

Public Inquiry concerning the Network Rail
(Essex and Others Level Crossing Reduction) Order
under the Transport and Works Act 1992

Wrabness Parish Council
Summary Proof
based on Statement of Case

Reference: TWA/17/APP/05/OBJ/127-W1-3

Introduction

1. My name is Richard Colley. I am Vice Chairman of Wrabness Parish Council and active in community work after a career as a chartered surveyor and planner.
2. Wrabness Parish Council **objects:**
 - to the proposed closure of **Level Crossing E48 – Wheatsheaf** situated in the civil parish of Wrabness.
 - to the proposed closure of the through public footpath route FP19 at Level Crossing E48 and to the proposed creation of a new footpath route.

The Railway

3. The Manningtree – Harwich branch line sub divides Wrabness. Level Crossing E48 – Wheatsheaf is situated one mile west of Wrabness train station.
4. The railway is on an embankment at the Wheatsheaf crossing with steps on both sides to afford a safe footpath route over the line. The crossing was recently upgraded. The alignment of the railway is such that visibility at the Wheatsheaf Crossing is regarded by footpath users as very good in both directions.
5. The branch line has hourly shuttle passenger train services in each direction and some through trains. The majority of passenger trains stop at Wrabness Station and train speeds appear moderate at the Wheatsheaf Crossing. Freight trains serve the port of Harwich. From observation the density of train movements in each direction is often one an hour during the day rising to an exceptional three an hour.
6. There have been no announcements about increasing the frequency of passenger services on the branch line. There is no expectation of early major freight expansion at Harwich port and Tendring District Council has discounted this in the new draft Tendring District Local Plan for the period to 2033 published in June 2017.
7. Given the good visibility of oncoming trains at the E48 Wheatsheaf Crossing, the density of train movements and relative train speed the Parish Council submit this is a safe crossing point point for pedestrians. There are no reports in the press of recent fatalities, accidents or incidents involving pedestrians at the Wheatsheaf Crossing. Similarly local history and local memory is silent about dangers or incidents involving pedestrians at the Wheatsheaf crossing.

Wrabness

8. The village of Wrabness, with an estimated population of 420, is set in coastal landscape which has been designated as a proposed Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The E48 Wheatsheaf rail crossing is situated within the proposed ANOB.

9. The estuary and woodlands have national designations for nature conservation and Wrabness benefits from a nature reserve. These features attract people to the local countryside and the Wrabness footpath network is an essential component of this as well as enabling local people to safely and conveniently access the locality on foot.
10. Wrabness is an active village community; our Parish Plan for Wrabness sets out the community vision for our locality (Statement of Case Document 1). Section 5 of the Plan highlights residents value access to the countryside and make good use of local footpaths.
11. Proposals to close footpath routes are generally unwelcome, whilst proposals for footpath diversions are considered on their merits. The Parish Council has discussed the proposed closure of the E48 Wheatsheaf Crossing and the related footpath proposals and concluded these are not in our community interest nor that of our visitors.

Public Rights of Way

12. The Wrabness area is accessible by a network of footpaths (Statement of Case Document 2). The Essex Way (Epping – Harwich) long distance path and E2 European Long Distance Path routed through the parish link to a range of other public footpaths for people needing feeder, linear or circular routes taking in field, shoreline and woodland, as well local walking access to family, friends and services.
13. In contrast Wrabness has just one short stretch of bridleway and horse riders are dependent on the goodwill and consent of landowners for off road riding opportunities.
14. Footpaths and bridleways are valued as road traffic is increasing. This is a particular problem in Wheatsheaf Lane to the north west of Crossing E48 due to HGV traffic generated by the storage depot on a former military site.
15. The public footpath route FP19 over the E48 Wheatsheaf Crossing from the south is routed through an attractive Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Site, over the railway and onwards through fields on the north side of the railway to Wheatsheaf Lane. There it links with Wall Lane leading to the shore and the Essex Way. It provides a safe and convenient walking route within Wrabness and beyond, linking with the footpaths leading to the adjacent villages of Wix and Bradfield. It serves as a feeder route for those seeking the Essex Way, the shoreline or inland destinations.
16. Closure of Level Crossing E48 at Wrabness will fracture a footpath which links two parts of the village (Cooks Corner with Wheatsheaf Lane/Close and Church Road/Ash Street} and destroy a convenient walking route for residents to visit friends and local businesses (such as those which supply produce). We anticipate that closure of the E48 crossing will mean less walking and higher car use and diminished utility from our footpath network.

Proposed New Footpath Route

17. The Network Rail proposal for an alternative footpath route in an east -west direction will not compensate for the loss of the north - south through footpath route across the railway in terms of utility for local residents.
18. As a walking route the new section of footpath would duplicate the existing Essex Way long distance footpath and Church Road which are generally aligned east – west and are very popular routes with stunning views across the Stour Estuary and beyond. In contrast to the proposed footpath route along lower lying land with contained views would be less attractive for users.
19. The eastern end of the proposed footpath is close to the rear of two houses and is likely to impact adversely on their privacy and amenity. Public rights of way pose issues for landowners and we can understand reservations expressed by the farming family concerned about the impact of the proposed footpath route on the future use of their land.
20. Villagers currently benefiting from the north – south walking link over the railway are less likely to walk the proposed longer new route and access by road will become the most convenient option to get to friends and local services. The new footpath route does nothing to retrieve the loss of access and amenity of walking through Ancient Woodland south of the railway. We consider this proposal will impact on quality of life of our small rural community and we oppose the proposed creation of the alternative footpath.
21. The Parish Council submits the best outcome in relation to public access to the countryside is the status quo retaining the existing through public footpath route crossing the railway at the E48 Level Crossing. Any other outcome would diminish the benefit and utility of the public footpath network at Wrabness.

Policy

22. The Parish Council consider that the proposed change runs counter to aspects of Government policy:
 - Department for Transport Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (April 2017).
 - Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs guidance on rural proofing (March 2017).
 - The Government response to the Independent Rural Proofing Implementation Review state that impact assessments need to include the question: *“Will proposals affect provision of facilities or services that support community cohesion or in other ways that affect the quality of life in the local community?”* (Defra, December 2015 - page 6)

Conclusion:

23. The Parish Council consider that the impact of the proposal on the rural community of Wrabness has not been sufficiently understood or taken into account by Network Rail. The E48 Wheatsheaf Crossing is valued and used by Wrabness residents and visitors alike. The fact Network Rail have proposed an alternative through footpath route suggest they are also aware of this fact.
24. The Network Rail footpath proposal would not compensate the community for the loss of the existing through footpath route and it impacts adversely on its neighbours. The proposed replacement footpath route duplicates existing well used east -west routes and is unnecessary. Wrabness values the existing footpath along the south – north route axis through Brakey Grove and across the railway because it is a key link in the local footpath network. Closure of the rail crossing will diminish a valued off road walking opportunity and access to varied landscape and habitat areas.
25. The Parish Council consider the best outcome for Wrabness will be to retain Crossing E48 and make no changes to the footpath route either side of the railway.
26. Wrabness Parish Council is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Public Inquiry.

List of Documents

1. Wrabness Parish Plan
2. Ordnance Survey Map 197 Extract 1:25000 scale