

Consultation 2026 Response Harlton Parish Council

Harlton Parish Council is disappointed that the Consultation feedback for our village has to be submitted in the 'other feedback' box. This is neglecting the importance of our community and the impact East West Rail will have in the South Cambs area.

Call for Assessment of Northern Approach into Cambridge

Harlton Parish Council believes that EWR should publicly assess the northern route into Cambridge, via Cambourne, Northstowe and Cambridge North. It would serve areas of high growth, new housing and create new jobs (Cambridge Science Park). By EWR's own admission (Affordable Connections Project Report, released in the 2023 Route Update Assessment), the northern route would be cheaper and easier to construct, be environmentally less damaging, plus the growth of freight would be better supported.

The ongoing route proposal to Cambridge South station, even with expensive and unproven mitigation will be environmentally devastating to the Eversden and Wimpole Woods Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). It will cause serious consequences to the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory (MRAO), which currently seem unresolved. Plus, all of the villages from Highfields Caldecote to Shelford will experience years of disruption, pollution and environmental damage as a result of this bizarre scheme.

Call for a tunnel from Highfields Caldecote to Cambridge South Station

If EWR persist with this route, then a tunnel should be extended from Highfields Caldecote to Cambridge South station. This would resolve both the issues with the Eversden and Wimpole Woods SAC, the MRAO and the chalk watercourses of the Rhee, Bourn Brook and Long Brook. It would also prevent local business premises from being demolished (such as at Washpit Lane) and it would prevent thousands of acres of farmland from being destroyed.

Call for an independent ombudsman

Harlton firmly believes that all of the South Cambridgeshire villages need an independent ombudsman when pre, during and post-construction work. Having read the experiences of villages in Buckinghamshire with EWR construction, such as road damage, uncoordinated road closures, devastating impacts on businesses and environmental damage and pollution, it is necessary that South Cambs residents do not go through the same nightmare. An independent ombudsman could help manage information to and from EWR and initiate actions in an agile environment.

Response to the latest proposals for Harlton

Comment on drop-in events

There were no drop-in events near Harlton. This was disappointing, but not surprising. At a drop-in event in Shelford, EWR staff misinformed attendees when questioned about the limit of the text boxes in the feedback form. When the word limit was not lifted as promised it was questioned via email. The response was that it could not be changed and 'was part of the system'. Why create a feedback form with word count limits? Why create a feedback form where all of Harlton's feedback has to go in 'other feedback'? This is unsatisfactory and created uncertainty over other information that was given verbally. It defeated the object of the drop-in events and further enhanced the level of mistrust that locals feel about EWR's proposals. Furthermore, by corralling Harlton's responses into 'other', it gives the air of unimportance and belittles our opinions on serious matters for our community.

No business case

It is bewildering that EWR's plans do not have an up-to-date business case. The most recent cost-benefit analysis demonstrates 'poor value for money' according to the Department of Transport. There has never been any public scrutiny on the value of the project, which leaves many people doubting its validity and continuing distrust of EWR. The transport model that EWR has published shows only 3% of Cambourne's working population using the railway. Is that value for money?

Primary Construction Traffic Route

The main road through Harlton has been designated a 'primary EWR construction traffic route' with more than ten HGVs every day in each direction. Parts of Eversden Road, High Street and Haslingfield Road are 480cm wide. Parts of Washpit Lane are 330cm wide. These are the only routes through the village and fall below the width considered acceptable for an adoptable street in Cambridgeshire County Council guidance. They are also narrower than the 5.5 metre minimum carriageway width identified by the Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee for restricted two way traffic operation, including larger vehicles.

Harlton has one Grade 1 listed building and 15 Grade 2 listed buildings, 11 of which are homes close to the road. There are other older properties that do not have listed status and have little to no foundations, plus a conservation area at the heart of the village. It is extremely likely that the construction phase of EWR will put these buildings at risk and possibly be damaged, especially if EWR persist with using the village as a primary construction traffic route.

In an email response from EWR regarding this matter, it stated that types of measures that would typically be looked at include 'avoiding unsuitable local roads', 'particularly roads with narrow carriageways, older properties close to the highway, conservation areas, schools, or known sensitivities'. This seems to fit in with Harlton village, so why is EWR ignoring its own guidelines?

A better solution would be for EWR to build a temporary access road on the same trajectory as the proposed railway line. This would avoid the village entirely and could be directly routed from the A603.

Bridges

A603 and the green bridge

The current proposal redirects Washpit Lane onto a newly raised road, joining up with the A603 onto a bridge. Currently, Washpit Lane is a well used route for access to Harlton village and on to Haslingfield, the local farms, the cricket pitch and the wedding venue at Manor Barn. The turning on/off the A603 onto the side of the bridge where it is not at its highest point, and onto a curving road seems highly dangerous. Many vehicles currently do not adhere to the 50mph speed restriction at that point and to have an access road halfway up a bridge with unclear sight lines seems like an accident waiting to happen. Plus, the new turning for Comberton is proposed to be on the other side of the bridge. This turning, on and off the A603 could also be an accident blackspot, as drivers will experience the same issues trying to turn off/on to the A road. Perhaps the bridge needs to have better lines of sight, or the local roads need to be located nearer to the apex, or there needs to be a traffic light for safer access, or there needs to be a further speed restriction and/or a speed camera. If left like this current proposal there will be fatalities.

How will a 30-metre-wide planted section of the green bridge provide habitat for wildlife? How will the wildlife stay within its sections without venturing onto the A road? Will the planting be mature trees? Who will maintain the green bridge? How will its success be evaluated? How will wildlife be preserved whilst the infrastructure is built without damaging its current habitats?

Assuming the A603 will be shut at some point during the construction of the railway, where will traffic be redirected? There needs to be effective communication with local communities on road closures as it could seriously impact access to work, education, hospitals and see huge volumes of traffic using Harlton as a rat run. EWR will need to be mindful of cutting Harlton village off as construction work could simultaneously happen at each end of the village.

By realigning Washpit Lane, will the current rural nature of the road be maintained? The road, as it stands is unsuitable for HGVs and it would be a shame to alter this beautiful hedge lined approach to the village. The proposed woodland seems to be only near to the green bridge and not further along Washpit Lane. This should be extended further to counterbalance the loss of hedgerows and trees that will be destroyed in the realignment. Has the scheduled monument on Washpit Lane been properly evaluated and protected by EWR's plans to alter the alignment of the road? The monument could be put at risk of flooding with the realigned road, bridge construction and redirection of watercourses. Plus, its immediate neighbouring landscape will be detrimentally changed.

New bridge between Harlton and Haslingfield

EWR states that the bridge between Harlton and Haslingfield could be lowered by two metres, 'subject to further technical work and ground investigations'. Reading the information given, it appears EWR has not done the ground work to fully know whether this is possible. The next paragraph on p.243 is equally baffling, stating that the earthworks would 'deter bats from crossing the railway here and encourage them to take a safer flightpath'. This at best seems like a plan whilst keeping your fingers crossed. How would the earthworks deter the bats? Where would the bats find 'a safer flightpath'. How will this be mitigated whilst the bridge is in construction? Is there any evidence of this being successful elsewhere? Barbastelle bats from Wimpole and Eversden Woods SAC have been detected in Haslingfield. This new barrier in Harlton could alter and destroy bat feeding flightpaths and create adverse and irreversible damage to a protected species. Whilst the road between Harlton and Haslingfield is being realigned and the bridge is being built, how would local people access crucial services such as the doctor in Harston, the local primary school in Haslingfield and how would the local bus service be affected? Assuming that this road would be closed for significant amounts of time it is essential that EWR communicate effectively with Harlton as a detour could be impossible for people without a car and a long diversion for those that do.

Harlton, mostly, welcomes the incorporation of a cycle/footpath on the bridge, extending to Haslingfield. Perhaps equestrian users could also be added to this plan? We have various households in the village with horses and other horse riders from outside the village that also use the village road.

The consultation document states that the landscaping 'would provide screening of the rail embankment'. This has to be planted with mature plants and trees, not ones that will take years to provide any screening. Also, EWR needs to monitor and maintain any planting and landscaping to ensure success in taking hold.

Water courses

Water is a scarce resource in South Cambridgeshire. In Harlton, Long Brook is part of a chalk stream watercourse. Any construction or planned diversion could damage its fragile ecosystem. The planned 500 metre diversion will have to be sensitively undertaken. There is a high risk of polluting the brook with construction fallout. Plus, there needs to be mitigation and continued assessment of the works to ensure wildlife is not all killed off during the works. EWR needs to work with the local population, to be as transparent as possible during construction and to immediately remediate work if it obvious the proposals are not working.

Water and electricity supply

There is a concern in the village that EWR will tap into the mains water and electricity supply during construction, especially when constructing the Chapel Hill tunnel. There needs to be proper

assurance from EWR that Harlton will have a continuous and good supply of both of these essential services.

Barbastelle Bats and wildlife

The proposed EWR route severs the Barbastelle bats' maternity roost and day roost, plus it impedes the core sustenance zone of 7km radius from the Eversden and Wimpole Woods SAC, which includes the village of Harlton. Furthermore, a second maternity colony is based at Hardwick Wood, which requires the same level of protection. EWR is legally obliged to prove that their mitigations would not cause any negative impact on the protected species. Currently, EWR does not have enough evidence to demonstrate that green bridges or raised viaducts would actually be used enough/at all or be successful in maintaining/preserving the presence of the bats. If EWR persist with this route alignment, the only logical way to protect the Barbastelle bat is to construct a tunnel.

Other species under threat of existence include the water vole. EWR must ensure that it doesn't wipe out species whilst constructing the railway, as mitigations post construction will be useless. This is particularly concerning for the proposal to divert Long Brook 500 metres.

We would welcome a tunnel that would protect all species of wildlife above the ground. We also, would welcome a transparent and honest working relationship with wildlife bodies to help protect endangered species.

Farmland

One farmer from Harlton has estimated he will lose c100 acres. This is valuable Grade 2 and 3A agricultural land. Where the proposed route has sliced a corner off a field, EWR has proposed to take the whole field for its own use. Cambridgeshire grows just over 50% of all the wheat grown in England. The land lost to EWR's CS3 could be as much as 5000Ha, which works out as about 9.5 million loaves of bread per year.

The high grade farmland in this area is important for UK food security. Currently, the UK is only 60% self-sufficient. EWR's plans to cut through South Cambs farmland, only reduces the amount of land available to farm. Much of the land, even if it is only temporarily used during construction, will not be usable when the railway is completed - either due to uneconomic carving up of fields, spoil pollution or due to water logging from diversion of watercourses or the creation of wetland.

One solution to avoid this destruction of valuable land would be to follow existing transport corridors (northern approach to Cambridge), or tunnel from Highfields Caldecote to Cambridge South Station.

Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory (MRAO)

Harlton village lies in the Lord's Bridge Restricted Area (see planning policy T1/7 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2018). This area restricts planning permission that risks interfering with the MRAO. No matter what type of train EWR proposes to use on this route, there will be serious consequences to the work of this internationally important site. Electromagnetic interference will occur from battery-electric trains, whereas ground vibration will be caused by diesel freight trains. The consultation booklet, p. 242, makes a woolly statement in trying to find a workable mitigation. Studying other railways 'to identify lessons and inform joint working' sounds like no solution can be found, other than to relocate the railway (northern approach to Cambridge) or to tunnel it from Highfields Caldecote to Cambridge South Station.

There will also be the harm of electromagnetic and vibration interference during construction as well. Other industrial proposals in this area have failed due to these issues. A solar farm at Lord's

Bridge in 2024 and the installation of new quarrying equipment at Barrington Pit Cement Works in 2010 were both abandoned to protect the MRAO.

To ensure the future of MRAO a tunnel is required.

Construction noise, vibration, dust, disruption, access

A very large area has been allocated to the north of Harlton as an earthworks storage stockpile. This will be in very close proximity to the houses in Haslingfield Road, less than 50 metres from gardens and c. 100 metres from homes. Plus it is within 125 metres of the Grade 1 listed church and around three quarters of the village is within 500 metres of it. As the landscape is very flat to the north of the village and made up largely of fields, there is little to prevent dust and air pollution/contamination enveloping most of the community. This is a real health concern that dust and air pollution could damage many people's health if the stockpile is not managed properly.

We would like to see the storage stockpile moved further away from homes and substantial mitigation methods employed to prevent air pollution.

Construction noise will be a great problem, especially for those living in Haslingfield Road. The earthworks and the bridge construction will cause serious noise/vibration disruption and a reduction in air quality. Older houses with little to no foundations will be at risk from the engineering works.

We require as much of the construction to be carried out away from residents and the village and preassembled to prevent damage to existing buildings.

Harlton requires noise barriers along the railway route. Not only will the railway cause a visual abomination, but the noise will disturb the rurality of our tranquil village.

We would like to have an independent ombudsman to sort out resident's issues quickly and decisively.

The temporary realignment of the highway, has to be built before the main road is shut. There needs to be a close relationship with the village maintained, so people can be certain of access to important amenities such as the primary school in Haslingfield and the doctors surgery in Harston. Plus, access has to remain for farm machinery, emergency services, school bus service to Haslingfield primary and Comberton secondary schools and the public bus.

Landscaping and drainage ponds

The permanent landscaping measures suggested by EWR are a little disappointing. There needs to be more mature trees screening the railway, plus a woodland could be planted in the fields to the north of the village which is proposed to temporarily be used as an earthworks storage pile. Currently in the plans, there are a few trees around some of the edges of the site and nothing in the middle. A small strip of 'grassland' follows the footpath no. 1 to the north of Harlton. Why aren't trees planned along this route? To increase biodiversity net gain more trees should be planted around Harlton to screen it from the railway.

The drainage pond planned on the edge of Harlton, close to the homes in Haslingfield Road needs to be further investigated. There is no indication how deep it is, how it will be maintained and by who and how it will be protected. This could well become a hazard if not properly planned and maintained.

