

Harlton Parish Council Response to Non-statutory Consultation

The proposed railway line, currently, has no benefits to the residents of Harlton. There are no stations planned near to the village, plus we do not believe that the railway will have any significant effect on taking cars off the road. Conversely, we believe the railway will encourage house building in areas of extreme water scarcity and add pressure to road networks. The surrounding countryside, Harlton residents, many villages in South Cambridgeshire, farmland, nature and the environment will all suffer under these plans.

Harlton Parish Council's Lack of Trust in East West Rail

We are astounded by the spin of unsubstantiated claims from EWR about economic growth and employment figures for Cambridge. The claims of £6.7bn being added to the economy are from an unknown pre-covid document which appears to have plucked some figures out of the air. If these claims continue to be used they need backing up with a reference to the source. Also, if this figure is for the whole of Cambridge, why include it as a number based on the railway development? The further claims that 28,000 jobs will be created are from an EWR Economic and Technical Report, based on unevidenced model parameters described as 'very aspirational'. EWR continue to state these figures for reasons to build the railway. It is a very disappointing and unfair use of propaganda with no solid evidence to confirm either figure.

It also appears that EWR is promoting housing growth as an economic reason to the building of the railway. Most of the planned housing will occur whether or not the railway is built. In addition, it is a nonsense to think that all the people in these new settlements will be utilising the railway. In fact, the figure commuting into Cambridge could be very low. Building a railway, with the excuse that more houses can be built, is a very expensive way to free up land and an easy way to increase traffic congestion without sensible solutions. In fact, in an EWR report (Environmental and Technical Report, figure 4.1, Appendix 4, May 2023) confirms there will be more cars on the road. It is also worth noting that the dependent housing EWR is mentioning to the north of Cambourne, is currently not in the emerging local plan. How can EWR discuss this as something that will happen without the relevant authorities concurring?

The Northern Approach into Cambridge

The railway design, as it stands, is not only undulating but circuitous due to the persistent belief of EWR that the northern approach into Cambridge is somehow inferior. What is particularly perplexing is the agreement from EWR that a northern approach into Cambridge is not only less environmentally damaging and serves more people but is cheaper and quicker to construct. The northern approach seems to be dismissed through a fixed mindset that the route has to go to Cambridge South. Even if the route went through Cambridge North station, commuters could still get to Cambridge South station and therefore it could serve more people and all areas of Cambridge. The extra journey time would be negligible.

We believe that a proposal for the route to go via Cambridge North has never been given fair consideration. EWR has always dismissed the possibility and we have never had the chance to review it properly with other route alignments. It seems utterly bewildering not to review a northern approach to the same extent that other routes have had and give the residents of Cambridgeshire a chance to officially comment on it.

EWR is very good at manipulating facts to serve their own agenda. For example, the misguided belief that approaching Cambridge from the north will affect more properties. This is due to houses being counted in the city of Cambridge, whereas on the southern approach they are not - and ignoring the fact the proposed route goes very close to 13 villages in South Cambs. A solution could also be found for the Fen Road crossing, which seems to be a sticking point. EWR has also mentioned the need for a turnback - they've managed to allow for one of these on the Southern Approach, so why not on the Northern Approach?

The issue of freight trundling through Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire villages has also been swept aside. The current proposed route will see huge volumes of freight going through the middle of Cambridge. A 2021 EWR report insinuated there could be nearly 50, highly polluting diesel, freight trains a day by 2043/44. Surely a better solution would be a northern approach into

Cambridge and the bypassing of freight through the historic city centre and the tranquil South Cambs villages?

The Proposed Route - Issues for Harlton Parish

Water scarcity, water courses and risks

Building a railway and dependent development will put additional pressure on water. In this region, water scarcity is a real issue and future housing cannot be guaranteed until extra reservoirs and desalination plants are built at more cost. The railway will utilise great amounts of water during construction.

In terms of local resources, contamination of aquifers could be devastating to farmland and nature. Chapel Hill is a principle aquifer, plus Bourn Brook is an important water course for many species including barbastelle bats.

Risks of floods to the north and east of Harlton are a possibility with such large embankments and bridges, running from the A603 to the tunnel through Chapel Hill. Natural irrigation channels will be lost or damaged. Plus, villagers are worried that the balancing ponds aren't big enough, could be contaminated and could pose a threat to wildlife and passers-by.

No business case

The National Audit Office produced a report a year ago stating this scheme represented poor value for money, yet the project continues. Currently, the cost per passenger, over the lifetime of the railway is enormous. How will EWR's claimed benefits be delivered? - this is still not clear. There has been no business case published and it feels like this scheme is a huge waste of tax payer's money. The current cost, c.£8b, works out at about £4m per planned commuter. This surely cannot be justified, especially during a time of constrained public finances.

Loss of farmland and productivity

The land take that EWR is planning is mainly grade 2 and 3a highly productive cereal growing land. One farmer in Harlton is expecting to lose about 100 acres. Plus many pockets of land will be unreachable and dissected into unworkable pockets. Another local farmer has estimated that within five miles of Chapel Hill, 2,000 acres will be taken by EWR. Over the 50km route, enough food will be lost that could feed 200,000 people per year. EWR claim that once the railway is built, the land will be returned to farming. However, looking at evidence of other development sites (HS2, World War II airfields) where topsoil is scraped away and at a later date returned, yields may be reduced by as much as 50%. In a time of ensuring food security and relying more on domestic production, rather than imports, this is a very worrying figure.

Farmland and adjacent land will be at great risk of contamination during and post-construction, from machinery, pollution, introduction of new materials and soils. Local farms yields and the quality of their crops will be negatively effected and become far less productive.

Loss of local businesses

Local businesses located on Washpit Lane will be closed and destroyed to make way for the railway.

Destruction of nature

The destruction of nature and the environment that the proposed route takes is inevitable. The most pressing concern is that of the barbastelle bat. Its known roosting sites at the Eversden and Wimpole Woods Special Areas of Conservation and Hardwick Wood (Site of Special Scientific Interest) need to be protected along with their foraging routes and flight paths. Barbastelle bats (and many other varieties) have been located as far as Haslingfield and Grantchester. We assume barbastelle bats pass through Harlton and its environs. [The Clunch Pit, part of Harlton Parish Council's land, may well attract the species]. The proposed railway, plus its enormous (up to 11

metres) embankments passing the Eversdens and the A603 before gradually reducing in height to the north of the village, plus the overbridge between Harlton and Haslingfield can only have a detrimental effect on the bats flight paths, fanning and foraging behaviour. No mitigation has been planned near Harlton, and mitigation planned for Eversden (bat bridge, tree/sapling planting) is a little researched stab in the dark. Plus, the time it takes to construct the railway, before mitigation is in place could well decimate/obliterate the already rare barbastelle.

Other wildlife under threat from EWR include red kites, buzzards, water voles, badgers, deer and game birds. The loss of wildlife habitats, fields, farmland, water courses will decimate the biodiversity of the village and surrounding area. The mitigation offered by EWR is completely inadequate and could well see species of fauna and flora disappear.

Increase in Pollution

Air pollution - during construction (construction compound exceptionally close to village) and when railway is in operation (dust, diesel, construction materials, soil erosion, chemicals, waste materials).

Reduction in air quality - the increase in noxious particulates in the air and over Harlton village, due to use of heavy machinery during construction and the use of diesel trains (especially freight) when up and running

Noise pollution - during construction and when railway is in operation (heavy machinery, trains, construction traffic).

Vibration pollution - during construction and when railway is in operation (heavy machinery, trains, construction traffic).

Visual pollution - changing the landscape significantly from its natural form.

A significant increase in carbon emissions during and post-construction of railway.

An increase in electromagnetic interference, especially on the sensitive MRAO (Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory) site.

Severing of links

Many villagers in Harlton are extremely worried about the proposals. There has already been a significant detrimental effect on people's mental and physical well-being, which will only be exacerbated during construction and when the railway is operating. There is concern about the loss of open space and the eroding of the rural feeling of the community, the loss of historic landscape, views and its tranquility. Footpath no. 1 could well be shut, which is next to a planned construction compound.

Harlton has close links with neighbouring villages, especially Haslingfield. If the road to Haslingfield is shut, for several months during construction, this will have a huge detrimental effect on the communities. Access needs to be maintained to reach the primary school, GP surgery (in Harston), church, post office, sports clubs and facilities and cafe. The secondary school, GP surgery and local shops in Comberton is also a fundamental link and could be very tricky to reach if Washpit Lane is shut/re-routed and the road between the A603 and Comberton is shut/re-routed.

Both the Need to Sell scheme and blight policy is too restrictive in scope and area. There is heavy bias on the seller rather than admission from EWR that people's homes have been devalued or are unsellable.

Roads and Transport

Harlton has narrow roads and the community is worried that there could be a significant increase in heavy traffic through the village (one of the three access roads being single-track) during construction (due to road severance or temporary closure) and post-construction (with the increase in car users due to extra house building, from EWR's dependent development plans). Journey times by car, bus, foot or bicycle are likely to be extended significantly, are likely to be more dangerous (especially for pedestrians and cyclists) and there will be a decrease in economic growth (due to length of time travelling to access school, work, facilities).

The risk of a regular and reliable bus service during the ten years of construction is a huge issue. Children in further education need to get to Comberton Village College or into Cambridge, plus villagers need to access places of work.

EWR's policy of door to door connectivity and active travel is a nonsense for Harlton. There will be no easy access to EWR's station at Cambourne. Villagers would have to travel 30 minutes in the wrong direction to board a train to Cambridge, extending travel time to the city threefold.

The building of an overbridge, just outside of Harlton could well lead to an increase in road accidents within/without the village. The overbridge will be particularly dangerous for cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders, especially due to its east-west axis, curvature and lack of separation from vehicular traffic. It also poses a risk for suicide attempts.

Issues facing the wider community

All villages south of Cambourne face years of disruption, pollution and severe degradation of rural life. There are no benefits to people living in Caldecote, Toft, Hardwick, Comberton, The Eversdens, Harlton, Haslingfield, Harston, Hauxton, Newton, Little and Great Shelford.

The proposed line runs very close to Comberton Village College. The construction of the line will be very disruptive and dangerous to the 2,000 pupils. Plus, the pollution and noise from the railway will be detrimental to the learning of these children.

The large embankments adjacent to the Eversdens is an appalling blight on the environment, a threat to barbastelle bats and a severe lack of good design.

The road between Harston and Newton should remain open. The primary school in Harston serves both villages. Severing access is an appalling design fault.

The proposed line will do nothing to reduce traffic flow along the A10 and through villages like Harston. The construction of the railway will lead to huge travel disruption and vehicles using local villages as rat runs.

The proposed A10 overbridge at Harston will increase road noise across the whole village. The overbridge could well be a safety issue, in terms of speed of vehicles, lack of provision for cyclists (which currently have access to an off-road cycle path) and pedestrians and human welfare.

The planned closure of the bridge on Long Road in Cambridge will lead to huge disruption to hospital traffic, school children, commuters and locals. Cambridge will be grid-locked. There are sports fields and a sixth form on Long Road. The plans will disrupt children's learning and ability to play sports.

Harlton Parish Council would like:

A pause in the development of the route's proposals and a complete transparent appraisal of the Northern Approach into Cambridge

A more transparent approach from EWR in all aspects of its work

An invitation for more than one Parish Councillor to attend EWR focus groups, LRG meetings etc (all meetings run by EWR thus far have been restricted to one Parish Councillor per parish)

The acknowledgment from EWR that this railway has no benefits to our village, or neighbouring villages

An independent ombudsman, working with the local community before, during and after construction. The ombudsman should be independent of all existing authorities and their remit should be to work with local residents

A focus from EWR to ensure facts it is stating are checked, up-to-date and verified

To ensure that EWR research matters (especially in situ wildlife studies) thoroughly rather than relying on desk-based information gathering

EWR to use pioneering and above threshold mitigation parameters and techniques to reduce the significant negative effects this railway will have on our village and South Cams

A thorough look at the current proposals and an increased effort to make the plans more digestible (eg lowering the railway, moving it at least another 250m away from the village, removing construction compounds that are too close to houses, provide the highest level of mitigations and compensation)

Better engagement with local farmers/business owners to ensure their businesses are viable, productive, land is accessible, mitigation is thorough and fair

Access to environmental surveys conducted in the village

A thorough overhaul of mitigation (the current proposals have no positive benefits and will do little to prevent noise, air, visual pollution and destruction and disruption to wildlife). The land around the north of Harlton is typically flat, so noise, sound, vibration and air pollution will travel with ease unless there are serious attempts by EWR to mitigate these issues.

Complete and thorough measures to mitigate the impacts of construction and the running of the railway, including: modifying the design (designing the railway in a cutting/trench between Washpit Lane and Chapel Hill Tunnel) and altering its proximity to Harlton, controlling noise and vibration, managing friction of wheels, designing highly resilient tracks with rail fixings and dampers and constructing noise bunds and barriers

Limits to speed of trains when travelling near the village - below 40mph when passing Harlton Overbridge

The lowering of Harlton Overbridge (and consequently the railway to 5m below grade), to negate the severe health and safety risks its proposal has currently and to reduce noise and visual pollution

Limits to operation hours of trains - no operation after 23.00 and before 06.00

No audio rail signals used (except emergency)

A determination from EWR to construct the quietest, least polluting type of railway leading the way in industry best practice, rather than the most economical solution

The study area for the construction dust assessment should be increased dramatically from 250m from construction activities. This distance does not take into consideration the topography of the land or wind direction or the effects of wind after constructing an embankment

All construction machinery to be electric rather than diesel or petrol operated

All heavy plant construction facilities need to be located as far away as possible from dwellings

A definitive community assessment of health, before, during and after construction. It is not good enough to state that there is no definitive guidance on providing a community assessment. The threat of EWR on Harlton has already been detrimental to many villager's health.

The study of possible effects on wildlife, including barbastelle bats, on increases in electromagnetic field before starting construction

The further study of barbastelle bats flight paths and mitigation during construction, plus further assessment of proposed embankments to ensure the species is not obliterated

A more thorough mitigation of issues for wildlife, especially barbastelle bats in Harlton parish environs

Making sure mitigation for wildlife is in place before their current habitats/flight paths are altered/destroyed

Hedgerows to be kept intact, or reinstated and maintained if destroyed in the building process

Extension of tree planting with mature trees, along railway towards Washpit Lane from Harlton Overbridge

To ensure water courses (such as Bourn Brook and Chapel Hill aquifer) are unpolluted and flow unimpeded during and after construction

To ensure that aquatic life is not threatened by the railway, during and post-construction

To ensure water and air quality is of the same standard as before construction

Increase in the length of Haslingfield tunnel on the western approach, to extend distance away from houses

No EWR traffic, especially HGVs, coming through Harlton

A joined up, transparent approach to road closures and diversions

A thorough safety check/modelling of the new roads proposed either side of the A603 - new access road onto Washpit Lane and new access road, heading towards Comberton

To ensure that the railway, it's construction and the mitigation put in place is climate resilient and not adding to the advancement of climate change through carbon emissions

To ensure that EWR's net gain biodiversity count does not include areas that are already high in biodiversity