

Network Rail and Somerton Crossing

RE: Cherwell ref 18-00825-HYBRID Heyford Park Camp Rd 1175 dwellings-care dwellings-retail
Network Rail comments 04062020

OBJECTION

We were very surprised by this proposal to possibly close or divert the Somerton crossing. The Somerton crossing has no parking, which deters many walkers, cyclists and dog walkers, so is unlikely to attract huge increases in users from Heyford Park. In Upper Heyford our recreation ground has attracted dog walkers from the new development of Heyford Park but unfortunately many do not walk they use their cars to bring their dogs to walk around our recreation ground. The same applies to Allen's Lane, the village entrance to the Oxford Canal, many walkers and dog walkers use their cars to walk or bring their dogs to start their walk from there instead of walking from their homes. Our village is hoping that when the leisure walks are in place on Heyford Park, people will predominately use these to walk directly from their homes and lessen traffic in our village lanes.

We would suggest that as Somerton Crossing is somewhat further from the new development than our village and based on what our experience has been so far, there may be a small increase in some people walking over the crossing but we would not anticipate anywhere near the numbers suggested by Network Rail. We believe that the new leisure walks and parks will create a range of walks on Heyford Park and offer residents walking facilities closer to home. Network Rail have not considered this in their report.

Network Rail's report says that 1,482 children will be living in very close proximity to open access to the railway. We would not put Somerton Crossing in the 'very close proximity' range. The crossing is quite a distance from the villages of Upper Heyford and Somerton and down a long, approx half mile track, which means the crossing is not visible from the road. We believe Network Rail's argument regarding 'herd mentality' of young people is extreme and it does not take into consideration the real distance from the new development and indeed the non visibility of the crossing from the road.

Network Rail summarise that with the building of 1235 dwellings they anticipate a dramatic increase in the number of users. The Somerton crossing is not on the 'way' to a bus stop, or railway station, or anywhere else that would encourage pedestrians to use it unless for leisure walking and their projection of 100 people would increase the risk by 126%. What risk are they talking about? Risk of young people playing 'chicken' or people just using the crossing? They use the 'high risk register and currently they say it is 39 out of 705 but state that due to the planned development 'near' the crossing it may increase by 32%. The crossing is not near the planned development it is some way from it, particularly for children/young people to access. It is quite a walk from the development. It would take approximately an hour at a leisurely pace from the middle of the new development either by part public footpath route or road to the crossing and then another hour or so back whether by canal or road.

To summarise our objections:

1. Network Rail have not considered the provision of the extra leisure pathways and parks being developed on Heyford Park for the residents to use from their doorsteps. Which will mean many people remaining on site for their leisure and recreation. Or driving somewhere they can park.
2. Network Rail are basing their assumptions and projections as if the Somerton crossing was in 'very close proximity'. We would not consider Somerton crossing in very close proximity to Heyford Park.

From Upper Heyford Village it would take us a good 3/4 hour to walk to the crossing let alone from the new development on Heyford Park. No housing is being built near the Somerton end of the site.

3. Network Rail are assuming vast amounts of young people and dog walkers will be accessing the crossing. If it was going to be in very close proximity, as in a short walk from their homes, we can understand the concerns but **it is not**, it is a considerable distance and not visible from the road. The crossing itself is well managed, signed with lights and is a very safe crossing.

4. We do not consider Network Rail's summary to be enough to close or divert this crossing. Network Rail have not considered all of those who live in the villages who enjoy and use the Somerton Crossing sensibly. They have based their report on projections and assumptions and an inaccurate distance from the actual housing on the new development site e.g. .9 this measure is probably taken from the bottom of the site nearest to Somerton but there is no housing going there and access to the public footpath is on Camp Road, Heyford Park, which to walk to the crossing would be approx an hours walk not very close for children/young people to access.

5. Network Rail have not mentioned that the increase in housing will take many years before the number of occupied houses reaches the permitted level. Therefore the public route should remain open and monitored on a yearly basis.

If Somerton crossing public footpath were to close or be diverted it would mean a lot of people including a high number of older people having their walks curtailed. We walk weekly 2 hour circular walks and Somerton crossing is key to quite a few of those. We are part of a walking group of retirement age and enjoy many circular walks around the Cherwell Valley and we have been walking these walks for over 12 years we have yet to see any young people at all on their own, we have only seen them within a family group. The majority of people are of the same age as ourselves or some dog walkers who are younger.

Please consider the enjoyment of many of us who love walking the countryside footpaths, including Somerton crossing, which allows us access to circular walking around the Cherwell Valley, to enjoy nature and the feeling of wellbeing that it gives to us. Please do not allow the diversion or closure of this crossing.

Healthy Heyford Walking Group

Upper Heyford