

# Lidlington Parish Council

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To Whom It May Concern:

## **East West Rail Western Section Phase 2 project – Transport and Works Act Order**

Lidlington Parish Council continue to object to the proposals and wish to have a seat at the table when this matter is discussed.

Below are the reasons why the Council want to express their views and relay the detrimental impact this proposal will have on the village and all the residents.

Lidlington Parish Council has reviewed the recent information relating to this proposal and understand that Network Rail have carried out some surveys in the village at the main footway crossing and main vehicle crossings. The presentation of the supporting data which was conveyed to the Parish Council at the end of July was helpful, however, it in turn raised a number of questions which to date remain unanswered. Therefore it is difficult to respond fully to this consultation in light of the number of unconfirmed matters relating to the two above mentioned crossings.

The Parish Council would like to submit the following in response to the consultation document.

In the document justifying the consultation rounds and summarising responses, the areas of mitigation for the issues particular to Lidlington are deemed to be dealt with outside of the Transport and Works Order. It is felt that given consultation started in 2015 with an additional special consultation for Lidlington in June 2016, that there is more that could have been done by Network Rail at an earlier stage to overcome the specific difficulties in the parish, thus allowing the solutions to be included in the TAWO which will be the legal basis for construction, maintenance and operation of the line. Given that any actions agreed once the Order has passed will sit outside of this legal instrument, which is not a satisfactory arrangement for the parish as any agreement would be less enforceable. This also puts Lidlington at a disadvantage through no fault of their own.

If the school crossing closure is maintained (ie. crossing closed), then more enhanced remedial work is needed on the Station Road crossing than is currently proposed. For example, in the meeting between Network Rail and Lidlington Parish Council in July we proposed the realignment of the highway to the east; removing the eastern footpath in its entirety to give a double width western footpath. This could further be enhanced by the extension of the level crossing to the west (requiring replacement and extension of barriers) to utilise some vacant land which would then again add to the width of the western and most-used footpath. This would then improve the safety of the level crossing. The safety of pedestrians at this level crossing is a huge concern to the Parish Council, as is the situation that all pedestrians but particular the child who will use this route on the way to and from school, will be standing next to running vehicle engines, inhaling their fumes.

The Parish Council are also very concerned about if the proposed closure of the school crossing takes place, and as often happens there are works on the line or a need to close the main village crossing, there is then no clear, safe alternative route for pedestrian users. At no time has this concern been answered, this will sever the village in half effectively. There has been no proposed re-route for pedestrians put forward.

There was more recently a sudden closure of the main crossing in the village for maintenance works on the track, this was not publicised in advance and in fact meant some residents were stranded on one side of the track as it was during a Sunday. Residents had gone to Church but had no way of returning home. With the proposals being put forward this scenario will arise again and it continues to be short sighted that there is no clear alternative route for pedestrians.

The stepped access to the Marston Road overbridge (work no. 37 – BBM 08A-Marston Road) between points 12&13, Sheet 54, there should be stepped access to the highway from the footpath running parallel to the railway through Granary Wood. There should then also be stepped access down from the highway on the northern side of the line into the grassland towards Lidlington Pit.

In addition, there should be appropriate dropped kerbs from the highway on the proposed road overbridge to ensure accessibility.

It is very unclear from some of the consultation documents what the actual final proposed route is through the area known locally as Granary Wood. It appears there is a path still going through the Wood, however, the Council are worried they may not have interpreted this correctly. The Parish Council support there being a much needed right of way along this route for multi users and wish to see this be retained going forwards.

It is important to add that Network Rail are still claiming Bye Road as owned by them. This is something that this is completely inaccurate, the home-owners of Bye Road have evidence in their deeds that show clearly that Network Rail are making a false claim.

The Parish Council would also like to add they were also disappointed to see that in one section the village is referred to the parish of Lillington which is an actual parish in Warwickshire.

For point of future reference the Parish Council have asked for the following clarity from Network Rail. Awaiting a copy of the diversity and inclusion assessment document that accompanied the studies undertaken in Lidlington. As well as feedback to the issue again raised by Councillors regarding non compliant signalling system and excessive barrier down times. The Council also asked that there be a check done that the risk assessment referred to in the presentation included child and adult divisions, with this fed back to the Council. It was also felt it would be helpful to understand the near miss and emergency stop data over the last two year period to see any trends, and to understand what the risk matrix considers as high risk data for the stretch of line in Lidlington, as well as the data for Woburn Sands in order to have some comparable data as well.

If this clarity had been received before the end of this consultation it would have enabled the Parish Council to respond more fully.

The Parish Council would also like to reiterate and further highlight their previous concerns as set out below.

The Parish Council has continued to review the proposals and engaged with local residents. The Council's previously raised concerns still continue not to be addressed, which is most

worrying. The Council have highlighted before a number of very serious matters which Network Rail must be resolved. These issues have not gone away, in fact, they have increased with the rushed Central Bedfordshire Council's Local Plan consultation process which has significant implications on Marston Vale and planned growth which is still not be taken into account by Network Rail.

This consultation again shows the lack of regard for stakeholder engagement, in light of the impact any rail changes have on the village, given the line cuts through the centre of the village. The consultation period is not particularly long and there has been no local publicity for residents to be alerted to the fact their views are being sought. Only a handful of residents have received literature on the consultation due to them being pro-active in the matter.

The Parish Council is also dismayed at how there has been no planned approach to ensure the school footbridge crossing survey data feeds into the public consultation. This survey which was promised, has instead been delivered during the consultation process with the Parish Council having no data to hand to highlight or use to illustrate the supporting facts of why the village MUST have an access that remains open at all times and enables the village to remain connected.

This consultation document still shows the parishioners of Lidlington that there is no solution or care for their community and way of life being cut into two. There is sadly, still no clear plan for how the Marston Road crossing changes will be implemented in a way that will not impact on residents negatively. This is mainly due to the fact that there is no workable solution that enables residents to carry on their lives without massive inconveniences from the de-tour they will have to undertake.

The Parish Council remains strongly opposed to any footpath closures in the parish.

The Council would like to again further highlight the previous comments submitted which appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

Network Rail's failure to respond to the very high growth taking place in the Marston Vale exposes a weakness in the organisation's ability to operate responsively in a modern environment. It is also true to say that the overall nature of the scheme has oscillated between a full electrification with greatly increased freight traffic, through to the present one extra passenger service per hour. In the light of all this the Parish Council is deeply sceptical as to what the future truly holds. Flawed Consultation Process During Round 1 of the consultation process the presentation of information was very misleading. Although, on the face of it 3 options were presented – underpass, bridge or closure, the methodology used by Network Rail to determine preferences was deliberately skewed resulting in villagers appearing to support the school crossing closing. It is now also clear that the supposed alternatives were not genuine offers by Network Rail. This has become even more apparent given that the two potential proposals for retaining the crossing were dismissed solely on the grounds of cost.

The consultations to date have been manipulated and presented in such a way that it has left Lidlington facing an unmitigated nightmare. The Parish Council has always sought to co-operate with the Railway Authorities. When the last "upgrade" was carried out we were keen to improve safety and many promises such as pedestrian lights at the School crossing were made by the then Rail Authority. Very few of the promises have been delivered, and certainly no lights. It is our experience, therefore, over a long period of time that consultations have failed to produce any positive benefits for the village.

The Parish Council has always been strongly opposed to any footpath closures within the parish. The school crossing in Lidlington is the most well-used pedestrian crossing on the Bedford to Bletchley section, a fact Network Rail themselves acknowledge. It is inconsistent for Network Rail to be providing Woburn Sands with a permanent route that will allow for continuous access when the crossing it is to replace is used less than our school crossing in Lidlington.

The school crossing is the most well-used pedestrian crossing for a reason; it allows for a permanent link across the village. It means there is a continuous access to the shop, village school, sports field, playing field and public house. Village life will alter dramatically without this link. It will bring isolation to a number of residents, young and old, and potentially impact negatively on the village school. Therefore, the Parish Council feels that it is paramount that this crossing MUST remain open and usable. We do not accept the claim that closure of the school crossing is safer than diverting children, guardians and push chairs onto the road crossing.

Previous consultations have illustrated how unattractive the footbridge options for the school crossing are, and that such structures do not integrate kindly into a rural setting. The Parish Council has always been supportive of an underpass option as an alternative for the school crossing route, and it is just simple equality that Lidlington residents should have full access to both sides of the railway. The Parish Council has previously raised concern that the proposed route of the underpass is a significant distance from the centre of the village. It was hoped that this would be re-designed to allow for closer proximity to the centre of the village. This is based on the evidence given in Network Rail's comments to the planning application for a Nursery on the site immediately next to the crossing, and their stated intention to buy back this piece of land.

The Parish Council therefore calls for the current foot crossing to be replaced by an underpass as close as possible to the existing crossing. We also believe that the Timberland Trail should not be diverted as the bulk of foot fall is on Sunday when no trains run. Finally we oppose the proposed footpath scheme on the Marston Road bridge and call for a direct route with steps. Road Crossings Another supporting reason for why a separate continuous access is needed in Lidlington, is that it is not safe under any circumstance to have just one crossing in the village centre as Network Rail propose. A crossing that will be accessible for pedestrians, vehicles and horse riders, which has no proper safety barriers in place, is ridiculous. There has also been no reference during the consultation process to the increased barrier down times which will clearly impact on the village, not just in terms of crossing the line to access services, but also for people trying to catch a train and their ability to safely cross to the other platform. The safety implications for what Network Rail are proposing are not acceptable and will result in a surge of different users trying to rush across while they have the chance.

Pedestrian users, such as dog walkers, mobility aids and parents with pushchairs, will all cross concurrently with motorists and delivery drivers who have experienced the frustration of many minutes waiting for the barriers to lift. We believe accidents and fatalities are inevitable. Network Rail has neglected to consider what happens when the road crossing fails and is closed, or when regular routine maintenance means a closure. How are pedestrian supposed to get across the village – and if this occurs during term time what will be the fate of the young children potentially stranded on 'the wrong side'? These implications have clearly not been thought through.

The Parish Council believes as a minimum the road crossing in the centre of the village must be upgraded to O.R.R. compliance, to help mitigate the impact of the changes proposed. Finally the Parish Council is opposed to the replacement of automatic barriers with a road bridge on Marston Road built on the existing site as this will extend disruption to village life, effectively

cutting off another exit from the village for many months, thereby causing increased hazard at the very dangerous A507 junction.

It appears that Network Rail has given up trying to solve the special problems they face in Lidlington and taken a deeply flawed but entrenched view that nothing can be done to mitigate the harm that the East West Rail scheme proposes. The end result is a scheme which will close all practical footpath links between the two sides of the village and concentrate all forms of traffic through a single at grade road crossing with non O.R.R. compliant barrier times. It is not acceptable for a village to have no continuous access and the Parish Council will make legal challenges to defend residents who should not have this basic right taken away from them. There has been no consideration in the process of the local authority Local Plan consultation which proposed up to four villages of 5,000 homes and a business park all on land within the parish of Lidlington.

In conclusion the Parish Council cannot convey strongly enough that Lidlington **MUST** be treated as a very special circumstance and have permanent routes across the railway near the centre of the village to protect the safety of residents and preserve the quality of family life; this is of paramount importance to the Parish Council.

Yours sincerely

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