

Re The Network Rail (Essex and Others Level Crossing Reduction) Order

Note on Behalf of the Ramblers Concerning the Withdrawal of Objections to Proposals at E04 Parndon Mill and E48 Wheatsheaf

Introduction

1. In their letter of representations and objections, dated 11 May 2017, to the Network Rail (Essex and Others Level Crossing Reduction) Order (the “Order”), the Ramblers objected to the closure of level crossings at E04 Parndon Mill and E48 Wheatsheaf. The Ramblers’ Statement of Case amplified their reasons for these objections.
2. In a letter to Persona Associates, dated 21 September 2017, the Ramblers withdrew their objection to the proposals at E48 Wheatsheaf. The Ramblers has also now decided to withdraw their objection to the proposals at E04 Parndon Mill.
3. This note records the reasons for the Ramblers’ withdrawal of their objections to these crossings.

E48 Wheatsheaf

4. A major concern among the Ramblers’ objections to proposals in the Order is the extent to which proposals will require users to walk on dangerous roads. However, it appears to the Ramblers that the proposed diversionary route at Wheatsheaf will actually remove a significant amount of road walking.
5. The existing route through Brakey Grove involves an exit on to a narrow lane. Whether walkers turn right or left on arrival at this lane, they have to walk along it. There is no footway.
6. By contrast, the alternative proposed in the order allows walkers to avoid that lane completely.

7. The Ramblers are of the view that there is no great problem involved in walking along Church Lane. It has been included in Ramblers' walks along the Essex Way in the past.
8. Moreover the proposal, as well as being safer than the existing lane, will create an alternative means of reaching Jacques Bay, via Wall Lane; it will also make a circuit from Wrabness, without the need to walk down the narrow lane. In terms of the quality of the route, the Ramblers believe the proposal makes little or no difference to the views across the river available from this locality.
9. For all these reasons, the Ramblers concluded, upon a further review of the proposed diversionary route, not to object to Network Rail's proposals at E48.

E04 Parndon Mill

10. Despite the Ramblers' dissatisfaction with Network Rail's proposals for E04, upon further review of this crossing, the Ramblers have decided to withdraw their objection, having regard to the facts below.
11. This level crossing has been physically closed for many years. The Ramblers' records have a note of the closure going back to 1972 and landowners on the north side of the line state that this crossing was closed before 1969. Records show that the Ramblers were negotiating back in 1993 with the appropriate authority — at that time, Harlow District Council — to try to get the crossing re-opened through Harlow District Council's negotiating with Network Rail's predecessors. Unfortunately, these efforts were not successful.
12. At that time the physical closure of the crossing, though unfortunate, mattered less, in practical terms, because people walked an unofficial path across the northern edge of the rugby club's field. This rugby field is now the (roughly rectangular) site of the new development bounded by (i) Elizabeth Way to the south, (ii) Parndon Mill Lane to the east and (iii) the proposed new footpath to the west. The unofficial path was along the north edge of this rectangular site, approximately 50 metres south of, and parallel to, the railway line.

13. This unofficial path, therefore, provided a direct link for users on the south side of the railway to Parndon Mill Lane. This route also required less walking along Parndon Mill Lane itself (when compared to Network Rail's proposal for a diversionary route in this Order) and, moreover, avoided the unsafe section of Parndon Mill Lane between the main road and the church (as detailed in Mr Russell's proof of evidence (OBJ/148/019) at 4.10 and 4.15). It also avoided the need for users to walk along Elizabeth Way.
14. The Ramblers reiterate that Network Rail's proposed route along Elizabeth Way is unattractive because of the large number of vehicles including large lorries on that road, whose noise and pollution make it unpleasant to walk, despite there being a footway and cycleway. It is moreover a particularly long and unnatural deviation, since it takes users (coming from the west) first southwards, then eastwards, then northwards: around three sides of a large rectangle. In the Ramblers' view, a route nearer the railway would be far better.
15. Unfortunately, there is no proposal to formally incorporate the unofficial footpath into the new development that will replace the rugby field.¹
16. The Ramblers are, however, hopeful that the new development will still allow access for users to connect east to west between Footpath 73 and Parndon Mill Lane, thereby avoiding the need to walk along Elizabeth Way and the unsafe section of Parndon Mill Lane. The Ramblers note that other new developments in Harlow (such as one at New Hall) have pedestrian access into the surrounding green spaces directly from the housing. They assume that Harlow District Council will want similar links at this site to meet their policies about safe and healthy access to green spaces for all residents, something which is set out in their long-term development plan.
17. With the hope that they are not being too optimistic, the Ramblers accept that this likelihood (of continued access through the new development) may make it somewhat artificial for them to continue with this objection. The Ramblers are also mindful that, even if they were to be successful in preventing the closure of E04 Parndon Mill, this

¹ This is, perhaps, unsurprising as the unofficial footpath has not been added to the definitive map and statement of public rights of way.

would not, necessarily, result in the crossing being re-opened, or a formalised footpath link across the new development being established.

18. In light of these practical circumstances, the Ramblers have decided to withdraw their objection to this crossing.

MERROW GOLDEN

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FRANCIS TAYLOR BUILDING
INNER TEMPLE, LONDON
EC4Y 7BY