

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

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

PROOF OF EVIDENCE:

ANDREW WOODIN – RIGHTS OF WAY AND ACCESS MANAGER

Bachelor of Sciences Honours degree in Ecology

TOPICS COVERED

OBJECTION TO THE CLOSURE OF S25 (CATTISHALL)

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. I hold a Bachelor of Sciences Honours degree in Ecology and am a member of the Institute of Public Rights of Way and Access Management. Before moving to Suffolk I managed the public rights of way service at Northamptonshire County Council, and started my access career as a rights of way officer with Cambridgeshire County Council in 1984 where I was responsible for protection and maintenance of the rights of way network and order making to modify the definitive map.
2. Most of my career has been involved with public rights of way and access rights and I consider I have a very thorough comprehension of public access both from a professional viewpoint and from the perspective of users.
3. I am a confident leisure walker and walk access networks all over the country and abroad. I am very used to walks which are often a mix of public rights of way, open access and public roads.
4. As the Rights of Way & Access Manager I am responsible for the public rights of way and open access network in Suffolk. This includes maintenance of the network and the definitive map; increasing usage of the network in line with local and national policy; policy development and the preparation of the annual business plan. I am responsible for discharging the Council's statutory duties and powers under the Highways Act 1980, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1980 and other relevant legislation.
5. The ROW & Access service is part of Suffolk Highways' Environmental Management service and comprises four teams – two teams are responsible for the operational management of the physical access network, one team is responsible for the definitive map and one team is responsible for increasing use and enjoyment of Suffolk's Green Access Network and maximising public benefit from it. Mr Kerr, Definitive Map Manager, gives more background to the service in

his evidence.

6. 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.
7. 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. Again, Mr Kerr, Definitive Map Manager, gives more background in his evidence to the overarching concerns the Council has in respect of the Order.

Objection to Closure of Cattishall S25

8. This proposal seeks to close the level crossing and divert users 420m to the west alongside the railway to an existing underpass and thence on estate roads to re-join the route on Mount Road. The Council's objection letter of 3rd May 2017 states:

"The council objects to this proposal for the following reasons:

"The current crossing alignment provides a direct and convenient route for users. The proposed diversion entails a significant detour for users.

"The area is subject to significant housing development and the local planning authority (LPA) has successfully negotiated the provision of a stepped footbridge with one of the developers. The council believes this crossing should be removed from the Order and, should for any reason agreement not be reached between the LPA, the developer, NR and the council as highway authority to construct the footbridge, this crossing be included in a later phase of the Anglia level crossing reduction strategy.

“It is noted the proposal includes creating a bridleway between points A and P022. This section is already recorded highway and has a metalled surface. If the Secretary of State is minded to accept this crossing proposal, the council requests the Order is modified accordingly.”

Current Situation at Cattishall

9. I have used and inspected this crossing on many occasions over the years, including for leisure cycling, and observed it to be well used, with users taking care to stop and look for trains. The crossing is on a road known as Green Lane, which is an unclassified road except for the crossing itself, a public right of way which Network Rail recognise as having bridle status, although the definitive map shows it as a footpath. The route is also part of the National Cycle Network (National Cycle Route 13). The purpose of the route is mixed, including accessing Great Barton, Moreton Hall, the new Sybil Andrews Academy, local employment areas, the local countryside and of course as part of the National Cycle Network.

Distances

10. The distance from the Great Barton side of the level crossing south to Mount Road via the level crossing is 240m. At an average walking speed of 2.5 miles per hour (the pace used by Network Rail) this would take just over 3 and a half minutes.
11. The distance from the Great Barton side of the level crossing to the same point on Mount Road via the TWAO diversion is 1230m. At 2.5 mph this would take 18 minutes 20.57 seconds. This, therefore, constitutes roughly an additional 15 minutes, or 30 minutes on a return journey. The underpass can hardly be described as nearby (as referred to in para 106.2 of Network Rail’s Statement of Case), which most people would take to mean a short distance away.
12. In short, the diversion from Green Lane to the railway underpass which forces people from their natural desire to take the shortest route between two points will deter them from their walking or cycling trip, whether it is being made for health

reasons, leisure or utility.

13. On the matter of desire lines, I believe strongly that especially when walking and cycling people are naturally drawn to use desire lines to get to their destination and will use those lines even in preference to routes in better condition, as the following images from Google Images vividly demonstrate. In other words people will always want to use the most convenient route when walking or cycling Green Lane and may be deterred if they are denied that route.

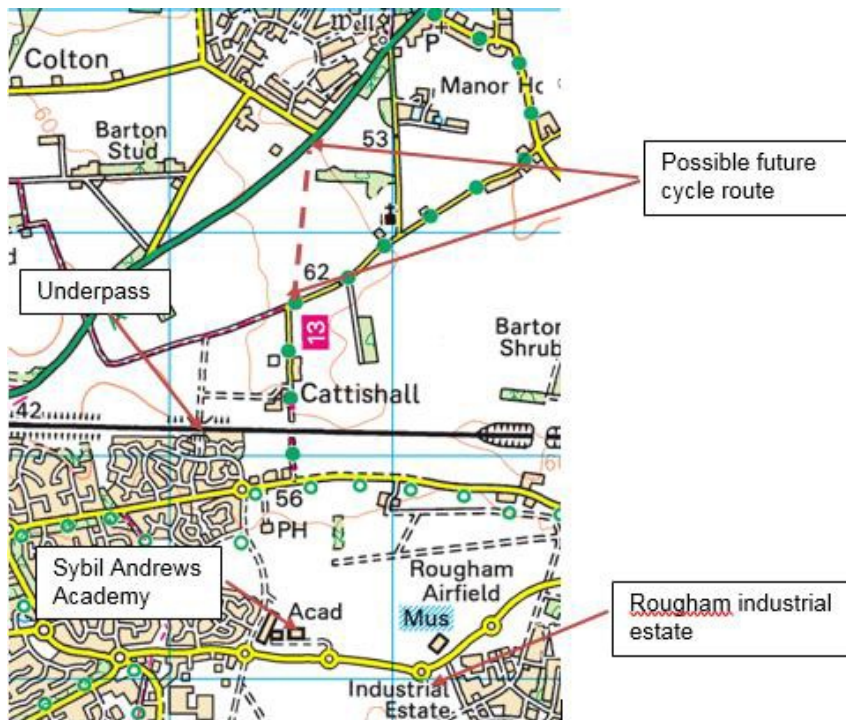


14. As Mr Kerr has noted in his proof, the test to be applied to whether an alternative route provided by Network Rail is adequate is whether it is “convenient and suitable for existing users” (TWA Guidance Annex 2, p. 105). The 2011 edition of the Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines suitable and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

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

Those walking and cycling Green Lane, both now and in the future, on a generally north/south journey, or anywhere eastwards, will not find this alternative route fits their needs, plans and activities.

15. The map below illustrates pertinent locations:



Conflict With Relevant Policies and Local Development

16. I consider the additional distance to the underpass would be enough to deter people from walking this route from Great Barton and from the new housing envisaged in BV6 of Bury St Edmunds Vision 2031 which allocates this area for development in accordance with the provisions of Policy CS11 of the Core Strategy. The allocations are defined under the St Edmundsbury Policies Map Book Inset Map 1. Vision 2031, the core strategy, map 1 of the map book and the key are included as core documents. Mr White, Principal Planning Officer Major Projects with Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough councils, will say more about current and future development in the area.
17. Existing residents and residents of the new developments will see the retained unclassified road (called Green Lane) as an attractive walking route to housing, the Sybil Andrews Academy and places of work south and east of Mount Road, including the industrial estate, but be faced with a circuitous diversion that takes them completely away from the natural walking desire line. Closing the level crossing and diverting walkers to the underpass will discourage walking and thus have a detrimental effect on sustainable transport (where the journey is other than recreational), health, appreciating the natural environment and accessing the public

rights of way network to the east of Cattishall.

18. Furthermore, West Suffolk Council have an aspiration to create a cycle path heading north along the existing field boundary from the junction of the byway and Green Lane to Great Barton (Vision 2031 p.105). This accentuates the importance of the north south access along Green Lane and the importance of retaining that linear access as the natural desire line.
19. Green Lane will be an important means of accessing the countryside for the development which is being built out east from the Flying Fortress (south of Mount Road). People living on that development will be deterred from accessing the natural environment by having to detour to the railway underpass.
20. West Suffolk Council have an aspiration to create walkable neighbourhoods which enable communities to meet their day-to-day needs without requiring them to drive (Vision 2031 p.21 5.1 Aspiration 2) This aspiration is specifically included in the North-east Bury St Edmunds Concept Statement on p.101 and the Council very much shares this aspiration.
21. Mr White will also say more about the negotiations to build a developer funded footbridge at the site of the level crossing in his evidence.
22. The second of the two aims of the Suffolk Walking Strategy (Active For Life Suffolk Walking Strategy 2015-2020 is that walking becomes the 'default' choice for journeys of 20 minutes walking time or less. This is about the time it would take to walk from Cattishall to the Sybil Andrews Academy on the existing route, but the route proposed in the TWAO would significantly exceed this time.
23. Further, physical inactivity is a major issue for public health and this extra walking distance is especially likely to deter the elderly, people with restricted mobility and parents with children, whether in a pram or buggy or walking independently. The Council wants to encourage people to walk and enjoy the natural environment and Suffolk's Nature Strategy's 2020 vision for the natural environment includes seeking better access to enhanced enjoyment and a deeper understanding of Suffolk's natural environment's unique qualities. Recommendation 28 states *Suffolk*

County Council should seek opportunities to improve the connectivity of the public access network and the development and improvement of the public rights of way network.

24. Suffolk County Council's Public Health department has submitted evidence to the inquiry to support the objection to the closure of this crossing and giving expert public health-based evidence. This evidence is attached as appendix 1.

25. 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 Cattishall is contrary to:

- (i) Suffolk's **Local Transport Plan 2011-2031**, for example having safe, healthy and inclusive communities; the important role the public rights of way network can play in rural areas and on the fringes of towns in providing traffic-free and safe routes for walking and cycling journeys; the aims of providing safe continuous routes for cycling and walking, removing gaps and addressing barriers and disincentives to users; creating the Greenest County through the reduction of carbon emissions by encouraging the use of more sustainable forms of transport; the role of walking and cycling in improving public health, and the aim of providing safe, continuous routes for cycling and walking, removing gaps and addressing barriers and disincentives to users. Diverting walkers and cyclists to the underpass removes a continuous route and is therefore a barrier and disincentive to users.
- (ii) The Department for Transport's **Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 2017**, which states the Government wants cycling and walking to be the natural choices for shorter journeys in every urban and rural community in England. For cycling or walking to be normalised in this way, they need to be safer, and be perceived to be safe, normal and enjoyable ways to travel. Note the reference to shorter journeys, where this proposal significantly lengthens journeys from Cattishall and Great Barton to the south and south east.
- (iii) The **Suffolk Walking Strategy 2015-2020**, whose vision is for walking to be

seen as beneficial, easy, inclusive, accessible, pleasant and safe; and for walking to be the 'default' choice for journeys of 20 minutes walking time or less. The proposal at Cattishall will make walking less easy by lengthening the walking route. The walking time for a journey from Cattishall, or that part of the proposed development to the immediate west of Cattishall, to the Sybil Andrews Academy using the level crossing is under 20 minutes at 2.5 mph, but it is over 26 minutes using the proposed alternative.

- (iv) The **Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2006 to 2016** (and still the policy document the Council works to until it is replaced), places great emphasis on the importance of accessing the natural environment from urban fringes. For example objective B8 is to improve routes between urban areas and the countryside. The plan also places a very high priority on improving non motorised access to local services, for example the academy and Rougham industrial estate. Example objective headings include on p.28 B.6 Improve access to shops and other services and B.7 Increase the number and promotion of easy access routes, including access for wheelchair users. This proposal worsens accessibility because it will deter walkers and cyclists making a north/south journey or anywhere eastwards.
- (v) The draft **ROWIP II 'Policies and Action Plan'**, which under the heading of connectivity includes the draft policy for the Council to use "every opportunity to improve, and even create, public rights of way as healthy and sustainable links between communities and services. Opportunities will come through development, transport planning funding, external grants and partnership working." Under severance, a draft policy notes the Council will oppose those proposals which do not meet the needs of local communities in accessing public rights of way. Again this proposal worsens accessibility, especially for those with impaired mobility, be it wheelchair users, those pushing pram or those in poor health. Peter White will say more about the agreement being drawn up to build a developer funded footbridge at this location in his evidence.

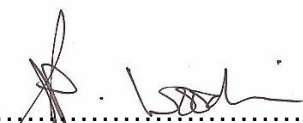
26. Appendix 2 is an Ordnance Survey of the area and shows Great Barton, the academy, the site of the Flying Fortress and the industrial estate.

Conclusion

27. 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 and cycling.
28. Furthermore, the Council is not persuaded Network Rail has adequately justified the need to close the crossing at all, or as opposed to implementing other mitigation measures.
29. On this basis, I ask that the Inspector recommends the removal of this level crossing from the order, and that the ongoing negotiations between Network Rail, West Suffolk Council and the developer, who has agreed to fund the bridge, be allowed to proceed to conclusion.

END

Signed:



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Andrew Woodin

Dated: 10 January 2018