

Heyford Park, Camp Road Development Objection

On 20th April 2020 I received notification that planning permission is being sought for the below, within close proximity of Somerton level crossing (User Worked Crossing/Footpath Bridleway Crossing with Miniature Stop Lights).

- 1,175 new dwellings (Class C3)
- 60 close care dwellings (Class C2/C3)
- 929 m2 of retail (Class A1)
- 670 m2 comprising a new medical centre (Class D1)
- 35,175 m2 of new employment buildings, (comprising up to 6,330 m2 Class B1a, 13,635 m2 B1b/c, 9,250 m2 Class B2, and 5,960 m2 B8)
- 2.4 ha site for a new school (Class D1)
- 925 m2 of community use buildings (Class D2); and 515 m2 of indoor sports, if provided on-site (Class D2)
- 30m in height observation tower with zip-wire with ancillary visitor facilities of up of 100 m2 (Class D1/A1/A3)
- 1,000 m2 energy facility/infrastructure with a stack height of up to 24m (sui generis)
- 2,520 m2 additional education facilities (buildings and associated external infrastructure) at Buildings 73, 74 and 583 for education use (Class D1)
- Creation of areas of Open Space, Sports Facilities, Public Park and other green infrastructure.

Planning permission is being sought for the building of 1235 dwellings on a portion of land Heyford Park, Camp Road, Upper Heyford. The proposed development will be in close proximity to the Didcot to Chester railway line and also Somerton level crossing.

Following a study and information presented by the Railway Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) '*User observations at UWCs (user worked crossings) suggest that approximately 25% of dog walkers failed to use a leash or any other form of dog restraint*', this leads to the owners becoming distracted. RSSB evidence shows that a greater number of near misses with trains involve owners of unrestrained dogs.

Information from the Pet Food Manufacturers Association shows that approximately 25 % of households have pet dogs, as the development is for 1235 new homes it can be assumed that there will be about 309 new dogs in the area. This may result in an increase in the crossing further.

From the National Office of Statistics, it can be determined that the average household had 1.2 children, again using the 1235 dwellings on the development it

can be determined that a further 1482 children will be living in very close proximity to open access to the railway. Not only could this increase the possibility of deliberate acts of misuse of the crossing, for example ‘chicken’ it will also increase the potential for accident misuse e.g. groups of children not paying cognisance to their surroundings. Details from the RSSB state *‘When in a group of people, individuals are prone to following the ‘herd mentality’, paying less attention to their surroundings and following the decision-making of the group as a whole. This may be particularly problematic at footpath and bridleway crossings on routes used often by ramblers. Young people in groups also exhibit more risky behaviour. A young person’s attitude to risk tends to be one of a ‘risk adopter’. Although most young people will not engage in extremely dangerous behaviour, peer group dynamics can encourage them to behave more dangerously than they would when on their own.*

At present, in relation to other crossings in the North West & Central Region, Somerton level crossing is ranked 39 out of 705 in the high-risk register. Following the development and the potential increase in use this would increase the risk further.

Due to the planned development near this crossing the FWI (Fatality Weighted Index) risk score may increase by 32 %, this is due to the potential increased usage of the crossing. See details below.

Combined risk results for increased usage following development.

Usage	Risk Score	FWI	Increase / Decrease	Percentage Change	Ranking in NW&C Risk Register
Current (12 Pedestrians & Cyclists)	B3	0.006024817			39 out of 705
Increase of 2 (14 Pedestrians & Cyclists)	B3	0.006176955	Increase	% 3	39 out of 705
Increase of 5 (17 Pedestrians & Cyclists)	B3	0.006405163	Increase	% 6	37 out of 705
Increase of 10 (22 Pedestrians & Cyclists)	B3	0.00678551	Increase	% 13	35 out of 705

Increase of 25 (37 Pedestrians & Cyclists)	B3	0.00792655	Increase	% 32	32 out of 705
Increase of 50 (62 Pedestrians & Cyclists)	B3	0.009828283	Increase	% 63	26 out of 705
Increase of 100 (112 Pedestrians & Cyclists)	C2	0.013631748	Increase	% 126	15 out of 705

To summarise Somerton level crossing (circled below) is approximately 0.9 miles from the development site, at present there is approximately 12 pedestrians/cyclists who use this crossing daily. If the planned development for 1235 dwellings is accepted then this could see a dramatic increase in the number of users that traverse Somerton level crossing which would in turn increase the overall risk score, if only 100 people out of the 1235 dwellings chose to cross at Somerton level crossing in one day that would increase the risk by 126 %, it is important to note that the crossing also provides pedestrian access to the footpath on the oxford canal which could also be an attraction to new residents and would potentially see users traverse the crossing twice walking to and from the canal footpath.

There are already mitigation measures at the crossing in the form of miniature stop lights, given the potential for a significant increase in risk and having considered all options, the mitigation at this crossing is currently near its maximum and the appropriate next step would be closure of the public footpath element of the crossing via diversion, we would expect any increase in risk at the crossing to be addressed by the developers and/or the Council.



21st May 2020

Rhys Evans

Level Crossing Manager

Network Rail