

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

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MOORGATE FOOTBRIDGE CAMPAIGN GROUP

Objections 19 and 65

NETWORK RAIL STALYBRIDGE TO DIGGLE

TRANSPORT WORKS ACT ORDER

841 words

- 1 I am a retired GP with orthopaedic and surgical training, having lived all my life in Saddleworth. I am a walker, climber and skier and have been Medical Officer to the Oldham Mountain Rescue Team, supporting our Remote Rescue Medical technicians, for over 50 years.
- 2 My 50 years' Mountain Rescue experience of rescuing individuals, groups and families ascending and descending treacherous paths (where there are at least no traffic hazards) tells me that this is a thoughtless and dangerous proposal, conceived to avoid the cost of retaining a community path extensively used for centuries. It can only extend the walk for those who currently use the Moorgate crossing regularly and put them into significant personal danger - all to achieve what in reality is probably a small saving in costs.
- 3 The Moorgate footpath - 209 - is for the most part a sunken lane, signifying great use over time, with its width suggesting vehicular use in the past. It is neither steep nor difficult, approaching the slope obliquely to reduce the incline - a route selected by the footfall of history. Surveys have shown considerable use by able walkers, walkers with disabilities, walkers with dogs, groups, families, unescorted children and cyclists. Whilst widely used for recreation by locals and tourists, many users are commuting to and from work or school or visiting the shops on foot - a usage we would expect to grow if 209 were maintained, supporting the generally accepted green agenda, and the duty of public bodies to eliminate discrimination (Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010).
- 4 FP 244 is otherwise Wickens Clough - an overspill, V-shaped flood-stream bed which was used by quarry workers walking up from Greenfield. It has long fallen into relative disuse because it is difficult and dangerous - hazardous by means of narrowness and steepness at the top and dangerous by virtue of the precipitate exit on to the main road at the bottom. It is hard to identify at both ends and is permanently subject to damp, slippery surfaces and seasonal leaf fall from the surrounding protected trees. It has been admitted (Mayer Brown in NR87) that this a footpath for able-bodied walkers only. Equally, only the hardest of cyclists - expert and super-fit mountain bikers - could use this route.
- 5 A large number of objectors have expressed the same view, including two other GPs.
- 6 Steep steps are required at the very narrow entrance to the top of 244, with high rises and short goers; replacement with new steps for which no realistic plans have to date been made available - apparently 65 with a hairpin turn - would be an extensive civil engineering project given the narrowness of the site available and the bulging retaining wall it must skirt. Most of the dry stone walls on the downhill side of Ladcastle Road have collapsed due to the nature of the ground. No ground survey has been reported. These constraints will most likely lead to a new stepway being steep and difficult to use, and too narrow for assistance to be given to less able companions or children.

- 7 Other witnesses will describe in detail the dangers at the lower end of 244 as it exits on to the main A670 road with 18 inches of footpath on a blind corner. Whilst the top and centre sections pose significant risk of lower leg injury, the risk at the bottom is of death by traffic accident. An unsteady walker, a pulling dog or an unrestrained child would raise the risk of mortal danger, to no fault of any motorist involved. A 20 mph speed limit would not be observed; there is daily evidence of this in traffic approaching and entering Uppermill.
- 8 Not all users climbing up 209 would exit on to Ladcastle Road at the top, opting instead to use the footpath parallel to it, but below the quarries, to exit on to the little used Mow Hall Lane. Ladcastle road is a single track road with no footways and considerable traffic - users forced to climb 244 will exit with some difficulty on to the narrow road and have to walk along it for an extra 150 metres.
- 9 It is accepted that a footbridge at the Moorgate crossing would have steps, but these would be wide, permitting assistance to the less able and the portage of a bicycle.
- 10 There is a steep clough in Saddleworth which was popularised by social media during and since Covid. The widespread publicity was such that its usage has increased from rare use by climbers to its being a very popular route for the inexperienced. The number of injuries that Oldham Mountain Rescue Team has attended in six years has risen from zero to 16 - and that, given a level of use probably less than a tenth of the Moorgate usage figures.

Dr Andrew W Taylor



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