

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

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

PROOF OF EVIDENCE:

ANNETTE ROBINSON – EAST AREA RIGHTS OF WAY MANAGER

BSc Hons Ecology
PGCE and Certificate in Management

TOPICS COVERED

S02 HIGH BRIDGE (FOOTPATH 6 BRANTHAM)

Introduction

1. I am employed as an Area Rights of Way Manager by Suffolk County Council (SCC) and have been in this post since 26th March 2001.
2. My formal qualifications are a BSc Hons Ecology, PGCE and Certificate in Management. I have worked as the Area Rights of Way Manager with SCC for 16 years, prior to that, 6 years as Countryside Recreation Officer in the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB team, 4 years as Heritage Coast Warden in Suffolk and 2 years as a Countryside Ranger in Walsall.
3. The Rights of Way & Access Team are responsible for the maintenance of the public rights of way network across Suffolk and the protection of the public's right to use that network.
4. I lead and direct the Area Rights of Way team in delivering an annual practical work programme including managing tenders, organising capital projects and maintenance schemes, developing processes for better service delivery and protecting the public's right to use the network.
5. 3 of the public footpaths that are subject to the Network Rail TWAO fall under my Area responsibilities: SO1 – Brantham Sea Wall, SO2 – Brantham High Bridge, SO7- Broomfields. SCC has objected to SO1 and SO2 but not SO7.
6. Suffolk County Council objects to the closure of crossing SO2 on the basis that the proposed alternative route is not viable.
7. SCC Rights of Way Officers were invited on the 14th September 2017 to accompany the NR bridge engineers on their site visits on the 19th and 20th September to assess the bridge works– only 2 working days' notice. For proposals SO1 and SO2, the engineers relied on the knowledge of the Area Rights of Way Officer to estimate where the NR maps showed the location of the proposed alternative routes and the bridges on the ground. This shows a concerning lack of preparation and lack of real desire to involve the Highway Authority to achieve

successful proposals, as well as a lack of communication and information provision to NR's structural engineers who had to rely on the Area Rights of Way Officer to estimate where the routes and structures would be.

In Detail

SO2 – Brantham High Bridge

8. For Proposal SO2, the Area ROW officer accompanied the NR appointed structural engineers to the location for the bridge as mapped by NR at location Work Area 5 on the Order Plan, on the 20th September 2017. Despite SCC having informed NR that there was no requirement for a bridge at this location, NR instructed their engineers to visit. They found a sloping bank leading into a meadow and absolutely no requirement for a new footbridge up to 5m in length as described in the NR proposals. This demonstrates that NR had not visited the site to map the alternative route for closure SO2, but had simply presented this proposed alternative route for the public to use based on a desktop exercise. The practical reality on the ground is very different than a 2-dimensional desk mapping exercise and this example raises a more wide-ranging concern that there may have been similar oversights made on other proposals.
9. The photographs show Location 05 on the Order Plan, to illustrate the SCC objection regarding the viability of the route. This is the location for the alleged new footbridge for users to cross from the private road into a field. Clearly, there is no need for a bridge, but steps or a sloped ramp will be required.



10. The proposals then describe the new route as a 2m wide unsurfaced path along the field margin outside of NR land. I visited the site with the landowners permission in December and noted that in reality, the proposed path would leave the private road down a steep wooded slope into a field, is then obstructed by a wire fence before turning easterly up a sloping field thence northerly to run somewhere parallel to the railway cutting. The proposed route is sloping and has a crossfall making it

inconvenient for use. Where parallel to the railway line, the land is eroding; there are two ground levels evident and the surface is riddled with rabbit holes. There are two parallel fences and it is not clear where NR intend the new path to be. As mapped, the path looks neither suitable or convenient.

11. The photograph illustrates the location between P148 and P149 on the Order Plan regarding the viability of the route as shown on the Order Plan. Note the two parallel fences, the change in the ground levels suggesting slippage, the extent of the land erosion, rabbit infestation and the crossfall of the field



12. Thus, SCC is unable to make a reasonable assessment of the NR proposal due to the lack of realistic and accurate information as to the exact location of the proposed alternative route on the ground and the actual work that would be required to provide a path fit for the public to use.

13. In addition, the order plan shows the unaffected connecting section of FP6 as lying within the field outside of the NR land. However, the public footpath is actually legally recorded as running within the NR land and this is the physical layout on the ground. See Appendix 2 to Mr Kerr's Prrof. An extract of the Definitive Map is also provided at Appendix 1 to Mr Kerr's Proof. Again, this would appear to demonstrate a lack of accuracy on the part of NR. Walkers are currently fenced into the railway corridor for approx. 88m with no security measures to prevent them from straying or trying to cross the line. The alternative route proposed will link into this current arrangement – pedestrians fenced into the railway corridor with no safety measures in place.

14. The photograph below shows the line of the public footpath, which is to the left of the stock fence on the side slope of the railway banking.




15. The Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy “Designing for Maintenance”, section 6.5, notes that good asset management starts at the planning and design phase when decisions can be made that affect the amount of maintenance required, the ease with which the work can be done and the whole life

cost of the asset. This practice is reinforced in the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan 2016 which requires all new structures to follow a technical approval process to ensure that these new assets are designed with durability and whole life costing taken into account. In preparing for the TWAO, NR has not ensured that good management of new assets has been designed in at the design and planning stage, despite repeated requests from SCC.

Conclusion

16. Due to the ongoing concerns as to the suitability of the proposed alternative route, referred to above, SCC submits that the Inspector cannot be satisfied that an alternative route has been provided pursuant to section 5(6) of the Transport and Works Act 1992. SCC, therefore, requests that the Inspector recommends the removal of this level crossing from the order

17. I confirm that this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed: 
Annette Robinson

Dated: 09 January 2018