

Harlton Village Meeting

Meeting Notes

6 May 2026

The village meeting held on 6 May 2026 was very well attended, with the village hall full and strong engagement from residents throughout the evening. The meeting was structured into four parts.

1. Parish Council Update

Isabel provided a summary of the Parish Council's work and engagement on East West Rail over recent years. This included the progression from the initial consultations in 2019 through to the current 'final' consultation phase. Residents were reminded that the village and surrounding communities have consistently engaged with the process despite concerns that local communities have never been able to comment on a fully developed proposal for the Cambridge northern approach.

The update outlined the establishment of Cambridge Approaches in 2020, the formation of the Harlton Working Group during the 2021 consultation period, ongoing engagement with MPs, East West Rail representatives and the Department for Transport, and the continued coordination between affected South Cambridgeshire parish councils.

Reference was also made to the Scoping Opinion submitted by the Parish Council during the consultation process and to the growing cooperation between villages through the South Cambridgeshire Parishes Rail Group established in autumn 2025.

The update concluded with the important forthcoming meeting involving the Trains Minister, Lord Hendy, East West Rail representatives and Lord Vallance.

2. Project Overview

David then provided a summary of how the project has reached its current position and reflected on the efforts undertaken by residents and campaign groups over recent years.

He stressed that campaigns do work and that persistence matters. Through the tireless work of a relatively small number of committed individuals, significant changes have already been achieved. In particular, the route has been moved further away from the village and the proposed height of the alignment has been substantially reduced. While these changes are important, it was emphasised that there remains much more to do.

The meeting was reminded that the scale of the East West Rail proposal is significant and that its impact on Harlton and neighbouring villages would be profound and long lasting. Concerns include the permanent alteration of the landscape, roads, farmland, habitats and the wider character of the rural community.

David reinforced the importance of the village remaining informed, organised and united in order to ensure that local concerns continue to be heard clearly and consistently throughout the consultation and planning process.

A summary was then provided of the five principal areas of concern:

- Route selection and whether rural communities are carrying a disproportionate burden
- Route alignment, including tunnels, cuttings and embankments
- Construction impacts including traffic, dust, noise and safety
- Environmental impacts, including protected habitats and species
- The permanent loss of productive farmland and wider landscape impacts

3. Questions and Discussion from the Floor

The meeting was then opened to questions and discussion from residents. A number of important points were raised, with several responses provided by subject matter experts present in the hall.

Key issues raised included:

a) Construction traffic and haul roads

Residents questioned why a dedicated haul road could not be constructed in order to prevent large volumes of construction traffic travelling through the village and surrounding rural roads. [Currently Eversden Road, High Street and Haslingfield Road, Harlton are designated as a 'primary construction traffic route' with over 10 HGVs in both directions per day].

b) Sequencing of construction phases

It was suggested that improved sequencing and management of construction phases could help reduce disruption, noise and dust over the course of the project.

c) Independent oversight

Concerns were expressed regarding accountability and transparency. Although East West Rail is understood to oppose the idea, residents argued that an independent ombudsman should be appointed to oversee complaints, disputes, and mitigation issues throughout the project.

d) Route alignment and wider strategic review

The meeting heard that the MRAO is currently challenging the proposed route alignment. It was noted that this could potentially reopen discussion around the north south route debate or lead to a wider re-examination of the currently proposed alignment. It was further emphasised that while barriers or moving the alignment slightly towards Harlton may provide limited mitigation, they would only offer partial solutions. In the view of many residents, the only fully effective options remain either a tunnel running from Caldecote to beyond Chapel Hill or a shift to the northern route alignment.

4. Closing Summary

The meeting concluded with a brief summary and a commitment to provide residents with a monthly update on the progress of the project and its implications for the village.

Residents were strongly encouraged to respond individually to the current consultation. It was stressed that responses should not be limited to one submission per household, but that every resident should submit their own response.

While responses must naturally reflect each individual's own concerns and priorities, the importance of reinforcing the key village wide messages consistently across submissions was emphasised.

Finally, although the meeting was very well attended, it was recognised that some members of the village remain hesitant to engage with the issue. Residents were encouraged to continue speaking with neighbours and encouraging wider participation, as collective engagement remains essential if the concerns of the community are to carry weight throughout the consultation and decision-making process.

Suggested Guidance for the inputs to the Consultation.

1. Route Selection and Strategic Justification

Core Message

The current route alignment appears to place disproportionate impacts on rural communities without sufficient evidence that reasonable alternatives have been fully and transparently assessed.

Key Terms and Phrases

Use language such as:

- disproportionate impact on rural communities
- inadequate comparative assessment
- lack of transparent option evaluation
- strategic alternatives not fully examined
- cumulative community impact
- long term irreversible consequences
- insufficient justification for preferred alignment
- failure to balance regional benefit against local harm
- need for re examination and open discussion of northern alignment options
- concerns regarding decision making methodology

Points Residents May Wish to Raise

- Concerns that communities south of Cambridge are carrying an excessive environmental and social burden.
- Questions regarding whether alternative route alignments have been assessed using consistent criteria.
- Concern that the consultation process appears focused on mitigation of a predetermined route rather than genuine evaluation of alternatives.
- Support for reassessment of northern route options where these may reduce long term harm to villages and protected landscapes.

Example Framing

“I remain concerned that the current preferred alignment places a disproportionate burden on rural communities while alternative route options do not appear to have been fully or transparently reassessed.”

2. Alignment, Tunnelling and Long Term Landscape Impact

Core Message

Partial mitigation measures are unlikely to address the permanent visual, environmental and acoustic impacts created by the proposed alignment.

Key Terms and Phrases

- long term landscape scarring
- permanent alteration of rural character
- visual intrusion
- embankment dominance
- ineffective partial mitigation
- cumulative environmental harm
- irreversible landscape impact
- inadequate tunnelling provision
- loss of tranquillity
- operational noise impact
- long term degradation of visual amenity

Points Residents May Wish to Raise

- Concerns regarding embankment height and visibility.
- The view that barriers and limited alignment shifts do not adequately resolve the underlying issue.
- Support for extension of the Chapel Hill tunnel as the only meaningful mitigation option if the route proceeds.
- Concerns regarding permanent changes to the character and setting of Harlton and neighbouring villages.

Example Framing

“The proposed alignment would create permanent and irreversible impacts on the rural landscape which are unlikely to be adequately mitigated through barriers or limited route adjustments.”

3. Construction Traffic, Noise, Dust and Community Disruption

Core Message

The construction phase presents a major risk to public safety, rural infrastructure, quality of life and community wellbeing over a prolonged period.

Key Terms and Phrases

- construction phase management failure
- cumulative disruption
- rural road unsuitability
- construction traffic burden
- prolonged community disturbance
- dust and particulate concerns
- public safety implications
- emergency vehicle access
- traffic resilience
- inadequate logistics strategy
- sequencing and phasing concerns
- avoidable construction impact

Points Residents May Wish to Raise

- Concerns that local rural roads are unsuitable for sustained heavy construction traffic.
- Requests for dedicated haul roads to remove construction traffic from villages.
- Concerns regarding pedestrian safety, cycling safety and school transport.
- Concern that poor sequencing could unnecessarily prolong disruption.
- Requests for stronger enforceable commitments around construction management.

Example Framing

“The proposed construction approach risks creating prolonged and avoidable disruption to residents through noise, dust, congestion and heavy vehicle movements on roads which are unsuitable for sustained industrial traffic.”

4. Environmental Impact and Biodiversity

Core Message

The proposal risks significant and potentially irreversible damage to sensitive habitats, biodiversity networks and protected species.

Key Terms and Phrases

- habitat fragmentation
- biodiversity loss
- ecological connectivity

- protected species impact
- irreplaceable habitat concern
- cumulative ecological degradation
- insufficient ecological mitigation
- long term ecosystem damage
- fragmentation of wildlife corridors
- precautionary principle
- environmental resilience

Points Residents May Wish to Raise

- Concerns regarding bats (especially barbastelle) and protected habitats.
- Concern that mitigation measures may underestimate long term ecological damage.
- Questions regarding the robustness and independence of ecological assessments.
- Concern regarding fragmentation of habitats and wildlife corridors.

Example Framing

“The proposed route raises serious concerns regarding habitat fragmentation and the long term degradation of ecological networks which support protected species and biodiversity resilience.”

5. Loss of Farmland and Rural Character

Core Message

The proposal would result in permanent loss of productive agricultural land and gradual erosion of the wider rural environment.

Key Terms and Phrases

- permanent loss of productive farmland
- food security implications
- erosion of rural identity
- agricultural sustainability
- irreversible land use change
- fragmentation of agricultural holdings
- pressure on rural economies
- degradation of countryside character
- cumulative loss of green space
- long term strategic land impact

Points Residents May Wish to Raise

- Concern regarding permanent loss of high quality agricultural land.
- Wider concerns about food production and agricultural sustainability.
- Concern regarding the cumulative industrialisation of the rural landscape.
- Concern that once lost, the existing rural character cannot be restored.

Example Framing

“The permanent loss and fragmentation of productive farmland should be treated as a strategic issue given wider concerns around food security, environmental resilience and the preservation of rural landscapes.”

6. Governance and Accountability

Residents may also wish to raise concerns regarding transparency and oversight.

Suggested Themes

- independent oversight mechanism
- community accountability
- independent ombudsman

- transparent complaints process
- public confidence and trust
- independent monitoring of mitigation compliance

Example Framing

“Given the scale and duration of the proposed works, an independent ombudsman or oversight mechanism should be established to ensure transparency, accountability and community confidence.”

Final Recommendations

Strong Responses Tend To:

- Explain local impacts clearly
- Use calm and factual language
- Refer to long term consequences
- Raise strategic rather than purely personal concerns
- Mention cumulative impacts
- Include requests for reassessment or stronger mitigation
- Reinforce themes raised by other residents

Avoid

- Abusive or emotional language
- One line responses
- Unsupported accusations
- Generic statements without explanation
- Copying identical wording from others

Most Important Message

The consultation process pays attention to volume, consistency and repetition of key themes. Individual responses matter. Consistent concerns raised across many submissions are harder to dismiss and more likely to influence further scrutiny, mitigation requirements and political attention. Every resident should therefore submit a response in their own words, while reinforcing the key issues affecting the village as a whole.