

Glebe Way Level Crossing CW80

Inspectorate Reference: ROW/3226477

Summary user proof of evidence – The Whitstable Society

14 September 2020

Mark Demery

Contents

1 – Introduction and overall scope of the user evidence - how it fits into our case.....	3
2 - My personal experience of the alternative routes to CW80	3
3 - Experience of others	5
4 - Response to NRIL points on suitability of alternative routes.....	6
5 – Summary and Conclusions	6
7 – Appendices.....	7
APPENDIX 1 – ALTERNATIVE ROUTE DISTANCES..	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Contents

1 – Introduction and overall scope of the user evidence – how it fits our case	3
2 – My personal experience of the alternative routes to CW80	3
3 – Experience of others	5
4 – Response to NRIL points on suitability of alternative routes	6
5 – Summary and conclusions	6

1 – Introduction and scope of user evidence

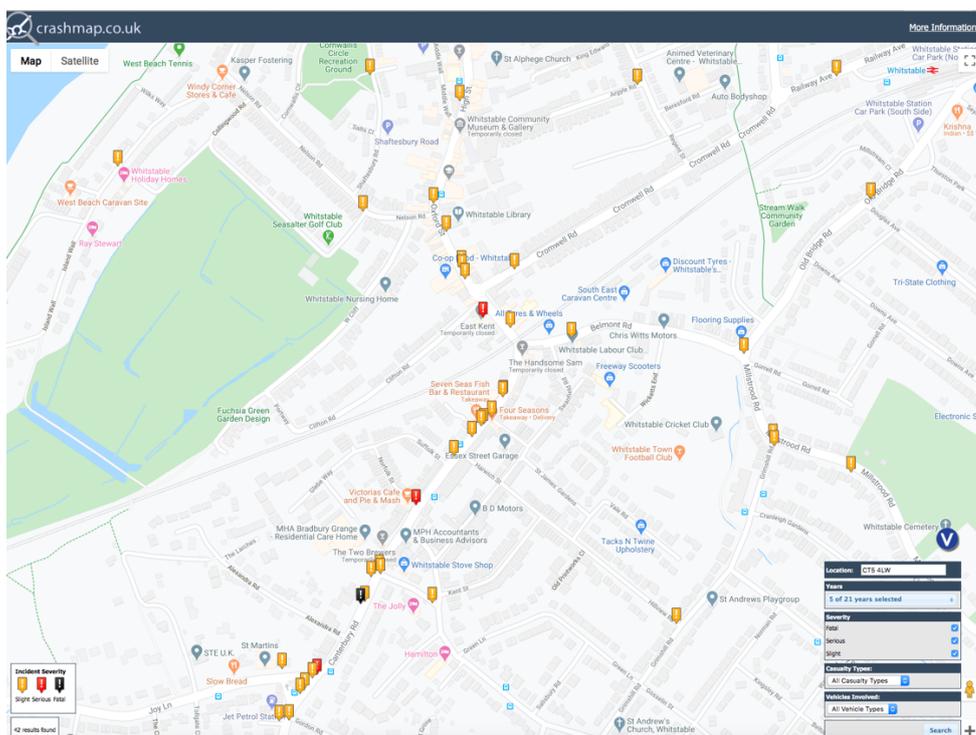
1. My name is Mark Demery. I have lived in Glebe Way, Whitstable for 4 years.
2. I submit this proof of evidence in support of the Whitstable Society case that the crossing should remain open.
3. In this proof of evidence I set out my experience of alternative routes to the crossing and summarise work to collate local residents' views.

2 - My experience of alternative routes

4. The crossing is my preferred route to the town centre, beach and Seasalter. I am familiar with alternative routes.
5. There are two alternative routes: i) east of the crossing via Canterbury Road; and ii) west of the crossing via Alexandra Road or Irish Village.
6. At Appendix 1 I have sought to determine approximate measurements of the increased distances involved in using alternatives. It shows considerable increases in typical distances and times taken for pedestrians who currently use the crossing, up to an additional 1.2km for a round trip. This takes journeys beyond acceptable distances, and in some cases beyond preferred maximum distances, established by the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) quoted in the Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (NRIL) statement of case 1.13.
7. Canterbury Road route is the only direct alternative route towards the centre of town. It is the main western vehicular thoroughfare into and out of Whitstable. As Appendix 2 shows, this is a busy road with narrow pavements, particularly under the rail bridge. The route has considerable sections of pavement which are substandard (approx. 1.3m) and under the bridge is only 1.05m: barely half of the "*desirable width*" (2m), and considerably less than the 1.8m "*absolute minimum width*" as specified by the CIHT.¹
8. The 'pinch point' under the bridge is particularly dangerous because of the combination of a narrow footway and narrow carriageway. There is little space for pedestrians to pass at a point where vehicles often come close to or mount the pavement because of the narrow carriageway. Social distancing here is very difficult.
9. Canterbury Road traffic is often slow or stationary with engines idling resulting in an unpleasant and unhealthy pedestrian environment,

¹ [https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/4460/ciht - designing for walking document v2 singles.pdf](https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/4460/ciht_-_designing_for_walking_document_v2_singles.pdf) at page 7.

10. I always choose to use the route via the Crossing to town because it is a pleasant and healthier journey. “The propensity to walk is influenced not only by distance, but also by the quality of the walking experience. A 20-minute walk alongside a busy highway can seem endless.”
11. The route via Alexandra Road or Irish Village, goes to/from the beach. Alexandra Road is a private road with no pavements leading to a poorly lit footpath towards the rail bridge. The footpath to Irish Village is somewhat overgrown in places, ill lit, narrow and uninviting at dusk or in the dark. These paths lead to a stepped bridge over the railway which itself is unattractive, attracts graffiti and is inaccessible to anyone who cannot cope with the gradient and steps.
12. In its report considering the application to divert the crossing over a new bridge, Kent County Council stated that *“There is, therefore, a concern that the proposed new route running over the stepped bridge is not significantly safer than the level crossing.”*² I would concur that this alternative does not provide a marked safety improvement.
13. Using the footbridge increases distance to a visit to the beach with time spent on busy polluted roads. I would be most unlikely to use these alternative routes after dark.
14. In the past five years Canterbury Road from Joy Lane to Nelson Road has seen 20 collisions resulting in injuries including one fatality.³



² KCC Regulation Committee Member Panel 26 September 2018, P11 24.d; also at [KCC/1477].

³ <https://www.crashmap.co.uk/Search> - then search Canterbury Road, Whitstable, CT5 4LW.

15. The Glebe Way crossing provides a quiet mainly traffic-free route, or part of a route, to the beach or town centre. The crossing and other Whistable footpaths can be used to reach any part of the main shopping streets without walking along busy roads for more than a few metres. It also allows the bypass of main roads to reach the harbour and beyond to the east or Seasalter and beyond to the west. The crossing provides access to a substantial and complex collection of paths in Whistable.
16. Alternatives to the crossing are considerably less safe, pleasant and comfortable for use by pedestrians.

3 - Experience of others

17. The Whitstable Society conducted a questionnaire asking residents about their use of the crossing
18. User evidence in the comments section of the questionnaire, and in objections to the extinguishment order (KCC4a) demonstrate closure would force many people to use alternative routes they consider unsafe, unhealthy and unpleasant. Some say closure would prevent them making journeys by foot or at all. In many cases, the crossing is used for everyday routes to work, shopping or to see family etc., and not simply discretionary leisure use. Closure would have a detrimental impact on users' quality of life.
19. Examples of users assessment of alternative routes:
 - WS Q5/30 *"I have heart problems which means I find the pedestrian bridge very hard to use, and the road under the bridge into town, is dangerously narrow with dangerously obscured vision (at one time I was hit by a lorry mirror as the lorry mounted the pavement heading into Whitstable)."*
 - WS Q6/184 *"It would simply mean we cannot walk to the beach or to the causeway across the golf course and would have to use the car."*
 - WE Q6/212 *"I find the route along Canterbury Road very dangerous with narrow pavements and fast moving heavy traffic including lorries and buses. The fumes are also bad for my asthma."*
 - KCC4a P45 – John and Sue Allen *"The alternative route of Alexander Road and the pathway to the rail bridge is not an option for us, because it is not lit and we don't like using alleyways alone due to personal safety, this certainly cannot be used in the evening."*

4 - Response to NRIL points on alternative routes

20. Paragraph 1.12 of the NRIL statement of case states “*The nearest footbridge is approximately 200 meters to the west of the crossing. Some 300 meters to the east, there is an underpass.*” These distances are ‘as the crow flies’ and only achievable by walking along the tracks. NRIL misrepresent the distances and call into question the veracity of their evidence.
21. Paragraph 1.18 of the NRIL statement of case states “the only pragmatic solution to satisfactorily ensure adequate public safety is to see the closure of the crossing.” Yet in Network Rail’s Narrative Risk Assessment 11 January 2019 the recommended options for the crossing were diversion via a footbridge or installation of MSL Overlay.
22. Paragraph 13.16 of the NRIL statement of case states ‘the length of the path leading leading up to Glebe Way crossing from Canterbury Road is, for the majority, unlit.’ There are seven LED streetlights triggered by fading light ensuring the path is well lit.
23. NRIL’s statement of case points to the existing crossing’s access difficulties for some potential users (P27 13.4-13.5), a situation it has done nothing to improve. While accepting that closure of the crossing will have a detrimental equalities impact on the grounds of age and disability NRIL has not proposed measures to improve access via the existing footbridge or via Canterbury Road which is restricted by the rail bridge.

5 – Summary and Conclusions

24. Alternatives to the Glebe Way crossing are less suitable for pedestrian use, when matters such as safety, comfort, convenience and quality of life are considered.
25. The increased distances of alternatives would result in this part of Whitstable being less accessible and permeable to pedestrians, particularly those with mobility issues and a proportion of elderly residents, increasing isolation for some users.
26. Alternatives offer a lower *quality* of route for pedestrians, they force force pedestrians to use either an already busy main traffic route or a stepped bridge with significant access and comfort issues.
27. Neither a bridge down a dark alley nor a narrow pavement on a busy road under a rail bridge are equivalent to the existing access provided by the Glebe Way crossing. Residents who use the crossing would demonstrably feel less secure and some would have their access to leisure and other amenities curtailed. Car use would increase.
28. Closure of the crossing would have a negative equalities impact on the grounds of age and disability, and reinforce the division between those who live on the right and wrong side of the tracks in Whitstable.

29. On behalf of the Whitstable Society, I ask that when considering alternative routes, the inspector's consideration is weighted towards safety and comfort of pedestrians, as well as the obvious distance increase.
30. I therefore ask the inspector to not confirm the order for extinguishment.

7 – Appendices

Appendix 1 – Alternative Route Distances

Appendix 2 – Assessment of Alternative Routes (in separate document).