

Woburn Sands School Crossing

Briefing Note by Councillors David Hopkins (Milton Keynes Council) and Michael Geddes (Woburn Sands Town Council)

1. The Woburn Sands School Crossing is extensively used by the residents living North of the railway line. It is called the school Crossing since the greatest single group of users are the children attending the two schools in Woburn Sands.
2. Discussions in 2015 and 2016 between Woburn Sands Town Council (WSTC) and Network Rail (facilitated by Milton Keynes Council) indicated that NR was concerned over the safety of the crossing and wished to close it. Following concerns expressed by WSTC NR agreed to provide a replacement bridge and planning permission for a fully ramped bridge was granted by MKC in November 2016.
3. Subsequently NR submitted an Application under the Transport and Works Act 1992 for a range of modifications to the East West railway between Bicester to Bedford. This included a proposal to close School Crossing and a requirement for users to use the adjacent vehicle crossing on Station Road.
4. The created local uproar amongst residents and approximately 100 individual objections and from WSTC were lodged. Following informal discussions with NR it was indicated that NR would be prepared to install a pedestrian bridge if this would satisfy the objectors. MKC was kept informed of these discussions – see extract from MKC letter of 23 January 2019 attached as Appendix A.
5. The discussions were reported locally by Cllr Hopkins and, as a result, the majority of residents withdrew their objections. It was agreed that WSTC would represent local views at the Inquiry and Cllr Geddes appeared before the Inspector on 15 February 2019. A copy of his presentation.
6. Following the Inquiry, and before the Report was issued, Network Rail submitted a planning application for a pedestrian bridge; this was approved by MKC prior to the issue of the Report.
7. MKC, WSTC, and local residents were astonished and dismayed when the Inspector's Report agreed with Network Rail's original request and refused permission for a pedestrian bridge.
8. WSTC does not object to the closure of the at-grade crossing (para 2 of Objection). However we strongly object to the proposal requiring pedestrians (particularly children) to use the vehicle crossing. Not only is this contrary to the spirit of the previous discussions but it is hard to understand that Network Rail appear to believe that it is safer for children to cross a railway line co-mingled with vehicle traffic rather than via a pedestrian bridge.

9. We recommend that the proposed closure be suspended to allow time for further discussion. WSTC will pursue all legal options to prevent the requirement for children to share the railway crossing with vehicles.

Councillor David Hopkins
Councillor Michael Geddes

Milton Keynes Ward Councillor
Woburn Sands Town Councillor

23 August 2020