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Subject: The Network Rail (Tackley Level Crossing) Order
Date: 26 January 2024 14:53:35

The following comments are from Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Access and Countryside Records Teams and relate to the impact of the Network Rail (Tackley Level Crossing) Order on the Public Bridleway.

The County Council understands the need to close the crossing to reduce risk and improve safety and has been supportive in liaising with Network Rail to find a satisfactory alternative route to replace the bridleway level crossing.

The existing bridleway [379/2/10] running to the east of the railway is an enjoyable well used bridleway and in its elevated position affords attractive views across the countryside. The County Council therefore welcomes the proposal to keep this bridleway open (apart from the level crossing) and for permissive access to be maintained through the station and over the footbridge. Since the footbridge will have steps and lifts, walkers, wheelchair users and cyclists will be able to continue to enjoy access along the bridleway.

The proposed new bridleway replaces the level crossing and provides a new route to take users under the railway almost 900m to the south of the existing crossing. Information provided by Network Rail shows that there has been a lot of local opposition to the proposed lineside bridleway route with concerns expressed about the safety of horses using a route next to the railway. The concerns are outlined in the Consultation Report NR07 and these have also been expressed directly to the Countryside Access and Records teams. The teams share these concerns. Network Rail maintains that the proposed bridleway route is acceptable and has identified other bridleways and byway routes in England that run alongside railways at a similar height and distance. During liaison meetings Network Rail have advised that they have had opposing views from Equestrian Experts over the safety of the lineside route.

Information within the documentation confirms that Network Rail is still in discussions with the British Horse Society, and other industry bodies, as to the exact configuration and potential mitigations for the new bridleway. The County Council is keen to learn what these mitigation measures are and believes there should be further consultation once these are known.

In summary, the County Council is in support of the aim of the proposal to close the crossing to improve public safety. It welcomes the retention of the existing bridleway and permissive access through the station and over the new footbridge. However, it shares concerns about safety along the proposed new bridleway route and therefore looks forward to finding out more about the mitigation measures that are still being discussed.

Comments on the Order.

1. Schedule 1 (Article 6) - Redesignation of Highways.

The highway included is Public footpath 379/16/20 between points B1 and B2. The section of this footpath between points B2, B1 and 'Commencement of New Bridleway' (on the Order plan) also needs to be included in this schedule. [Appendix 5 in document NR04 Statement of Aims does not highlight this section of path on the plan. This seems to be incorrect and the blue line needs to be extended.]

2. Schedule 2 (Article 5) – Street to be temporarily stopped up.

The first highway included is noted as public footpath 379/2/10. This is a public bridleway and should be recorded as such. The second highway under schedule 2, public footpath 379/16/20 is again shown between points B1 and B2 but we believe should be between B2, B1 and 'Commencement of New Bridleway'.

3. Schedule 3 (Article 8) – Closure and replacement of Level Crossing

Under (4) the new bridleway should include a width (4.5m as previously discussed with the County Council).

4. Creation and maintenance of new highway

9. This paragraph states that *after a period of 12 months from the creation of the bridleway it will be maintained at the expense of the highway authority*. It should be noted that the highway authority will only maintain to a bridleway standard. If Network Rail (or other) vehicles damage the surface the highway authority would not be responsible for the repairs.

Kind regards

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