



Wareham Railway Crossing Briefing Paper



This paper explains the importance to Wareham residents of the existing ground level foot and cycle crossing at Wareham Railway Station.

Residents wish to maintain a safe and convenient pedestrian crossing across the railway, the only pedestrian route between the two halves of the town and linking those living to the north of the railway with jobs, schools, shops and other vital services with 1,200 or so crossings made daily.

1. Wareham has two halves either side of the railway line

The Town has a population of 5,827, about half of whom live north of the railway line whilst nearly all shops, services, all schools, the sports centre, health centre and library are to the south.

2. There is only one pedestrian crossing of the railway line

There is no other pedestrian crossing of the railway line. The bypass flyover has no footway and its route would not be convenient for pedestrians. Some 1,200 crossings of the existing pedestrian crossing are made a day, 18% of people crossing have mobility difficulties.



Wareham showing railway level crossing joining the two halves of the town

3. There has never been an accident or fatality on this crossing

The railway line opened in 1847 and there has never been a recorded accident or fatality at the crossing. Network Rail's Level Crossing website shows that Wareham crossing had no incidents of "misuse" prior to the risk assessment date (September 2016), no incidents since, one incident of "near misses" in the year prior to assessment, and no incidents since and no "accidents" in the year prior to or since the assessment date. The next assessment was due in December 2017. For comparison Poole crossing had 30,051 pedestrians or cyclists. It had 28 incidents of misuse, 2 incidents of near misses and 2 accidents prior to the assessment date of January 2017.

4. Network Rail cannot close the crossing without there being a Equality Act compliant alternative

Network Rail has threatened to close the level crossing when the lease expires even if there is no alternative crossing point.

Legal advice on this threat has been taken from Sasha White QC of Landmark Chambers, London who states that

"if Network Rail close the Level Crossing when the 1988 Lease expires and refuse to provide alternative step free access, while still failing to have due regard to the effects on

those with protected characteristics, it is highly likely that a court would find that Network Rail have acted unreasonably and contrary to their duties under the Equality Act.”

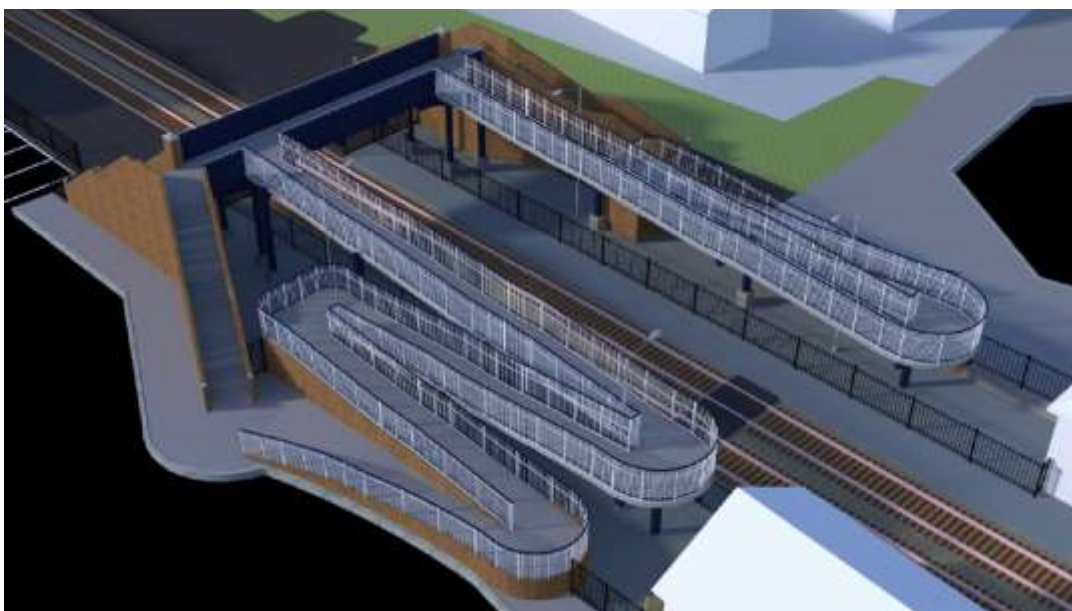
A copy of the advice has been sent to Network Rail and it is interesting that their reply to the Trust did not contain the threat to close the crossing in the absence of an alternative.

5. Proposed ramps were unanimously rejected by Purbeck District Council and Dorset County Council

In 2015 a proposal for a ramped bridge was submitted by Network Rail to Purbeck District Council. For good planning reasons the District Council turned down this proposal as follows:

- 1.The proposals by way of their excessive scale and materials of construction will appear demonstrably harmful in the street scene.
- 2.The proposals due to their excessive scale, bulk and massing fail to preserve the setting of the historic asset of the bridge itself and the wider station area.
- 3.The proposals due to the increased length of travel for pedestrians which make it more likely to increase the use of motor vehicles by residents for short journeys, fails to promote sustainable transport

In 2018 a revised proposal for a ramped bridge was submitted to Purbeck District Council for Listed Building consent. The application for Listed Building Consent was refused unanimously by Purbeck District Council in January 2018 because they considered on a 8 – 0 vote that there was not substantial public benefit to outweigh the harm to the listed station and bridge.



The planning application for this proposal for a ramped bridge to replace the pedestrian/cycle ground level crossing was also refused unanimously at a meeting of Dorset County Council's Regulatory Committee held on Thursday 14th June.

The application was refused subject to the reasons set out below. It was also suggested that the Highway Authority and Network Rail enter into discussions about alternative solutions including an automated barrier system.

1. The construction and presence of the proposed ramp would cause harm to the setting and therefore the significance of the Grade II listed bridge which forms part of a listed group of station buildings, as well as ancillary/curtilage buildings which are listed. No clear and convincing exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify harm to the Grade II listed bridge. Neither would the harm to this nationally important heritage asset be clearly and convincingly outweighed by the public benefits associated with the proposed development, as other significantly less harmful alternatives are available.

2. Approval of such development would be contrary to government policy for conserving and enhancing the historic environment set out in Section 12, paragraphs 131, 132, 133 and 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, March 2012) and the proposed development would make no desirable positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness as encouraged by paragraph 131 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

3. Section 7, Paragraphs 56, 57, 61 and paragraph 64 of the NPPF states that permission 6 should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions. The excessive mass and scale of the proposed ramps will not improve the character of the historic bridge and station. This is also contrary to Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

4. The application is contrary to Policy LHH (Landscape, Historic Environment and Heritage) of the Purbeck Local Plan. In addition, the ramps would detract from the street scene and be contrary to Policy D (Design) of the Purbeck Local Plan Part 1. This is because the application fails to demonstrate that the protection and enhancement of the setting of the designated heritage asset has been addressed. It also fails to establish that the adverse effect that the proposed development would have on the setting of the listed building, can be satisfactorily alleviated through appropriate and acceptable mitigating measures.

5. Also the proposal is likely to increase the use of motor vehicles, and therefore fails to promote sustainable transport, contrary to Paragraphs 30 and 41 of the NPPF and Policies IAT and CEN of the Purbeck Local Plan.'

6. Strong public support for the maintaining of the ground level crossing

In 2016 3,300 local residents signed a petition to maintain the ground level crossing.

On 23rd April 2016 a well-attended demonstration of local residents was staged at the station.

On 21st July 2017 Michael Tomlinson MP chaired a public meeting arranged by Wareham Town Council of some 400 residents at the Purbeck School. Residents expressed their very strong opposition to the proposal for a ramped bridge and closure of Wareham's level crossing. Residents were concerned that the bridge will split the town in two, cut residents off from jobs and needed local facilities, be too steep (1 in 12) and too far for many people to use, and be out-of-keeping with the Listed Railway Station.

This proposal was widely reported in the local press, the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph.

Daily Mail, Wednesday, August 2, 2017 Page 11



On the warpath: Residents stand on the level crossing of Wareham station to protest against changes to the Grade II-listed footbridge. Inset, actor Edward Fox

A Bridge Too Vulgar

Edward Fox joins protests over 'eyesore' zig-zag railway crossing

By Ben Wilkinson

ACTOR Edward Fox gave an impassioned speech as a British general in the classic war film *A Bridge Too Far*. Now 88, the screen star has launched a new battle cry - this time against controversial plans for his local railway bridge.

The actor made a heartfelt plea after a public meeting, warning officials that the proposals would leave a permanent blot on the market town of Wareham in Dorset.

Fox won an Oscar for his role as Lt Gen Stan Horrocks in the 1977 movie, based on Operation Market Garden, the failed Second World War mission to take eight key bridges held by the Germans.

He is now determined not to lose the fight against Network Rail and council plans to add an 'unsightly' network of ramps to the Grade II-listed station footbridge at a cost of up to £1.7million.

The actor argued the imposing 187-ft-high network would overwhelm the historic structure.

The station, which is served by pretty brick buildings, dates from 1847, when it replaced an even older stop from 1647. The actor said: 'This is a vital issue which will affect the day-to-day lives of local residents and have an irreversible impact on the town's future. The proposal would also be a permanent blot on our town's historic station.'

Rail bosses and Dorset County Council want to add ramps to the existing footbridge and shut off the 'dangerous' level crossing currently used by pushchair and wheelchair users.

The crossing is controlled by locked gates and a security guard at a cost of £130,000 a year.

The plans will mean those taking the new route over the tracks will have to travel 450ft up and down the zigzagging ramps. Fox, who also starred in 1973 film *The Day Of The Jackal*, has lived near Wareham on the Isle of Purbeck since the 1980s. He regularly uses the station to travel to London.

The actor is fighting the plans alongside more than 2,300 people who have signed a petition calling for the current crossing to be retained.

Campaigners have pointed out no one has ever been seriously injured there in 49 years and have called for an automated gate to be installed instead.

About 1,000 people use the existing crossing daily to get to work and access local amenities.

The actor is no stranger to local politics. Seven years ago he gave a speech that helped convince planners to reject an application for a supermarket near Wareham.

The star won a round of applause after claiming the proposal would 'ruin for evermore a precious corner' of Dorset.

'There have been previous plans to redesign the station's footbridge, which has been examined for closure for several years. But a Dorset Council spokesman said this design for Wareham station was less imposing than previous proposals, adding: '(The ramps) will be shorter in length and have less of an impact on the existing railway footbridge.'

After the meeting last month, Mid Dorset and North Poole MP Michael Tomlinson said: 'The strong opposition voted clearly showed the strength of local opinion. There are very real concerns that this proposal will split the town in half, some people will simply be unable to get across the railway and that it would be an eyesore.'

A county council spokesman said: 'We expect to submit the application in around two weeks' time and will follow the standard planning process, which will give all parties the opportunity to comment.'

A final planning decision will be made by the county council's regulatory committee.

Controversial: The proposals for the 450ft network of ramps on the crossing

'Permanent blot on historic station'

Battle cry: Fox left, in war movie classic *A Bridge Too Far*

Daily Mail, August 2nd 2017

On Saturday 9th June an impromptu demonstration was staged at the Railway Crossing by local residents wishing to save Wareham's Railway Crossing. This was reported on Meridian

News and BBC South Today and showed the continuing opposition to the proposed ramped bridge despite many being disillusioned.



7. Wareham Neighbourhood Plan includes Policy to maintain the ground level crossing

Work on a Neighbourhood Plan for Wareham started in 2015 and following extensive consultation was submitted for examination in January 2019. In view of the importance of maintaining this vital pedestrian and cycle link between the two halves of Wareham a Policy to maintain the ground level crossing has been included in the draft Plan:

PC1 - Main Pedestrian and Cycling routes

The main pedestrian and cycle routes within the Neighbourhood Plan area shown on Figure 26, including the surface level crossing across the railway line next to the Station, shall be retained, and improvements to the accessibility of these routes supported. New development should have good convenient routes to the Town Centre and main movement attractors and should not adversely impact on the convenience and attractiveness of pedestrian and cycle routes or the Town's heritage assets.



8. Conclusion

The proposed closure of Wareham Level Crossing is probably one of the biggest issues faced by the town in the past 50 years. Clearly public safety is of great concern and so too is the severance of the local community. Half of the town's population of almost 6,000 live on the north side of the railway yet all schools, shops, recreation and health facilities are on the south side. There is only one pedestrian route between the two and this involves the level crossing. The closure of this crossing is therefore an issue which will directly affect the lives of thousands of the town residents on a daily basis. This is why there is such overwhelming public opposition to the proposal and has been for the past 15 years since it was first mooted.

The Wareham community wish to work with Dorset County Council and Network Rail to find a solution that is in keeping with a historic market town and maintains a direct and convenient route for pedestrians and cyclists. Common sense suggests that the solution should be based on an electronic barrier or gates linked to the signalling system. In discussions with Network Rail it has been confirmed that this solution is likely to achieve an acceptable risk score without the need for DCC to continue to pay £120,000 pa. for staff cover.

The letter from Network Rail to the Town Trust dated 18th January states "Should the current planning application be unsuccessful we will meet again with DCC to discuss a way forward. We have no pre-ordained view on what should happen in this scenario."

The community wishes to see all parties working together with the local community to find a sensible long-term solution based on electronic gates linked to the signalling system.

Wareham Town Trust 22.01.2020