

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

MOORGATE FOOTBRIDGE CAMPAIGN GROUP

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Objections 65 and 130

NETWORK RAIL STALYBRIDGE TO DIGGLE

TRANSPORT WORKS ACT ORDER

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

I have set out the broad thrust of my evidence in the Summary document. I will now explain in detail the economic, social and environmental impacts which I believe should be considered when assessing the proposals for the Moorgate Crossing.

1 ECONOMIC IMPACTS

- 1.1 It is only in the last two decades that Uppermill and the surrounding area has become a thriving tourism destination. The process has been incremental but rapid. In the 1970s it was still a former industrial village. As wool textile manufacturing declined, and then disappeared, significant dereliction had been left behind. Uppermill and nearby villages were scarred by an abandoned canal, closed railway lines and waste tips, and remained largely treeless. The idea that the area might become a place to which visitors could be attracted would have seemed far fetched. Now visitors flock to Uppermill drawn by characterful buildings, excellent places to shop, eat and drink, great attractions and vibrant cultural events – all in a beautiful landscape setting.
- 1.2 New manufacturing activity has emerged in the area, and in Uppermill legal and financial services are notable growth sectors. However, it is obvious that the transformative change has been the growth of its tourism economy. We are not aware of data relating to local business turnover or employment in the tourism sector but the visual evidence is hard to miss. In May 2026 a walk round the village centre revealed that, of 90 ground floor commercial units, 54 were being used by businesses which are likely to be to some degree dependent on expenditure by visitors to the area. 33 units were probably purely serving local needs and 3 were vacant. Uppermill is thriving. The facilities enjoyed by visitors are also a great asset for the local community. We want to protect and enhance this success.
- 1.3 Overnight stays provide another boost to the local economy. We have not counted the number of places in Uppermill where overnight accommodation is available, but there are many. This can easily be assessed by online searches. For example, and ironically, there is a place to stay within a few metres of the bottom of the footpath Network Rail propose to close.
- 1.4 Uppermill is designated as one of seven “centres” in addition to Oldham Town Centre in Oldham’s Local Plan. The centres are subject to policies designed to enhance their economic and social role and their accessibility. Uppermill is unique amongst these centres in having tourism as a major element in its economy. To date Network Rail has not referred to this designation, the characteristics of this centre, or the planning policies which apply.
- 1.5 The emergence of the tourism sector has not been a chance occurrence. It is a

consequence of careful planning and investment. Major public investment was made in strategically selected environmental improvement schemes over a period of 30 years. Private business investment was stimulated, and on an even greater scale than had been hoped.

- 1.6** Tourism policy was developed in conjunction with the improvements to the physical environment.
- 1.7** Many millions of pounds of public money was invested in schemes such as the reopening of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal and its towpath; the transformation of abandoned railway lines into recreational routes; extensive tree planting, conservation schemes such as the enhancement of Uppermill Square; and the reclamation of Moorgate Quarry to provide a major open space within easy walking distance of the village. All these new assets were connected by a greatly improved network of routes for walkers and in some locations, horse riders and cyclists. The village centre was at the heart of the system of routes. Dark Lane was a pre existing link, ideal for integration into the network.
- 1.8** It might be asked why does Footpath 209 matter in this context?
The path is the only suitable route from the village centre to the hilly countryside to the west. It is a link which makes short circular walks on this side of the village centre possible as shown in an Oldham Council tourism leaflet. It brings people to the heart of the village centre. A small diversion of footfall can make a huge difference. From this perspective the termination of Footpath 244 on Oldham Road, outside even the boundary of the defined “centre” is damaging.
- 1.9** A visitor descending onto Oldham Road by Footpath 244 may be completely unaware of what the village centre had to offer or think that it is too distant to bother visiting. There are the options of boarding a bus to go home at this point or walking to Greenfield Station. Both without visiting the village centre.
- 1.10** What Uppermill and the surrounding area has to offer is a great asset to the cross Pennine Corridor. It is a place for recreation and an attractive place to make one’s home. Conurbations which lack these assets cannot be competitive. The strength of Saddleworth’s housing market has increased remarkably as the opportunity to access a transformed environmental setting has been created. Within a lifetime properties that were once almost unsellable have become some of the most desirable in Greater Manchester.
- 1.11** The new economy has thrived but it is fragile. It is founded almost entirely upon small independent traders. This is a great attraction for our visitors but this type of business can go under if there is even a short term loss of customers.
- 1.12** The TWAO process is a difficult one for these businesses. Understanding the proposals, and the frequent changes, is very demanding of time. Expressing one’s views is no easy task. Running a business is hard enough in itself. Diverting one’s attention away from running the business may not be the wisest strategy.

2 SOCIAL IMPACTS

2.1 Health

- 2.1.1 Saddleworth has an elderly demographic profile. The proportion of residents aged over 65 increased by nearly 25% between 2011 and 2018. Younger people are significantly under represented. 17% of our adults have limiting long term illnesses, which is higher than the proportion for the Oldham borough as a whole, although this is likely to be related to the significantly higher proportion of elderly residents. People generally lead healthy lifestyles, and this is then reflected in good health outcomes. (all the above information is in the Profile section of the draft Saddleworth Neighbourhood Plan. We do not have similar information about the recreational visitors to our area.)
- 2.1.2 Walking is a very effective and popular form of exercise whether it is walking for leisure or a trip to the village's many facilities. We have challenging walking routes in Saddleworth, particularly in the Peak District National Park, but it is important that we also have a network of less difficult paths, particularly given our elderly age profile. But families with young children have similar needs. Objections 8 and 46 provide good insights into the benefits of walking, both physical and mental. A wider analysis of the objections shows that nobody thought Footpath 209 was unsuitable for their walking needs. Most said that they had been using it for many years. On the other hand nobody expressed a view that Footpath 244 could be made suitable.
- 2.1.3 Dog walking provides frequent, regular healthy exercise and opportunities for social interaction. Network Rail's usage surveys showed that significant numbers of dog walkers used Footpath 209. The likely conflicts between walkers, cyclists and dog walkers on the steps proposed for Footpath 244 are obvious. The risk to animals and owners where Footpath 244 meets Oldham Road is stark.
- 2.1.4 Ill health has costs. Good health has a value, both financial and in terms of wellbeing. This issue should be included in the calculation of the sustainability of development.
- 2.1.5 Network Rail showed a good understanding of the health and other benefits of walking and cycling when it submitted a planning application for a footbridge in June 2022. This can be seen in sections of the Design and Access Statement submitted as part of the application. (The sections relating to "Planning Policy" and "Assessment Against Key Planning Considerations" on pages 5, 6 and 7 of this document) . It refers both to the importance of non motorised travel and of good access to open space for exercise. Moorgate Quarry Recreation Area is an excellent place for exercise. It has trails for those with limited mobility and the fully mobile. In the Design and Access Statement Network Rail concluded that a footbridge would be suitable for all walkers, and cyclists, but not for wheelchair users.

2.2 Inclusion

- 2.2.1 People of all ages with many different circumstances may be denied access to services and experiences that others enjoy if there is inconsiderate design of the outdoor environment.

As an example, Objector 46 shares her professional experience of supporting older people, particularly those living with Dementia, Frailty, Isolation and Loneliness. She explains how they may be affected if they miss out on the benefits that regular exercise brings. Without it the consequences can be “tragic” and can “involve massively escalating costs for the NHS.”

- 2.2.2 The recreation area at Moorgate Quarry, the social events at the Golf Club and the great views from Ladcastle Road should be available on foot to all those people who were able to reach them by Footpath 209 before its temporary closure. The Moorgate Quarry reclamation scheme retained the old access roads within the quarry. As a result most parts of the area have inclusive access. Nobody anticipated a closure of Footpath 209.

3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 3.1 One of the objectives of the TRU is carbon reduction to help minimise climate change. If TRU acts to increase car use then this is clearly unhelpful.
- 3.2 It is evident from the objections that people use Footpath 209 for walking trips which are recreational but also functional. They walk from nearby villages to Uppermill to use its many facilities whilst also exercising and enjoying the beauty of the scenery. If the level crossing is closed without a footbridge being built some may walk by a more circuitous alternative but many will travel by car instead.
- 3.3 For those who in the past walked up to Ladcastle Road for a celebration at the Golf Club, a picnic in the quarry or just to admire the views, the search to find a safe walking route will be difficult. The most obvious safe and reasonably quick way will be to use the car instead, if you have one. Objectors 159 and 160 explain their very personal reasons for walking to Ladcastle Road to visit a family memorial bench positioned at a favourite viewpoint. In the past they have walked. They intend to speak at the Inquiry but this may not be possible due to current family circumstances.
- 3.4 As I have said, Uppermill is designated as a “centre”. Policy C1 “Our centres” makes the point that each centre has a unique character. I would suggest that Uppermill is unique within Oldham because of the contribution made by tourism. Commercial viability is, in the case of some businesses, the result of a combination of visitor and local resident expenditure. This contributes to the objective described in Policy C1 of “providing a strong convenience retail function so that they can continue to minimise the need for residents to travel.” In other words the tourism role of Uppermill

strengthens the convenience retail offer in the village and therefore reduces the residents to travel as far. A strong village centre also provides employment opportunities close to where people live. There is likely to be a reduction in travel to work by car.

A strong village centre has social and environmental benefits as well as economic one.

3.5 Residential Amenity

3.5.1 In paragraph 8.2.3.23 of Network Rail's Statement of Case it is asserted that the use of Footpath 244 "does not adversely impact private land, agricultural businesses or residential properties that would otherwise be affected by the building of a new replacement footbridge."

3.5.2 As far as we are aware the only impact of these types arising from the construction of a footbridge would be on a house on Moorgate. There would be the acquisition of a narrow strip of land at the furthest point from the dwelling in a long garden. Some overlooking of the garden from the footbridge would be possible, but the footbridge would be so remote from the dwelling and at such a higher elevation that walkers would be looking far over the house to the hills beyond. These issues would have been considered by the local planning authority in Summer 2022 before planning approval was granted for the footbridge proposed by Network Rail at that time.

3.5.3 Network Rail is saying that Footpath 244 as enhanced will not impact upon any residential properties. This is despite the facts that:-

- Footpath 244 passes through a narrow private garden area close to the door of 6 Oldham Road
- It would be carrying a higher volume of traffic than anyone can remember;
- That traffic would be of a type for which it has never been used before – a combination of walkers, vulnerable walkers, children with and without adults, dog walkers and cyclists.
- The part of the curtilage through which the footpath passes is enjoyed as a part of a relatively small garden and also used for car parking and manoeuvring – there being no alternative area within the curtilage for parking and no possibility of parking on Oldham Road

We believe that Network Rail was made aware of a "near miss" between a cyclist and a car which took place in the garden in February 2026 and that it was aware before its Statement of Case was completed.

The resident of 6 Oldham Road is very conscious of the dangers where Footpath 244 meets Oldham Road.

3.5.4 It is difficult to understand how Network Rail could conclude that there will be no impact on a residential property. In my view the much increased level of disturbance

and the continuous consciousness of risk to footpath users, and oneself, would greatly impact on the resident.

3.6 The Environmental Quality of Footpaths 209 and 244

3.6.1 Perhaps this is not a relevant test of a footpath diversion. Or perhaps, because there is an economic argument that we should be providing routes of high scenic value which will be enjoyed by tourism visitors and local residents, it is.

3.6.2 Network Rail has repeatedly referred to both the character and environmental quality of Footpath 209 and Footpath 244 in its Statement of Case. Mr Kevin Lawton has in paragraphs 2.7 and 2.9 of his Proof, pointed to these instances. Some of the descriptions are unrecognisable to us. They are not factual. They certainly do not accord with the opinions of objectors. In paragraph 53 of our Statement of Case we mention that a local poet, in the early twentieth century, described the route down Dark Lane as his idea of heaven. We have yet to find anyone who has a good word to say about the experience of walking down Footpath 244.

Footpath 209 featured in tourism promotion material up to August 2025. The rather grim route down Wickens Clough taken by Footpath 244 was never thought to have the potential to attract visitors.

4 COSTS AND BENEFITS

4.1 The lack of credibility of Network Rail's cost estimates for building a footbridge will probably have been discussed during Week 2 of the Inquiry

4.2 The point that Network Rail is proposing to "export" any costs of accidents by moving them from the level crossing to Footpath 244 where they will be the problem of the local authority and drivers on the A670 will probably also have been discussed during Week 2.

4.3 My point here is an additional one. In our opinion Network Rail has not made an assessment of costs and benefits in a way which determines whether a contribution to sustainable development is being made. It therefore cannot say that the project is in line with the principles which are meant to be driving the Route Upgrade.

4.4 Network Rail's focus has been a narrow one. It has been a different approach to the one it took in its Design and Access Statement when seeking planning permission for a footbridge. Now, In proposing the use of Footpath 244, its focus is upon "What is the most economical method of making the level crossing safe". At Moorgate it hasn't asked "How can we both make the crossing safe and have great regard for the economic, social and environmental prospects of the corridor bearing in mind both the costs to the Upgrade and those borne by others".

4.5 To answer the second question Network Rail would have needed a much wider

understanding of the area. One way of quickly adding to its understanding would have been to engage with the community before making its decision to reverse its decision to build a footbridge.

- 4.6 I believe a much more constructive and beneficial solution could have been achieved as described in section 4.3 of my Summary of Proof.