

Rachel Tibbetts

From: John Young [REDACTED]
Sent: 16 June 2020 21:09
To: Planning
Cc: Somerton Parish Council
Subject: Somerton Crossing Master plan 18/00825/hybrid

Dear Mr. Lewis,

We are the home owners at Mill Cottage, the house adjacent to Somerton Crossing beside the Oxford Canal. It is only by a chance remark in the last couple of days that we have become aware of proposed changes to our access over the railway. There have been no details posted here, neither have we had personal notice from the railway and we are not sure we have seen all the relevant documents.

In the limited time available I have read the report prepared by Natalie Stretton in, I think, 2018 which relies in part on my answers to her questions as to who and how frequently the crossing is used. Over many years different proposals have been mooted to change the crossing, the latest was to have a push-button electrically operated gate rather than the long established padlock. Our two households down here plus the farmer hold keys and have permitted vehicular access down the bridleway. It was pointed out to Ms. Stretton that a push-button would allow vehicle access to anybody over the crossing thus increasing potential danger, a point mentioned in her report. In addition an electrical fault or freezing conditions for instance could prevent the mechanism operating which would trap us in or out and potentially prevent access to us for emergency vehicles.

I have seen the letter to you from Peter and Tracy Clark and endorse their observations about the flawed assumptions and distortion of data regarding increased use due to further development at Upper Heyford. In over twenty five years here we can confidently state that the greater majority of walkers coming from the Heyford direction along the canal either continue, retrace their route or take the field and woodland path west towards Grange Farm. The route back in the direction of Heyford over the crossing follows our unmade access track to the main road, then a road walk between the villages. We have only ever done this once ourselves, preferring to walk the countryside without the need to hug the verge as vehicles speed past. Down the canal from the North there are regular walkers from Somerton using the crossing to complete a circular walk. They are familiar with the protocol of the crossing and, of course, the Heyford development has no bearing on these numbers.

From what I understand this is not a planning application as such from Network Rail but a notice of intent in relation to the application for further houses on the old airbase site at Heyford that the developers be responsible for the cost of any changes deemed necessary at Somerton Crossing. The case from Network Rail seems flawed in so many ways, some outlined by the Clark's letter. I would expect proper liaison from them should the need arise in the future. Sadly since Natalie Stretton moved from her position as our local Level Crossing Manager, maybe two years ago we have not been able to contact her replacement, neither have they made themselves known to us. As daily users of the crossing we could be a useful source of information rather than conjecture and supposition.

Yours sincerely

John and Michele young.