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The Saffron Walden and District Footpaths Association

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The Secretary of State
c/o Transport and Works Act Orders Unit
Zone 1/18
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR.

Objection to the Closure of Dixies E10 pedestrian rail crossing.

This walking club has been established for 54 years and has led over 800 walks in this area. We use up to 12 local railway crossings which allow our walks to be varied and circular. Safety features high on our walk planning but it is roads that cause us the greatest concern, avoiding them wherever possible. By contrast railway crossings are so safe we treat them as a normal footpath – moreover people using them seem to take more care than usual.

When considering the effect of the proposed closures to our local rail crossings, we experienced one closure which has yielded an improved alternative route, while another, still in the proposals, would be welcome. However most of the others are not the best examples of group thinking. Despite a “consultation” exercise, we detect no changes from pre-conceived plans. NetworkRail seems imperious, with a high handedness borne of having absolute power. Perhaps in attempt to seem considerate, we received one letter saying that it was closing a local crossing because it was used by elderly dog walkers!

We are particularly concerned at the proposed closure of the foot crossing known as “Dixies”. This crossing is a crucial link for walkers going east/west and is likely to become very useful for village residents. The alternative route suggested by NetworkRail to circumnavigate Dixies is so lengthy and impractical it would not be used by ramblers or public. They would seek the shortest route using a narrow road without a footway which is heavily used by school busses and parents collecting pupils from school. It seems NetworkRail considers it more acceptable to risk suffering injury by road than by rail.

While reasoning that an increased in the speed of trains necessitates this crossing closure, NetworkRail appears to disregard the rapid housing development around this crossing - 40 houses to the east and about 360 to the west. With people moving to the country, partly to get out and enjoy it, closing this crossing would fly in the face of a potential increase in use. Now with about 400 new dwellings planned in the vicinity, a case for making a new crossing would be justified and a master stroke solution.

We suggest a new crossing some 300 metres north of Dixies on the edge of the new housing site. There would be space here to make a bridge. This would be acceptably safe and partly offset the loss of the crossing at Windmills E11, now only 600 metres to the north. It would only require a short footpath link to meet the road (with footway) on the east side, and a diversion of Footpath 7 on the other. The school too, would also be more assured of pupil safety.

Can NetworkRail bite the bullet, bend the rigid thinking and come up with a solution we can applaud?

George Turner.