

BOROUGH OF POOLE

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY GROUP – THURSDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2009

REPORT OF HEAD OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

HAMWORTHY BRANCH RAIL CROSSINGS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report explains the options for providing a pedestrian and cycle route across the Hamworthy branch railway line. This will link the major areas of new housing to Hamworthy Park.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that:

- (i) The Council's preferred option should be a bridleway level crossing adjacent to the western boundary of the Shapwick Road development.
- (ii) A planning application be made for the new route and level crossing works.
- (iii) An application be made under Section 26 of the 1980 Highways Act for creating a new bridleway across the railway, as shown on Fig. 1.
- (iv) Further research be carried out on previous public use.

3. Background

- 3.1 Passenger use of the Hamworthy branch ceased in 1896, so for over a hundred years the line has been a low-speed freight-only route, with less than ten train movements a day. Hence the line has been used by generations of Hamworthy residents as an unofficial pathway, with numerous routes to and across the line showing up on aerial photographs. The railway authorities did make occasional attempts to prevent unauthorised pedestrian use, but the line continues to be used by pedestrians today. Currently there is only one return train movement a week on the line, and there have been periods of up to a year when no trains at all have run.
- 3.2 The Pilkington Tiles site between the railway and Shapwick Road closed in the 1980's, and the Council investigated alternative uses for the land as part of preparing the Poole Local Plan. The preferred option included leisure use of the western end of the site, with a road across the railway, leading to a slipway. However, these ideas were not developed further, and the present Harbour Reach development received consent in July 2005.

4. **Harbour Reach Development**

4.1 This development of 342 dwellings has recently been completed. At the planning stage, the options for crossing the railway line were fully considered, and the development layout, shown on Fig 1, includes a footway/cycleway running parallel to the railway. This rises to about 4m above ground level at location A, and slopes down to ground level at location B, near the Hamworthy First School boundary. Obviously location A is best suited to a bridge, and location B to a level crossing.

4.2 Nine options were investigated, and a progress report, attached as Appendix A was made to the Area Committee in June 2007. Subsequent design work shows that the Option 1 bridge crossing at location A is now expected to cost £780,000. However, the cost of a basic foot/cycle level crossing, Option 8 at location B, remains at the £90,000 - £130,000 shown in Appendix A. A design is now being prepared, and should be completed before mid- April.

5. **Future Rail Freight Services**

5.1 The Council and Poole Harbour Commissioners both wish to see more rail freight use of the Hamworthy branch. However, they agree that 20 train movements a week is an aspirational and operational limit, and this figure has been used in the risk assessments.

5.2 The Commissioners had been concerned that a level crossing might restrict future shunting of freight wagons at the Port. However, officers and the Harbour Engineer have concluded this will not be a problem, as recent changes to the rail operation by EWS (the rail freight company) prove that a level crossing at location B will not interfere with shunting.

6. **Risk Assessment**

6.1 Table 1 below compares the pedestrian/vehicle conflict at the Blandford Road pelican crossing with the pedestrian/train conflict at the proposed level crossing site, assuming that train movements increase to ten times their present level. Figures for the Ashmore Avenue level crossing are included for comparison. The figures speak for themselves, and will be forwarded to Network Rail.

Table 1: Risk exposure – proposed crossing compared with existing Blandford Road pelican, and Ashmore Ave. level crossing

Site	Visibility	Pedestrians crossing per week	Vehicles per week/speed limit	Trains per week /speed limit
Ashmore Ave. level crossing	Straight rail approaches but road has 90' bend immediately south of crossing	2000	18,000 30mph	2 5mph
Pelican crossing	Unrestricted – straight road approaches	2000	100,000 30mph	nil
Proposed bridleway/rail crossing	Unrestricted – straight rail approaches	1000	nil	20 5mph

7. Rail Industry Position

- 7.1 Network Rail have recently studied the train operation and level crossings locally as part of their preparation for the Poole–Wool resignalling project. Some changes to the Ashmore Avenue level crossing may be implemented in 2011 as part of this project. Useful and positive discussions have been held with Network Rail’s project team, but they have re-emphasised how difficult it is to gain permission to install a new level crossing.
- 7.2 There have been two well-publicised cases since 2007 where the office of Rail Regulation has allowed new level crossings as part of new railway lines. Transportation Services has been encouraged by this, and is also researching pending changes in level crossing legislation.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 Taking into account the increased cost of the bridge option, and the better prospects for securing a level crossing, it is recommended that the latter be promoted as the Council’s preferred option.
- 8.2 The evidence of historic and continuing pedestrian use of the railway is strong, and the Rights of Way officer has researched what procedures might effectively be used to promote a new bridleway route. Further research, including evidence from local residents, is recommended.

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Head of Transportation Services

Appendix A - Harbour Reach Development – Rail Crossing Studies - June 2007

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HARBOUR REACH DEVELOPMENT – RAIL CROSSING STUDIES

This report is a non-technical summary of the studies being carried out by Transportation Services, and gives progress and some decisions up to 20 June 2007.

1. **Introduction**

- 1.1 The former Pilkington Tiles site south of Shapwick Road, Hamworthy is currently being developed as a residential area by Taylor Woodrow. In accordance with the planning permission, the developer is constructing a four metre wide pedestrian/cycle route from Blandford Road (near Norton Way) to the south-western corner of the site, next to the school boundary. Opposite the beach, the route rises to a summit (Location A) about 3.5 metres higher than the railway tracks, and then falls back to track level at the school boundary. (Location B).
- 1.2 In addition to providing this route, the developer has contributed £127,000 towards the cost of a railway crossing. Further financial contributions will be sought from other major residential developments in Lower Hamworthy.

2. **Options**

- 2.1 Nine options have, so far, been investigated, and are listed on Table 1. They are six bridges, two level crossings and a combined bridge and path extension, Option 9.
- 2.2 A site visit was held with representatives of Network Rail and the Office of The Rail Regulator (ORR) last October. The current National policy is that Network Rail do not permit any new level crossings. The ORR consider that there are no exceptional circumstances here which justify an exception to current National policy.
- 2.3 There are various technical issues to be tackled with the Environment Agency (flood defences) Wessex Water, Crown Estates, Poole Harbour Commissioners and rail safety experts. It is hoped these will be concluded by the end of September.
- 2.4 Further advice will be sought from the Police regarding their views on community safety implications, particularly the different risks of a bridge compared to a level crossing.

TABLE 1

Option Number	Crossing Location	Description	DDA Compliant	Cost Range
1	A	Bridge. Straight ramp, southern side only.	Yes	£390,000 – £440,000
2	B	Bridge. Spiral ramp on north side, zig zag on south side.	Yes	£620,000 – £650,000
3	B	Bridge. Zig Zag ramp on north side, straight on south side.	Yes	£540,000 – £570,000
4	B	Bridge. Zig Zag ramp on north side, movable ramp on south side.	Yes	£620,000 – £650,000
5	B	Footbridge with steps.	No	£240,000 – £270,000
6	B	Bridge with ramps (affects school).	Yes	£550,000 – £580,000
7	A	Level crossing (3 tracks)	Yes	£70,000 - £110,000
8	B	Level crossing (2 tracks)	Yes	£90,000 - £130,000
9	A	Old Footbridge plus new path through residents' gardens to Ashmore Avenue.	No	£250,000 – £280,000

Note: DDA is the Disability Discrimination Act.

3. **Recommendations**

3.1 There are still too many technical issues remaining to give firm recommendations, but Options 5,6,7 and 9 are not being investigated further. The proposed path extension to Ashmore Avenue as part of Option 9 would require land from residents' gardens and this has, understandably, worried them. There is a high risk that a path in the location proposed could lead to criminal activity, as experienced some years ago, and it is right that Option 9 is clearly ruled out at this stage.

3.2 Option 8, a level crossing near the school boundary, is favoured by the majority of local residents and organisations. Further discussions will be held with rail experts on the details and risk assessment of Option 8. If it proves impossible to deliver a level crossing, then Option 1 looks the best of the bridge options at the moment.

4. **Information**

4.1 Transportation officers have appreciated the detailed information given by local residents, especially about walking along the railway line. Any further information, before the end of August would be gratefully received by email to c.francombe@poole.gov.uk or telephone 01202 262040.

Chris Francombe, Transport Policy Manager, Borough of Poole - 20 June 2007