

## Urgent Letter to all Ashton Residents from Tony Clarke MP regarding the **Network Rail problems in Ashton**

Dear Resident,

It has been some time since I was able to personally meet with members of the village to discuss our ongoing dispute with Network Rail over their continued mis-use of their access site just outside the village. There have been numerous meetings and discussions over the past couple of months and I thought it prudent to write to give you an update on where we are and what further can be done.

To assist you I re-cap below what has happened since our public meeting held in the village on 19<sup>th</sup> February. You may recall that Network Rail offered to move the site to a new position on Roade Hill a few hundred yards away from its existing position. This proposal was not supported by the majority of people in the village and as a consequence I wrote to Network Rail informing them of its unsuitability and asking them to look harder for an alternative. Network Rail investigated a number of alternatives and a site at Gordon's Lodge was identified and favourable comments were made by local residents as to the suitability of this site.

Network Rail attempted to purchase the site but the owner was not willing to sell. However, he was willing to sell the original alternative at Roade Hill to Network Rail if they were still interested. Network Rail are reluctant to purchase this site as they felt the village had already declared their dissatisfaction for this as an option. With Gordon's Lodge not available to them Network Rail then put forward proposals for the upgrade and improvement of the present site. At the same time I received some correspondence from the village stating that on reflection they would rather Network Rail moved the access to the new Roade Hill site than simply trying to reconfigure and improve the current access.

Despite our warnings to Network Rail about the possibility of accidents arising as a consequence of their inaction there was as I am sure you know a serious road traffic accident recently involving a car, a bus and a low loader. I wrote to Network Rail on 10<sup>th</sup> October expressing my anger that such an incident had happened, particularly after warnings given by villagers that such an incident was bound to occur. Network Rail responded to me outlining further measures they would be undertaking to ensure no repetition. So, despite all of our best efforts since 19<sup>th</sup> February we seem to have come full circle with alternatives being ruled in and ruled out, Network Rail continuing to make promises for improvement which are unrealised and as a result residents of the village becoming more and more angry at the lack of progress.

As a consequence I have now called Network Rail to a meeting at my office in Westminster on 2<sup>nd</sup> December to inform them that unless they can offer a clear and agreed plan of action for relocation and/or improvement works that are acceptable to the village then I will have to involve both the Health and Safety Executive and the offices of the Local Environmental Health Department to follow through the numerous complaints that are being logged and brought to my attention by local residents.

With the above meeting in mind I decided to take this opportunity of writing to you to seek your guidance on the following questions:

1. On the basis that Gordon's Lodge continues to not be available for purchase do you feel that the new Roade Hill site is a better alternative to the current access?
2. If the existing access is to continue to operate, what changes do you feel are appropriate so that its use would be acceptable to the village?

Finally, in order for me to compile a full list of incidents and/or complaints made by residents over the period I would be grateful if you would inform me of how you have personally been affected by Network Rail's operation of the access site and/or any breaches of Health and Safety Regulations you have witnessed. These will then form the basis of any submission I make to the Health and Safety Executive and/or the Environmental Health Department on behalf of Ashton residents.

I understand fully the continued frustration of people in the village that we have not been able to conclude this matter, indeed I share in that frustration particularly given that all of the points and concerns raised by us at our public meeting with Network Rail on 19<sup>th</sup> February have come in to being. I will of course keep you updated as to the outcome of my meeting with Network Rail on 2<sup>nd</sup> December and any subsequent action I undertake thereafter. But for the moment, I take the opportunity to thank you for your assistance to date and give you my assurances that I will not allow this matter to come to rest until we have reached an agreed course of action to which the village can concur with.

Yours sincerely

**TONY CLARKE MP**

**NORTHAMPTON SOUTH CONSTITUENCY**

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