

Steep Parish Council - Sheet railway crossing

In November 2014 Steep Parish Council issued a statement expressing our concerns regarding the Network Rail proposal to close the Sheet half-barrier level crossing. We reserved our final decision until Network Rail had concluded their consultation and had a firm proposal.

We are grateful to Camilla Bushill and her team for taking the time to come and present their proposals to the Council in June. Those proposals focussed on the closing of the crossing with variations on the design and siting of the foot/cycle bridge to replace it.

Network Rail claim that closing the half-barrier crossing is the only way to reduce risk at the crossing yet concede when questioned that full curtain gates would also reduce risk. We recognise that there is a case to reduce risk at the Sheet crossing and would suggest that full curtain gates would achieve this whilst also maintaining the historical connection between the villages. We are informed that full gates at Sheet would result in substantial wait times for motorists. Since the only alternative routes would be to use the full gates at Kingsfernden or in Petersfield where wait times would be equal or greater this does not negate the argument for their installation at Sheet.

Having discussed the proposal, Steep Parish Council remain firmly opposed to the full closure of the crossing. We would urge Network Rail to consider installing full curtain gates at Sheet. If the crossing was closed there would be a number of significant effects to the communities, businesses and on the roads of the surrounding areas. We are opposed to the closure for the following reasons:

1. Highways issues -

The closure of the crossing will force traffic to take an alternative route either using the Kingsfernden crossing or the main crossing at the station in Petersfield. As the Kingsfernden crossing is to be upgraded with full gates, the increased waiting times will accumulate traffic at the crossing. The top of the lane is narrow with no footpath and meets with the A272 coming into Petersfield. This junction is already difficult for emerging vehicles and will be exacerbated by increased traffic volumes.

There is already substantial congestion at the Petersfield crossing during busy periods and adding traffic from Steep will only add to what is already a significant problem.

Steep Marsh - Steep Marsh is an outlying hamlet in the parish of Steep. The proposed closure will annexe the hamlet further from the village forcing residents to either a) drive virtually into Petersfield in order to double back to the church, school or day nursery, or b) drive along a long narrow single-track lane for more than two miles into the village.

2. Landscape impact - The three designs presented by network rail each involve the construction of a massive steel structure in Sheet. A new bridge has to be future

proofed to accommodate possible overhead line equipment (OLE), this increases the height and mass of the structure. The bridge also has to accommodate wheelchairs and prams and must therefore have appropriate gradients necessitating long approaches that must be made safe with appropriate safety railings etc. The resulting monstrous structure will be a massive blot in the picturesque SDNP village.

3. **Businesses and services** - Access to businesses and facilities in Steep will be worsened as a result of the proposed closure. This could put businesses such as the iconic Harrow public house in very real danger. Although the pub is a popular destination, with worsened access it will be more difficult to find and can only have a very real negative impact on its future business.
Steep School, Steep Cricket Club and Steep Tennis would all be adversely affected by the closure of Sheet Crossing. Rural businesses and institutions struggle in the current climate to survive, worsening access to them increases their struggle.
4. **Community** - Closing the crossing at Sheet would sever a connection between the villages of Stroud, Steep and Sheet that has existed for hundreds of years. Residents of Steep value living in a village with individual identity, by closing the only route east effectively forces eastbound residents into Petersfield undermining the historical status of the village linked to each of its neighbours.