

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

ANDREW FLETCHER

OBJECTION 130

USE OF PLOTS OF LAND IN SADDLEWORTH FOR

- 1. A WORKING SITE AND ACCESS FOR CONSTRUCTION (Land plot 13 – 027)**
- 2. A COMPOUND TO STORE FENCING MATERIALS (Land plot 16 – 049)**

NETWORK RAIL STALYBRIDGE TO DIGGLE

TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT ORDER

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 I am Andrew Fletcher.
- 1.2 I have lived in Uppermill since 1974.
- 1.3 I gained a Postgraduate Diploma in Town Planning from the University of Manchester in 1975. From 1978 to 2006 I was employed by Oldham Council. In the later part of this period I was an Assistant Chief Executive and a Departmental Director. From 2006 to 2012 I was a consultant. My main area of work was providing support to the 10 Greater Manchester Councils.
- 1.4 I retired in 2012. Since 2016 I have, on a voluntary basis, helped the Saddleworth Parish Council prepare its Neighbourhood Plan, as a co-opted member of its Strategic Planning Committee
- 1.5 Since 2004 I have been registered disabled due to a degenerative form of sight impairment. This affects my experience of the outdoor environment. I may refer to this during my participation in the Inquiry. I am happy to be asked to provide further information about my condition if anyone feels this would be helpful.
- 1.6 I am strongly in support of the Transpennine Route Upgrade. I fully accept that the construction of TRU will involve disruption.
- 1.7 In this objection I have concentrated on two proposals where major adverse impacts could be avoided by very modest revisions to the TWAO. In my opinion, these revisions would be possible with scarcely any implications for the construction process, and none at all on the completed scheme.

2 CONTEXT

- 2.1 Saddleworth now has a beautiful landscape. Green spaces in the valley areas complement the upland scenery, much of which is in the Peak District National Park. It was not always like this. In 1970 the valleys were blighted by industrial dereliction and waste tips. It has taken a huge effort over many decades to transform the area.
- 2.2 As a result of these tremendous improvements, the tourism economy has grown from almost nothing to become a vital part of the local economy. It is a great place to live – an asset to Greater Manchester and the towns and cities of West Yorkshire. It is a reason for people to make their lives in this area, rather than leaving the North. The area is now a great asset for the North of England. It is folly to jeopardise this when surely an objective of TRU is to strengthen the North.
- 2.3 The visitor economy is based on independent businesses. That is part of the attraction for people from far and wide. This domination by independent traders

applies to cafes, restaurants, shops and tourist accommodation and much more.

2.4 However, independent traders are very vulnerable. Even a short term drop off in custom can be disastrous for them. Disruption of traffic during the implementation of TRU is, of course, a huge concern to them. So is anything that detracts from the scenic beauty of the area.

2.5 The approaches to our villages were landscaped by Oldham Council . These “gateways” create an excellent first impression on visitors and are, of course, enjoyed by local people. They also emphasise the separate identities of the villages.

3 OLDHAM ROAD AND CHAPEL ROAD, NORTH EAST OF GREENFIELD STATION. LAND PLOT 13 - 027

3.1 This is an area of very attractive woodland on a steep slope between two very busy roads. It is in the foreground alongside the A670, from which the trees frame the views towards Alderman Hill, Alphin Pike, Indian’s Head and the Pots and Pans War Memorial, all in the Peak District National Park. It is on several bus routes and very visible to passengers on trans- Pennine trains. It is at the point of arrival for visitors who have chosen to visit Saddleworth by train.

3.2 Its location means it can be appreciated by pedestrians, such as people walking to and from Greenfield Station. Its prominent, elevated position makes it a feature in the wider landscape, visible from many locations.

3.3 It is in a very obvious “gateway” location as people travel to Uppermill, and Dobcross and Diggle beyond; to Greenfield and Friezland; and to the hugely popular Dovestone area in the Peak Park.

3.4 Almost all of the vegetation is the result of an environmental improvement scheme carried out in the 1990s. It was prioritised for action by Oldham Council for the reasons I have just given. It was designed to include both evergreen and deciduous tree cover, with underplanting of flowering shrubs and Spring bulbs to make the area attractive throughout the year. In winter tall conifers frame the views of the Peak District hills. It has taken thirty years to achieve its level of maturity. It has transformed the environment, and people’s perception of the area.

3.5 Network Rail’s application gave the impression that the land might be used as a compound. On 22nd April 2026 I was advised by Network Rail that the proposal was not for a compound but for a “working site and access for construction”.

3.6 I have sought more information about the nature and extent of the proposals. On 6th May 2026 I received more detail from Network Rail. This read as follows :-

We are not able to provide a plan which shows how much of land plot 13 – 027 is required. The primary compound is the highway itself and the land (plot 13 – 027) is required to give some flexibility for space as an overflow. For example, if we (sic)

large equipment or a crane is being transported along the highway, we may need a small area of the land plot in order to manoeuvre the equipment. As such, we are unable to determine at this stage what part of the land will be required temporarily.

- 3.7 I don't think that this non- specific, unplanned approach provides any confidence that this key site, in which considerable public money has been invested, will be properly protected. It seems to be a "we will do whatever we need on the day" approach.
- 3.8 It can be deduced from the information provided by Network Rail that the impact would be on the Oldham Road frontage and probably in the central part of this frontage. This wasn't made at all clear until 6th May 2026.
- 3.9 The cross section profile of this particular area is relevant. To intrude into the area to create additional working space, alongside the compound on the highway, may involve the demolition of a low stone wall at the back of the pavement . This could easily be replaced, and Network Rail should, of course, commit to doing so.
- 3.10 Just beyond the wall there are large trees at the crest of the steep slope which drops to Chapel Road. Some of these trees stand on a bank above the level of Oldham Road. The majority are at approximately the same level as Oldham Road. It is within this zone at the western edge of the land plot that there are the most important trees within the design of this area – such as, but not only, the conifers. These trees have now reached maturity. If any trees are affected by Network Rail's proposals it could well include these. Network Rail acknowledges that the information it has supplied does not allow this to be determined. The impact on the root area of the trees also needs to be considered.
- 3.10 The trees further east, at more distance from Oldham Road are less effective in creating the beautiful " gateway" because they are at a much lower level when viewed from Oldham Road.
- 3.11 Beautiful areas like this have not happened by accident or without cost. They were carefully planned and they have involved significant public investment in their creation and aftercare.

4 COMPOUND AREA NORTH OF UPPERMILL VIADUCT ON WOOL ROAD BETWEEN BROWNHILL LANE AND THE ACCESS ROAD TO THE FORMER SADDLEWORTH STATION. LAND PLOT 16 - 049

- 4.1 Oldham Council has, I believe, also objected to the use of this site as a compound. At the time I was preparing this Proof I was advised by Network Rail that its discussions with Oldham Council were continuing.
- 4.2 This area was landscaped as a treatment of a former derelict quarry and is now an attractive green space in a highly visible position.

- 4.3 Its location is at one of the most prominent points in the valley areas of Saddleworth. It sits close to the junction of road routes connecting Delph, Scouthead, Dobcross, Diggle, Uppermill, Greenfield, Grasscroft and Friezland. It is on several bus routes. It provides a scenic gateway to Dobcross, Diggle and Uppermill.
- 4.4 The landscaped area is also important in creating a beautiful local setting. Across the road is the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. This is now a great visitor attraction following a huge investment in the canal's restoration. The Limekiln Café is diagonally opposite. Also nearby is a large and very visible listed building which will only be saved if considerable private investment is attracted.
- 4.5 There is a line of trees close to Wool Road and an arc of conifers at the back of the land plot. The centre of the plot is free of tree trunks, but the root areas of the surrounding trees would need to be protected.
- 4.6 If temporary use is made of the site as a compound there will be an immediate impact. This will be from the presence of a compound and the loss of trees. After closure of the compound there will be a period in which the site is replanted and recovers. Some of the trees have taken many years to reach their current maturity.
- 4.7 This will inevitably have an impact in terms of the perception of the area by tourism visitors, the effect on local businesses, the local community's enjoyment of the area, and the local housing market. It may also hamper efforts to secure the restoration of a nearby listed building. As I have said earlier, even a relatively short term impact on the attractiveness of the area can be disastrous to the type of tourism related businesses we have in this area.
- 4.8 As I have said, I am a great supporter of the TRU. However, I feel that there must be many other ways of storing fencing materials. Ones which have much less impact on the environment and economy in this area.