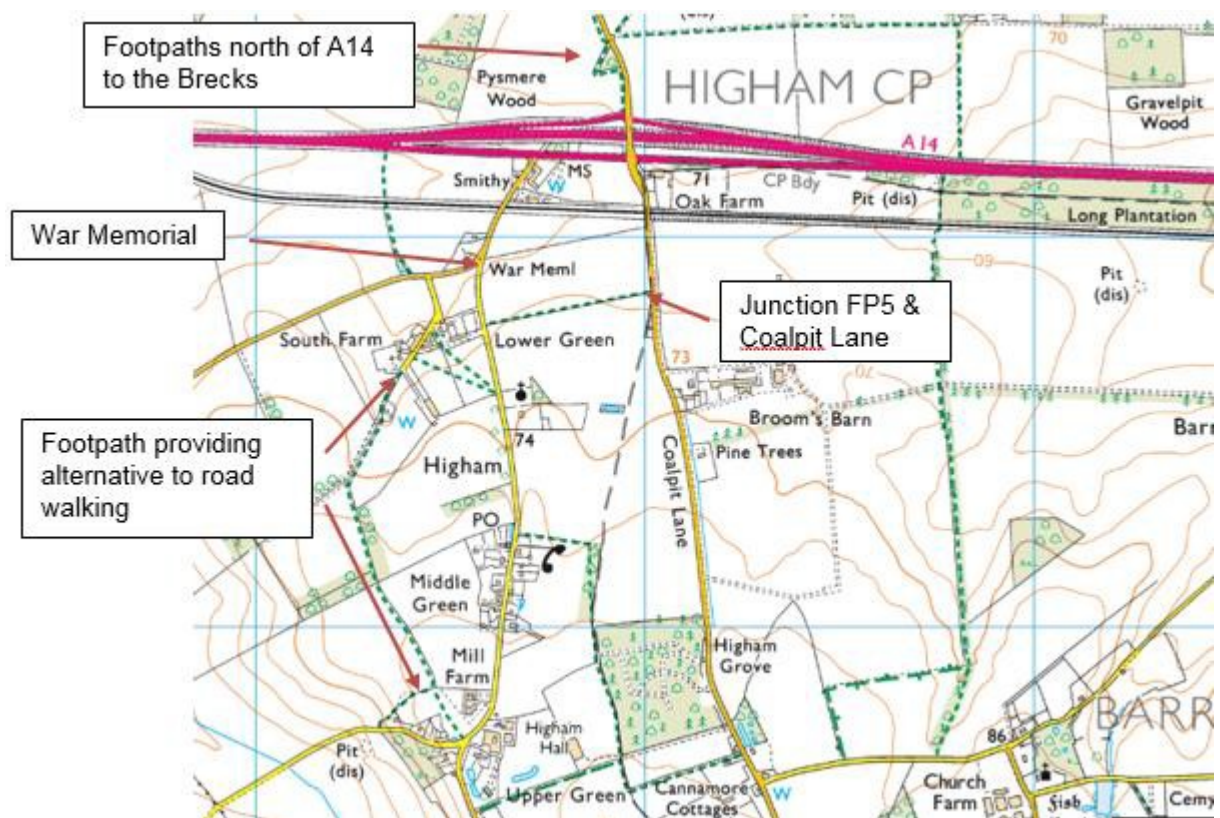
Safety Concerns – Lack of Walking Route in Road and Visibility

9. My last visit to site was on 8th January 2018. On each visit I have been struck by the absence along much of the alternative route of a walkable verge for pedestrians, who for most of the alternative route are thus forced to use the carriageway, including over the railway bridge, and are confronted with a blind bend at the war memorial on a road. The Design Freeze Drawings state that for S23 the alternative route has footway and verge available, whereas I consider walkable verges are only partly present, on a road with traffic travelling at some speed (I estimate 50mph to 60mph). This despite road bend warning signs to alert drivers to the hazard ahead. Users are required to cross the road to ensure

better visibility around this bend.

10. I note too that the alternative route is also a bus route, being the Newmarket – Barrow – Bury St Edmunds 312 service, that further compromises the availability of the road to pedestrians over sections where there is no walkable verge.

11. I have copied below a map showing features of interest, including the existence of a public footpath from Higham which avoids road walking to get to the commencement of FP1:



Ordnance Survey Crown Copyright

12. When I was on site on 13th December 2017 I spoke to the occupier of The Cottage, Lower Green Higham (opposite the war memorial). She was most concerned that the road might be promoted as a walking route and our conversation is expanded upon in my full proof.

13. I have included below illustrative photographs, all taken by me on 9th April and 13th December 2017. They show the alternative pedestrian walking route with overgrown verges and insufficient verge to walk on.

9th April 2017 on the alternative pedestrian walking route showing overgrown verges and insufficient verge to walk on:



13th December 2017 showing a van on the railway bridge and two cars passing on the blind bend:



14. On my site visits of 9th April and 13th December 2017 I also looked at FP5, Higham, where users will cross Coalpit Lane to access the proposed new Higham S24 public footpaths, as part of the diversionary route. The lack of visibility to safely cross the road is covered in more detail in my full proof.

15. I have included below illustrative photographs taken by me on 9th April 2017 showing the exit of FP5, Higham onto Coalpit Lane.

9th April 2017 showing the exit of FP5, Higham onto Coalpit Lane:



Overall Safety Concerns

16. I do not accept that this proposal can be perceived as safe for pedestrians to use. It is notable that whilst a new 1.5m footway is to be created as part of the proposal alongside the A14 access and slip road, where the road is wide and visibility is good, no such provision is made where the alternative walking route is narrow and visibility very poor on the blind bend.

17. As Mr Kerr has noted in his proof, the test to be applied to whether an alternative route provided by Network Rail is adequate is whether it is “convenient and suitable for existing users” (TWA Guidance Annex 2, p.105). The 2011 edition of the Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines suitable and convenient in the following way:

suitable: right or appropriate for a particular person, purpose, or situation; and
convenient: fitting in well with a person’s needs, activities and plans involving little trouble or effort.

I would expect suitable to include safe.

18. Statistics on accidents on rural roads and on level crossing are given in my full proof, but to summarise, in 2015/16 116 pedestrians were killed on rural roads, 685 were seriously injured and 2,043 were slightly injured. In the same period there were 3 fatalities at level crossings, all to pedestrians using level crossings
19. I acknowledge this data is anecdotal, but it illustrates there are many more fatalities and injuries sustained on rural roads than on level crossings.
20. The Council commissioned its own road safety assessment from Capital Traffic to provide a second opinion on the safety of the proposal, and this has been submitted as a separate proof of evidence. The audit notes there are road safety concerns to be addressed with the alternative route.

Conflicts with Relevant Policies

21. In his evidence, Mr Kerr highlighted those local and national policies which relate to encouraging and promoting walking. I am not an expert in all aspects of relevant evidence but consider the proposal at Higham is contrary to the following policies. These are expanded upon in my full proof.

- (i) Suffolk's **Local Transport Plan 2011-2031**,
- (ii) The Department for Transport's **Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 2017**,
- (iii) The Suffolk Walking Strategy 2015-2020,
- (iv) Suffolk County Council's **Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy 2015**,
- (v) The Suffolk Nature Strategy,
- (vi) The **Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2006 to 2016**,
- (vii) The draft **ROWIP II 'Policies and Action Plan'**.

Conclusion

22. To conclude, in my professional opinion, this proposal is neither suitable nor

convenient, and will have a significant negative impact on people's enjoyment of the rights of way network. The Inspector cannot, therefore, be satisfied that an alternative route has been provided pursuant to section 5(6) of the Transport and Works Act 1992. Furthermore, the proposal goes against both local and national policies that are meant to encourage walking.

23. I am also very concerned I have seen no attempt by Network Rail to assess the comparative risks of closing the level crossing and pushing vulnerable users on to alternative routes that often include stretches of road walking.

24. On this basis I ask that the inspector recommends the modification of the order to divert Higham Public Footpath 1 around the inside edge of the field on the south east edge, to exit onto the road at the rail overbridge, as consistently put forward by the Council. This straightforward expedient will avoid the worst of the road walking for those heading towards the access network to the north of the A14. In respect of the crossing of Coalpit Lane, I ask that the roadside hedge is cut back and a pedestrian refuge created in the verge allowing a pedestrian to assess when it is safe to cross the road

END



Signed:

Andrew Woodin

Dated: 10 January 2018