

Will Gompertz joins North Oxford residents in fight against Network Rail over planning restrictions

COUNCIL bosses have assured trackside residents in North Oxford they are standing up to Network [Rail](#) with the firm set to 'flout' planning restrictions next week.

When the first train leaves Oxford station to head to Oxford Parkway and beyond to London Marylebone at 7.20am on Monday, the company will have breached conditions imposed by [Oxford City Council](#) earlier this year aimed at keeping noise levels down.

Residents living along the section of line have written to the council this week to urge them to stop the services from running.

But the council, which voted to force Network Rail to install Silent Track along the line and increase its monitoring of noise and vibration, said it was in a 'difficult legal position'.

City council executive director David Edwards said: "We are standing up to Network Rail and we can't express enough sympathy to the residents, we do not fully understand residents' concerns.

"We are in a very difficult legal position in that before taking any enforcement action, all other possible solutions have to be explored.

"And Network Rail have submitted two fresh planning applications which would count as a possible solution."

He added: "Stopping a national railway is an expensive business and we have to be clear our case is watertight before seeking enforcement action."

Mr Edwards, who did not rule out eventually taking steps to halt services, revealed the council had written to the Department for Transport about the

potential breach but has yet to receive a reply.

He added the council was not confident of DfT support as a history of delays and going over budget on major railway projects would leave them less inclined to back enforcement action which would cause both more delays and more costs.

Among those angry at the move is the BBC's arts editor and a North Oxford resident Will Gompertz (pictured), who wrote to the council this week.



He said: "What is the point of the planning process – and the public expense involved – if it can be ignored and flouted."

Wolvercote resident Guilhem Poussot said: "It is absolutely stunning that, in a country where the law prevails, private organisations can start operating a new train service for which the planning conditions have not been fulfilled.

He added in a letter to councillors: "It will be impossible to install Silent Track once the 24/7 train service has started.

"The disastrous electrification project of the Great Western lines shows how difficult and costly it is to operate on live train tracks – this mitigation must therefore be delivered before the service starts."

Network Rail, who had previously promised to install Silent Track, backed out of its commitment after concluding a £3.6m price tag to lower noise by three decibels was not value for money.

No one from the rail firm was available for comment yesterday but the company has previously said: "We promised to look into whether any additional benefits that 'silent track' could provide would justify the significant extra cost required to install it.

"We established it wouldn't deliver any recognisable noise reduction beyond the £10m of trackside sound-reducing barriers we are already putting in.

"We are not prepared to waste taxpayers' money on a solution that would offer no discernible benefit."