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OBJ 182 Document 1.

CLlr Sue Clark

Proof of Evidence

Relating to the closure of School Crossing (FP6) and Pilling
Farm South Crossing (FP1) and proposals to divert to Station
Road, Lidlington, Bedfordshire

and the construction of a new Marston Road Crossing,
Lidlington, Bedfordshire

East West Rail Western Section Phase 2 Transport and Works
Act Order.

I represent the Central Bedfordshire (CBC) Ward of Cranfield and Marston. The Bedford to Bletchley (Marston Vale Line) runs through my ward from Ridgmont to Green Lane, Stewartby. A number of the TWAO proposals affect my ward.

Whilst supportive of the East West Rail (EWR) scheme as a whole, I object to the making of the Draft Order for the reasons outlined below.

1. Strategic developments proposed close to the Marston Vale Line

1.1 The Draft Order and the EIA need to take account of the strategic developments proposed in area. The Marston Vale has a strategic housing allocation of 5,000 houses, (CBC Pre submission Local Plan 2015-2035 Policy SA2) and this should be considered as a reasonably foreseeable future project. The CBC Pre submission Local Plan has been submitted for examination in public, which is due this spring. An outline planning application for the strategic site has been submitted for determination. Such large scale housing development will have a significant impact on the existing rural road network and the level crossings, as well as increasing demand on existing footpath/cycleway/bridleway crossings. It will increase the need for connectivity across the rail line, in contrast to current proposals which reduce connectivity in Lidlington. It will increase waiting times at barriers with more users on the roads.

1.2 The Strategic allocation at Marston Gate for 35Ha of B8 (CBC Pre submission Local Plan Policy SE2) which is located next to Ridgmont Station should also be taken into account as a reasonably foreseeable project.

2. Loss of connectivity and severance in Lidlington village

2.1 Network Rail (NWR) acknowledge that Lidlington village is a particularly challenging location for the EWR project. There are particular difficulties in Lidlington with regard to severance. The village is divided by the Marston Vale Line and connectivity across the rail line in the village is currently provided by footpath crossing points at School Crossing (FP6), Pilling Farm South (FP1), and road crossing points at Station Road Level Crossing, and at Marston Road Level Crossing. Further to the east of the village there are other footpath crossings between Lidlington and Aspley Guise that connect into the wider footpath network that are unaffected.

2.2 The proposed closure of the Pilling Farm South (FP1) footpath to the East of Station Road and School Crossing (FP1) to the west of Station Road with all pedestrian traffic diverted to the Road Crossing at Station Road level Crossing will massively reduce the connectivity within the village. Whilst I understand the safety requirement to close each crossing the combined effect of closing 2 of the 4 crossing points in the village will cause a loss of connectivity and severance.

3. School Crossing

3.1 School Crossing is particularly heavily used, connecting the village to the Lower School, playing fields and wider footpath network.

3.2 Concerns and objections to the possible closure of School Crossing without an alternative provision have been consistently raised since at least 2014. This is not a new issue. I have objected at each stage in the formal consultation

process, and repeatedly requested that an alternative crossing be provided. There is a wealth of correspondence to support this.

3.3 NWR carried out a footpath users census in (I think) April 2016. There were 100 users on the Saturday. Weekday use was heavier. On Wednesday 147 adults, 87 adults with children, 4 unaccompanied children and 9 adults with pushchairs were recorded. It would be useful if the whole of the census data could be made available. The survey confirmed the footpath is heavily used and the footpath connection is important to access the school and wider footpath network.

3.4 In response to the need to find a solution, NWR held a consultation event in Lidlington in June 2016, offering 5 different footpath replacement options for residents to rank in order of preference. The 5 options were: close and divert, a stepped footbridge, a ramped footbridge, a stepped footbridge with lift, or an underpass. NWR promised to install the most popular option. 70 responses favoured an underpass. 62 favoured close and divert. The bridge options were not favoured because of adverse visual impact. It would be useful for the Inquiry to see all of the consultation data.

3.5 In January 2018 a second census was carried out on School Crossing to establish the journey pattern of users. 188 people used the crossing on Wednesday 31 January (57 households), and 75 people (28 households) on Sunday 4th February. The weather was recorded as bitterly cold.

3.6 Detailed analysis concluded that if the crossing closed, the worst affected users would have an additional walk of up to 400m. Close and divert did not present a longer walking route than an underpass or ramped bridge option for most users that were surveyed.

3.7 The proposed location of the underpass away from the current crossing location would reduce its appeal. A ramped footbridge would be highly unsightly in the landscape, and lengthen the route as the ramps would be substantial. Both options have been ruled out by NWR on cost grounds.

3.8 A diverted walking route via Station Road Crossing is therefore NWR's preferred option. However this does not address the reduced connectivity and severance issues.

3.9 Even if the additional walking distance is considered acceptable for existing users by diverting to Station Road we need to see the fully detailed provision that will be made for the additional vulnerable users that will be asked to walk in the carriageway across the Station Road Crossing. We need to be able to fully assess this option. NWR have been very slow in bringing this forward.

3.10 Putting more Lower School children, say 100 movements a day, into conflict with vehicles is a concern. We have yet to see in detail the package of measures that will be provided to make this crossing and the highway environment safer. There will be increased barrier down times which may coincide with school pick up and drop off. There may be a large number of parents and children waiting and there will be an increased risk of trying to beat the barriers. The survey does not consider how many families may abandon walking to school, nor any congestion around the lower school. It does not take into account additional users from the Marston Vale strategic site, nor any future growth of the lower school. It does not offer any future proofing.

3.11 The potential for increased barrier down time in the future at the Station Road crossing will also add to severance issues. Maintenance work at Station Road will also add to the loss of connectivity. A resident recently reported

being unable to cross the crossing during weekend maintenance work. Without the footpath crossings she would have been unable to move from one side of the village to the other whilst the maintenance work was being carried out.

4. The Marston Road Crossing

4.1 The closure and redesign of the Marston Road crossing will also severely impact the village of Lidlington during the extremely long construction phase. It will close off one of the routes in and out of the village for a year, further reducing connectivity, and force vehicles to use the Bury Ware exit onto the A507, which has very poor visibility. The proposed access for construction vehicles along Bury Ware from the A507 will take HGVs through the village on an unsuitable steep, narrow country lane. HGVs will not be able to pass each other. More information is needed to understand the suitability of the mitigation to the A507 junction and Bury Ware. Alternative HGV routes should be considered.

4.2 The detail design of the new crossing at Marston road crossing must incorporate a footpath/bridle/cycleway.

5. Conclusion

Lidlington village is acknowledged to be a particularly difficult location for EWR. The proposed footpath closures will cause unacceptable severance and a loss of connectivity in a village that straddles the railway line. The School Crossing is particularly heavily used and its loss would be particularly harmful to the life of the village. Options considered by NWR such as an underpass or ramped footbridge have been discounted by NWR through cost or for being in not ideal locations or visually harmful in the landscape. The option to close and divert is considered unacceptable as it fails to address the loss of connectivity,

raises safety concerns of its own, will lead to longer walking routes and the detailed provision is yet to be fully understood. The severance issues will be compounded during the construction of the Marston Road Crossing.

Furthermore the impact of strategic scale proposed new development has not been taken into account.

Along with colleagues at CBC and the Parish Council I have consistently asked for an alternative provision to be made in Lidlington. Any alternative provision should be considered.

Sue Clark

Appendix 1 – East West Rail Consultation document for the June 2016 consultation on footpath crossing replacement options at Lidlington.

Timeline

First consultation event on EWR - 4 June 2015 Lidlington Parish Hall

E-W Rail Phase 2 Round 1 consultation 30/9/15 – 1/10/15 Marston Forest Centre

E W Rail further consultation in Lidlington 8-9 June 2016

Residents were asked to list their preference for an underpass, or 3 footbridge options, as a replacement or close and divert, in order of preference for the School Crossing.

19 July 2017 Second Round Consultation

Footpath user count at School Crossing

26 October 2017 meeting at Chicksands

Third Round Consultation January 2018 - no new information on Lidlington

31 January 2018 second census and questionnaire at School Crossing

16 April 2018 meeting at Chicksands

