

## **Maria McLauchlan - GT EPE**

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**From:** Laura Trott MBE MP <laura.trott.mp@parliament.uk>  
**Sent:** 28 February 2021 22:20  
**To:** clerk@otfordpc.co.uk  
**Cc:** Richards, Clive; Oddy, Yvonne  
**Subject:** Re: Part of Footpath SR49, Pilgrims Way (Otford, Kent)) Rail Crossing Diversion Order 2018 (Case Ref: LT11561)

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Dear Sharon

Thank you for copying me into your email.

I too have had a similar request for the inquiry to wait until it can be heard in person and I have passed these concerns onto the planning inspectorate. It is very good of you to offer a suitable location where the Inquiry could be held and I await the decision with interest and again ask for the Planning Inspectorate to take on the concerns I previously sent and the concerns expressed within your email.

With best wishes,

Laura

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR SEVENOAKS AND SWANLEY

Website: <https://www.lauratrott.org.uk/>

Telephone: 020 7219 4964

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From: Clerk - Otford Parish Council  
Sent: 18 February 2021 17:15  
To: yvonne.oddy@planninginspectorate.gov.uk  
Cc: TROTT, Laura , clive.richards@planninginspectorate.gov.uk  
Subject: Part of Footpath SR49, Pilgrims Way (Otford, Kent)) Rail Crossing Diversion Order 2018

[cid:image002.png@01D70619.965A0530]

Ms Y Oddy  
The Planning Inspectorate  
Temple Quay House  
2 The Square  
Bristol BS1 6PN

18 February 2020

Dear Ms Oddy

Public Inquiry - Reference ROW/3201659  
Part of Footpath SR49, Pilgrims Way, Otford, Kent. - Rail Crossing Diversion Order 2018

I am contacting you on behalf of Otford Parish Council regarding the difficulties that will arise from holding a Virtual

Inquiry to decide the fate of the Otford Rail Crossing, just south of Otford Railway Station. This inquiry is listed as Footpath SR49, Pilgrims Way (Otford, Kent) Rail Crossing Diversion Order 2018. The date of the Virtual Public Inquiry is currently set for the week commencing 4 May 2021.

Otford Parish Council has been advised that a Councillor has received multiple representations from residents who are very concerned that they will be excluded from the democratic process by this Public Inquiry being held via an online Zoom-style meeting. This style of Inquiry will favour Network Rail who will be able to use cutting edge equipment and fully trained operating staff to seamlessly run their side of the case.

It has been suggested that this style of Public Inquiry is grossly unfair and will lead to a one-sided debate.

The use of technology to hold this Inquiry will disenfranchise a sizeable proportion of village residents that do not have access to a computer nor any working knowledge about how to operate one. Similarly, many residents who do have computer access will never have attended an online meeting and will have no knowledge of how to run the application. All of this, coupled with unreliable local internet connections, can only lead to frustration from the residents as well as those trying to run a multi-person meeting effectively.

Otford Parish Council would therefore appeal to the Planning Inspectorate to delay the Inquiry until this can be held face-to-face. This issue has been unresolved for thirteen years already and it is far too important to be held online during a pandemic where one side already feels they will be effectively excluded from the discussion process. After such a long time, waiting a little while longer should not present a difficulty.

Otford is able to provide areas where social distancing would not present a problem and where an Inquiry that is open and accessible to all can be delivered for all sides.

The Council would appreciate it if this request can be given your most serious consideration.

Yours sincerely

Sharon Holt

Sharon Holt  
Clerk to Otford Parish Council

  
 High Street  
Otford Kent TN14 5PG

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## Maria McLauchlan - GT EPE

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**From:** Laura Trott MBE MP <laura.trott.mp@parliament.uk>  
**Sent:** 28 February 2021 12:51  
**To:** Oddy, Yvonne  
**Subject:** FW: Part of Footpath SR 49, Pilgrims Way (Otford, Kent) Rail Crossing Diversion Order 2018 (Case Ref: LT11552)  
**Attachments:** image003.jpg; image004.jpg; afplkbpeoamnoppn.png  
**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Dear Yvonne,

As you will see I was copied into this email to you and I hope Mr Housden's request can be considered favourably. As you know there is a lot of local concern about this proposal and it is important that the full range of local responses are considered.

With best wishes,

Laura

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR SEVENOAKS AND SWANLEY

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From: Tom Housden  
Sent: 16 February 2021 10:53  
To: Yvonne.oddy@planninginspectorate.gov.uk  
Cc: TROTT, Laura  
Subject: RE: Part of Footpath SR 49, Pilgrims Way (Otford, Kent) Rail Crossing Diversion Order 2018

re. ROW/3201659

Dear Mrs Oddy,

I am writing to you to request that I be allowed to publicly speak at the Inquiry into the closure of the level crossing just to the south of Otford Station.

I suffer from Cerebral Palsy and I am deeply saddened and distressed by the news that Network Rail want to build a footbridge over our local footpath, thus closing the railway foot crossing.

In the 150-plus years that the railway crossing has been in use here, there have been no reported incidents of major accidents or of people dying by being hit by a train. Network Rail have not disputed this fact despite a lot of people asking them to do so if they think it is not correct.

I have had a site meeting with Network Rail in 2015 about the proposed footbridge, and they said they would look into my problem with the bridge (I will not be able to go across it due to all the steps and its great height). However I have not been contacted back by them in six years after that meeting and nothing more has been said to me. I think that Network Rail are trying to dismiss my case as they think I am just one individual. However from previous Inquiries and village hall meetings I know that there are several other local disabled people who feel like I do, and want to keep the level crossing as they will not be able, like me, to get over that really high bridge.

I feel we, as disabled people, are being ignored and discriminated against by Network Rail. Such was local worry about my predicament that our local newspaper the Sevenoaks Chronicle published the article that I have sent you with my email.

I have had friends look at Network Rail's Statement of Case on my behalf and they consider the following is directly relevant to my and other mobility-impaired local residents' circumstances. I completely agree with them because we, like the mobility-impaired person in ORR's example, would be cut off from the village and the greater part of our social and commercial lives in Otford if our level crossing were to be replaced by a bridge:

"The Office of Rail and Road, Network Rail's regulator, is unhappy with its current guidance on level crossing safety, which it issued in 2011. It has put out for consultation a draft revised guidance note. When circulating its draft revised note, the ORR said it was dissatisfied with its current guidance basically for two reasons: it was 'out of date' because of technical progress and other developments, and it failed to deal properly with issues raised by the Equalities Act 2010. While stating that closing a level crossing should always be 'pursued', ORR acknowledged it should also be taken into account that a level crossing might be a mobility-impaired person's only means of crossing a railway line, so closure could be discriminatory because such people are members of a protected group under the Equalities Act. ORR's unease on this is palpable. It knows its revised guidance on level crossings will have to come to terms with the inconsistency of ORR's standard approach to level crossings (close them wherever and whenever possible!) and the requirements of the Equalities Act not to discriminate against members of protected groups."

The proposed height of the footbridge is vast. We (local residents) were told by Network Rail that it is made so high to allow for overhead electricity cables to go underneath the top walkway. To get over the railway crossing at the moment, I climb over a stile with 4 steps leading to the crossing. As the proposed footbridge will consist of climbing up and down a series of about 60 steps (in all sorts of weather conditions that will make the steps slippery) if I fall from a height the injury will be far worse.

I can not use the route that Network Rail say is an alternative as it would lead me down the very busy Station Road (A225), and that IS a scary and frightening place for me to try to walk. I cannot drive, so to remove the level crossing will mean I can not visit clients to fix their computers (I am a self-employed computer engineer and much of my job would simply vanish), but more importantly for me it completely robs me of my independence to walk to Otford which is my home village in which I grew up in, and love. Over my lifetime of 42 years I have had to learn to walk through constant practice and repetitions. Now, through a lot of hard work and perseverance I am privileged to be able to walk throughout my local area - so to have the prospect of a large part of it being denied to me will hit me very hard.

I use the crossing daily, and myself and other disabled people who also use the crossing will not be able to use the bridge. I would like to think that the Equalities Act 2010 covers what my friends mentions above about the Office of Road and Rail and Network Rail approach to cases such as ours, that they must acknowledge that any decision on closing the level crossing should also take into account that a level crossing might be a mobility-impaired person's only means of crossing a railway line (as in my case), so closure could be discriminatory because people such as I and other disabled users who use the crossing are members of a protected group under the Equalities Act of 2010.

I think that the ORP statement above, that it is revising its guidance on level crossings to reflect 'technical progress' may suggest the way forward. To satisfy Network Rail's wish to improve safety at the crossing why don't they install a traffic light system (as there is in use elsewhere) and forget the bridge idea. This way 'technical progress' supplies the answer to all our problems.

Yours faithfully

Tom Housden

[cid:part1.DFF747FB.C2D5A132@yahoo.co.uk]

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[Image removed by sender.]

Tom Housden

Actor

M: [REDACTED]

E: [REDACTED]

A: Inclusive Talent E: agent@inclusivetalent.co.ukmailto:agent@inclusivetalent.co.uk> B: <https://www.backstage.com/u/tom-housden/>

# Scrapping level crossing will discriminate against disabled

## Resident says proposed bridge will make it harder to get about

By Doug Kempster

doug.kempster@sevenoakschronicle.co.uk

AN OTFORD man with cerebral palsy has blasted Network Rail's plans to scrap the Pilgrim's Way level crossing.

Tom Housden, 36, relies on the footpath to get into the village. But rail chiefs claim it is too dangerous.

They have told district planners they intend to replace the crossing with a bridge.

Mr Housden, however, says climbing the stairs of the proposed structure would be too difficult for him. And taking an alternative route into Otford along the main road would be equally challenging.

He told the Chronicle: "I've got cerebral palsy and I'm wobbly on my legs.

### Issue

"At the moment it's not a major issue for me to get into the village. I use the level crossing and even the stiles don't cause me problems.

"But a footbridge will be very difficult for me. I'm a self-employed computer engineer and many of my clients live in Otford, I'm not sure how I would reach them."

Mr Housden's plight has the sympathy of neighbours in Tudor Drive, who challenge rail bosses' claims that the crossing needs to



**A BRIDGE TOO FAR:** Tom Housden is a cerebral palsy sufferer from Otford who fears he may be cut off from the village when the crossing is removed

close because it is dangerous.

Network Rail says Pilgrim's Way, which is crossed by around 150 trains a day, has seen 17 incidents in the past 17 years including a fatality. It says the site – to the south of Otford Station – has "a history of trespass and near misses".

However, villagers say that prior to the fatality – a suicide in

2013 – there have been no deaths on the crossing since it was opened in 1862.

Mr Housden said: "The suicide was absolutely awful but that death wasn't the result of the crossing's design. If somebody is determined to kill themselves, unfortunately they will find a way."

The Otford Village Society –

which represents more than 1,000 villagers – has also opposed the plans. It feels Network Rail has reread on the earlier proposals it had put to residents during a consultation because of cost considerations.

It also says the company's plans to slash mature trees and replace them with a similar screen is "clearly impractical". The society

has called for further consultation.

Mr Housden said: "As these plans stand, I feel I'm being discriminated against for no good reason. Network Rail has failed to demonstrate why the crossing needs to close."

Network Rail's proposals are currently before Sevenoaks District Council.

### IN BRIEF

## Allotment to host open day

**SEVENOAKS:** Sevenoaks Allotment Holders' Association's annual open day will raise funds for Hospice in the Weald on Sunday next week.

The free event will run from 10am until 4pm and will feature a range of activities and entertainment for all the family including a scarecrow festival, best plots contest, refreshments and stalls.

Those attending can park at nearby St John's School in Kennedy Gardens.

Event organiser Ruth King said: "You'd be surprised how many people don't know that there are 11.5 acres of stunning allotments right here in the middle of Sevenoaks.

"They are amazed when they walk through the gate and see what we have to offer.

"This is a terrific opportunity to take a stroll, admire the fruit, veg and flowers, enjoy a cuppa and cake and drink in the stunning view of the North Downs whilst supporting the Hospice in the Weald."

■ For further information about the event email [info@sevenoaksallotments.com](mailto:info@sevenoaksallotments.com)

## Man sentenced

**OTFORD:** A village man has been given a suspended prison sentence after attacking two men on Valentine's Day.

Joshua Satterley, of Willow Park, admitted two counts of assault when he appeared at Sevenoaks Magistrates' Court this month.

The court heard how the 23-year-old carried out the attack in Pembroke Road, Sevenoaks, on February 14.

Magistrates sentenced Satterley to 52 weeks in prison, suspended for two years. He must also carry out 300 hours of unpaid work in the next 12

## Mother is ordered to rehab after series of driving incidents