

Network Rail Inquiry into Closure of Footpath Crossing E54 Bures

David Lee, Chairman of Bures Hamlet Parish Council and long-standing Parish Council member of over 25 years.

So, I consider that I know the village quite well.

Bures is an active, rural village in the Stour Valley, just outside the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Stour Valley Path and Saint Edmund Way run close by and our footpath crossing is a link to these routes for anyone walking from the Earls Colne direction.

Bures welcomes all walkers and, as well as our own walking groups, of which we have several; we have numerous hikers passing through the village at all times of the year.

The river Stour divides the village between Bures St. Mary on the Suffolk side and Bures Hamlet on the Essex side and we have a combined population of approximately 2000 adults and children.

Although divided by the river and therefore having different Local Government administrative areas, we live and work together as one closely knit united parish.

The rail line and station are on the Essex side of the village.

Many walking groups use the branch line to access the start and to end their walks.

Firstly, I would like to refer to the Inquiry document 'Folder 02 NR12 Design Guide' item 1.1.2.1;

"In order to extinguish a public or private right of way over a level crossing, allowing the level crossing to be closed or downgraded, **an alternative convenient and suitable replacement for existing users has to be provided** unless it can be demonstrated that one is not required."

also

'In proof of Evidence of Mark Brunnen' Item 5.6:

The closure of level crossings requires attention to many factors, including the practicalities of replacing them with bridges and underpasses, the legal arrangements for closing right of way, **the need to minimise the possible transfer of risk** to other crossings, and the possibility of importing new dangers such as increasing the likelihood of trespass."

Accepted that these directives refer to level crossings but surely "**an alternative convenient and suitable replacement for existing users has to be provided**" and "**the need to minimise the possible transfer of risk**" means that any crossing

should not be closed if the risk to pedestrians using an alternative route would increase.

We believe that this increased risk to pedestrians would be the case as a consequence of closing footpath crossing E54.

The summary of our reasons for objecting to this proposal to close the footpath crossing over our rail line remain as previously submitted, with one amendment.

Our submission includes under 'Rail Underbridge No.891 item 2'; reference to an additional footpath under the rail bridge.

Upon further examination of the Inquiry documentation the only two written mentions of a second footpath being proposed **under** the rail bridge on the south side appears to be in Inquiry document 'Folder 01 Statement of Consultation' which reads;

"A new footway under the bridge has been incorporated into the design freeze proposal"

And;

Inquiry document 'Appendices Proof of Evidence Susan Tilbrook Tab 5. Local Highway Authority Meeting Minutes', which reads;

"SJP discussed the feedback in relation to the lack of a footway beneath road bridge and indicated MM would be considering mitigating this by proposing to construct a length of new footway to match the existing footway widths. MM to discuss with Essex Highways."

We took issue with this in our submission because of the restricted width of the roadway but as it now appears that this proposal has been dropped as being unfeasible, we do not wish to pursue this matter further.

However, the issues concerning visibility for pedestrians crossing Station Hill at the rail bridge remain as they are as described, namely very poor.

SUBSEQUENTLY POINTED OUT THAT LETTER FROM NETWORK RAIL TO PARISH COUNCIL 5 SEPTEMBER 2017 STATED THERE WAS NO PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE FOOTPATH UNDER THE BRIDGE

Reference to Inquiry document 'Statement of Case Folder 02 NR16 Road Safety Audits', clearly shows that a 'Road Safety Audit' has **not** been carried out. If this had taken place, then Bures Hamlet Parish Council believe that the issues that I am about to highlight would have been revealed in such a survey.

I will now analyse the route in more detail, starting from Parsonage Hill and walking into the village **without** being able to cross the rail line.

Added on the day:

We have heard earlier today details of the amended route.

With respect, what we have heard is a very simplified description **without** reference to particular issues along the route which we consider make it dangerous for pedestrians.

Initially, from where the footpath joins Parsonage Hill you must walk on the side of the road or the grass verge for a distance of approximately 20 metres and cross the access road to Parsonage Grove before you can connect with the existing pavement. A risk to pedestrians from passing traffic.

Having walked down towards the Station Hill junction and around the bend at the end the footpath finishes with a dropped kerb.

Due to the rail bridge and the end of the pavement, there is no realistic alternative but to cross Station Hill and join the pavement on the other side. This means crossing the road blind as there is no visibility to see traffic approaching from the village. **In pedestrian safety terms this is the most dangerous point of the route**, particularly considering that we have heavy demolition contractors' lorries accessing Parsonage Hill at all times of the day.

Walking the route in the opposite direction means that visibility is less restricted but is still a long way from ideal, particularly taking into account the excessive speed of some traffic coming from the Lamarsh direction not keeping to the 30-mph speed limit.

There is 17 metres of pavement under the rail bridge. Pedestrians must then cross the two entrances to Water Lane and the 7 metre wide grass area between them, a total of 21 metres with no pavement. Pedestrians again at risk from passing traffic.

There is then a length of approximately 14 metres between this point and the Paddocks pavement on the opposite side of the road. Further risk to pedestrians from passing traffic.

It appears from the Inquiry documentation that a new section of pavement is now proposed here. However, the Water Lane side has a cultivated hedge over a very restricted width of verge and the Paddocks side has a vague area of less than 1 metre in width delineated by a white line, so whichever side is proposed there seems to be a woeful lack of space.

Returning to my analysis of the route.

At some point between the Water Lane accesses and the Paddocks on the other side of the road pedestrians must decide where to cross back. There is no ideal point at which to cross as visibility is poor along the whole distance, but most people cross closer to the rail bridge than further away.

Depending on where you cross the road for a second time, which could be deemed at least inconvenient, you can ultimately join the pavement along the Paddocks which connects to the other end of the railway footpath. There is a total length between pavements (ignoring crossing the road itself) of approximately 35 metres.

I trust that this explanation is clear, but I would encourage any interested parties to visit Bures and walk the route. I would be more than willing to walk the route with you.

In summary Bures Hamlet Parish Council considers that the alternative route proposed is more dangerous than using the rail footpath and therefore that the status-quo should be maintained.

David Lee

Chairman

Bures Hamlet Parish Council

8 November 2018