

Meeting with North Bedfordshire elected representatives

19 October 2021 [with corrections as of 25 November 2021]

Sederunt

Representative from AECOM

Representative from Barley Communications

Cllr Mike Barlow, Brickhill Parish Council

Simon Blanchflower CBE – EWR Co – CEO

Jordi Beascoechea – EWR Co – Engagement Manager

Cllr Brent Fielder, Wilden Parish Council

Will Gallagher – EWR Co – Strategy and Sponsorship Director

Cllr Justin Griffiths, Roxton Parish Council

Cllr Gordon Johnston, Wyboston, Chawston and Colesden Parish Council

Cllr Chris Kew, Bolnhurst and Keysoe Parish Council

Cllr Mrs Phillipa Martin-Moran-Bryant, Great Barford Ward, Bedford Borough Council

Peter Norris, Renhold resident

Tobias Paul – EWR Co – External legal advisor (DCO process and compensation)

Cllr Graham Palmer, Colmworth Parish Council

Cllr Mrs Amanda Quince, Renhold Parish Council

Cllr Mrs Wendy Rider, Brickhill Ward, Bedford Borough Council

Cllr Charles Royden, Brickhill Ward, Bedford Borough Council

Cllr Mrs Bernadette Russell, Ravensden Parish Council

Dr Cath Terry, Department for Transport

Cllr Michael Thompson, Thurleigh Parish Council

Cllr Martin Towler, Riseley Ward, Bedford Borough Council

Cllr Mrs Jane Walker, Clapham Ward, Bedford Borough Council

Cllr Mrs Sarah Walker, Clapham Parish Council

Cllr Tim Wood, Great Barford Parish Council

Transcript

[00:00]

An attendee: Oh they are recording it, that's good.

Mr Beascoechea: Yes so she's definitely, urm.

Dr Terry: Good evening all.

Mr Blanchflower: Welcome Cath, we are going to record this meeting so that we've got a record of what's said so we can use that in ongoing dialogue between us. So, unless anybody's got any objections to that in terms of recording? No? We will commence. Ok? Good. Urm.

Mr Barlow: We welcome it.

Mr Blanchflower: Yeah, yeah, so without further ado then I think I'll move on to Will who's going to give us just five minutes. Will?

[00:41]

Mrs Quince: Simon, just before we

Mr Barlow: Just before we start,

Mr Blanchflower: sorry, go.

Mrs Quince: Simon, before we go on, as you've entitled this 'Listening to the Community', you haven't introduced the rest of the people here and also I would like to say something. So, this is what I would like to say...

Mr Blanchflower: Wait, can we just. I'm happy to go round and introduce somebody but I don't want to take up too much time.

Mrs Quince: This is a very short...

Mr Barlow: This is reflective of what is on the agenda.

Mrs Quince: This is a very short piece and I would like to...

Mr Blanchflower: Would you want me to go round and let people introduce themselves first?

Mrs Quince: Yes, I would suggest that you do that if that's ok and then come to me after. If that's ok? Thank you.

An attendee: She said just going to do this

[01:15]

Mr Wood: Tim Wood of Great Barford Parish Council.

Mr Blanchflower: Yep.

Mrs Jane Walker: Jane Walker, Bedford Borough Councillor for Clapham.

Mr Blanchflower: Thank you.

Mr Towler: Martin Towler, Risely Ward Borough Council

Mr Blanchflower: Thank you.

Mr Johnston: Gordon Johnston, Wyboston, Chawston and Colesden Parish Council.

Mrs Quince: Amanda Quince, Chair of Renhold Parish Council and proud member of BFARe.

Mr Blanchflower: Thank you.

Mr Barlow: Mike Barlow, Chair of BFARe and member of Brickhill Parish Council.

Mr Blanchflower: Thank you. And online?

[01:43]

Mr Fielder: Brent Fielder, Chair of Wilden Parish. Also a proud member of BFARe as are all the Parish Councils here.

Mr Beascoechea: you're on mute.

Mr Thompson: Michael Thompson, Chair of Thurleigh Parish Council.

Mr Beascoechea: Thanks Michael. Justin you can go next.

Mr Griffiths: Justin Griffiths from Roxton Parish Council, Chair.

Mr Beascoechea: Brilliant, then we go to Chris.

Mr Kew: Chris Kew, Bolnhurst and Keysoe Parish Council.

Mr Beascoechea: Thank you. Bernadette?

Mrs Russell: That's me, Bernadette Russell. I'm from Ravensden Parish Council, and a member of BFARe.

[02:28]

Mr Beascoechea: Brilliant, thank you. Dr Cath Terry?

Dr Terry: Good evening all, programme director in Department for Transport for East West Rail configuration states 2 and 3.

Mr Beascoechea: Thank you Cath. Sarah?

Mrs Sarah Walker: Sarah Walker, Vice Chairman, Clapham Parish Council.

Mr Beascoechea: Brilliant, then Phillipa?

Mrs Martin-Moran-Bryant: Hello, yes, I am Phillipa Martin-Moran-Bryant. I am borough councillor for Great Barford Ward which comprises Woodlands Park, Ravensden, Renhold, Great Barford, Cople, Cardington and Willington. So that's quite a large area, thank you.

Mr Beascoechea: Thank you Phillipa. Wendy?

[03:13]

Mrs Rider: Yes, I'm Wendy Rider. I'm borough councillor for Brickhill Ward and I'm a member of the Brickhill Parish Council.

Mr Beascoechea: Thank you Wendy. And then Graham Palmer?

Mr Palmer: Hi, Graham Palmer representing Colmworth Parish Council.

Mr Beascoechea: Thank you. I think Michael you have already introduced yourself so last but definitely not least, Charles Royden.

The Rev'd Mr Royden: Yeah, thank you. Charles Royden, Borough Council and Parish Councillor for Brickhill. Thank you.

Mr Beascoechea: Thank you very much everyone, now we're all finished.

[03:48]

Mrs Quince: So if I might just take two minutes of your time. On the very start of this consultation you have demonstrated a total disregard for anyone who lives in North Bedfordshire. Tonight, for example, you are hiding behind COVID and in spite of the fact that this training room has capacity for thirty four, you have chosen to limit the access to just 12 Parish Council representatives and Ward Councillors and insisted on rigid COVID measures, even though Wyboston Training Centre has no procedure in place for this. Furthermore, very limited COVID measures were in force for your meeting with forty four Poets residents and their representatives from Bedford last week. The only requirement for them was to wear masks and yet we have been told to provide a negative test or a double jab certificate to gain entry.

[04:35]

Mrs Quince: On that point, I would like to bring into focus your double standards. You were prepared to meet with residents from Poets, but not with residents from North Bedfordshire whose homes, livelihoods and quality of life will also be destroyed by your choice of Route E.

[04:52]

Mrs Quince: As leaders, we firmly believe in putting the right people in the right seats and for that reason several parish council chairs were prepared to stand down from tonight's meeting to allow someone more knowledgeable from the community to attend. They could have more competently pointed out the issues that you have inadvertently missed, conveniently ignored or deliberately misunderstood. The time that you took to check through the Parish Council records to ascertain that each of our nominees was in fact a Parish Councillor would have been far better spent in answering our freedom of information requests. One of which is now five days overdue.

[05:32]

Mrs Quince: I believe you are running scared. You have included the BFARe option in your agenda tonight, but you have excluded the authors of the report. This is outrageous. This is not public engagement. This is a controlled tick box exercise in which you tell us who we can and cant invite and what we can and cannot ask. This is an exact repetition of the smoke and mirrors tactics used in the flawed consultation in 2019.

[06:06]

Mrs Quince: We have you, Simon, on record during the Three Counties Radio interview promising on air to meet face to face with BFARe. You have reneged on that promise and for that you should be ashamed. You are showing us no respect and you are being deliberately evasive, opaque and untrustworthy.

[06:27]

Mrs Quince: The only acceptable outcome of this meeting tonight is that you agree to a free and frank exchange of ideas with BFARe at a face to face meeting as you promised. And that you show the same consideration afforded to the Poets residents by agreeing to meet with our residents too. Only then will this systematic programme of deliberate misinformation be broken and some trust restored.

[06:57]

Mr Fielder: Here, here Amanda. And I think we want to say something as well. This whole meeting, the whole where this has been set up is a microcosm of how East West Rail have conducted themselves over the last two and a half years. You've actually told a lie Simon, I hate to use that word; however, you have. You told everyone on Three Counties Radio that you were very happy to meet BFARe and to specifically discuss the three way scheme. I've actually got my iPad here and I've got it set up to play if you want to hear yourself on Three Counties Radio speaking to me.

[07:33]

Mr Fielder: So, you said you would do that, but what have you done? You slotted the BFARe thing into tonight's meeting and then completely refused to let our own experts attend. East West Rail have denied access to our engineers, railway engineers, civil engineers, accountants, etc. So Simon you deceived us. You said you'd meet BFARe to specifically discuss the three way now you're refusing.

[08:00]

Mr Fielder: You'll only speak to lay people like us. How can someone like me, a firefighter, properly argue the case against the experts you've used for your own presentation? The people we want to bring in all live and work and pay taxes in our Parishes, our wards and our Constituencies . Why are you so afraid of them? They're the people paying your huge wages. Come on Simon, you're better than this. Prove that you're not a lame duck Chief Executive Officer. Keep your promise and meet with BFARe, as you promised.

[08:40]

Mr Blanchflower: (inaudible) point because otherwise we will move on with this evening's proceedings.

Mr Barlow: So, I think just one more sentence which is that pretty much everyone in the organisation, the Parish Councillors involved agree with those two statements.

Mr Blanchflower: Ok, thank you.

[09:03]

Mr Blanchflower: So we'll move on and I'm sure we'll pick up many of those points as we go through. So, we'll give a brief introduction and then we will go into the two sessions which we are going to be talking around the preferred route option and the proposals was put forward by BFARe Limited as part of their submission.

Mr Gallagher: Yep, absolutely.

Mr Barlow: So, there's little point in that second part of the agenda, but I suggest there are plenty of questions that do need answering so we can cover those.

[09:34]

Mr Barlow: We haven't got the right people in the room, you wouldn't let us bring them.

Mr Blanchflower: So, we've had a series of questions around that and we will go through the questions we received and we will make sure we try and address those as part of the discussion.

[09:49]

Mr Gallagher: So, if we pick up in terms of where we are. I don't want to spend very long on this as there are more important things to talk about. But in terms of the route selection process, really just a reminder that we are on a journey and if we move to the next slide Jordi it goes from route corridor to route option to route alignment and that has been a...at each point as we have set out in various documents that has been the considered set of steps.

[10:20]

Mr Gallagher: And you can see on the next slide we started in the corridor C and we did go through a number of different corridors, did analysis that got us to select corridor C. Within corridor C we then looked at route options that we consulted on in 2019. The A to E routes that you'll be aware of and then having set out our reasons for selecting route option E we have then developed a series of route alignments which is the next slide in those. So you're aware of that process that we have been through.

[11:03]

Mr Gallagher: I know we have had a couple of questions in relation to the sort of preferred route alignment and I think it was Ravensden Parish Council that asked us when we expect to

announce the preferred route alignment and publish the 2021 consultation feedback. We are currently processing that feedback, we received a large number of comments that we are working through. Our expectation is that we will be producing that feedback at around the turn of the year, the early part of next year and we will publish at that point a number of documents and reports that set out our detailed reasons for the announcement and the decision when it's made.

[11:59]

Mr Barlow: Am I ok to ask questions?

Mr Gallagher: Yeah.

Mr Barlow: About that slide specifically, who set out the scoring criteria for each of those 15 criteria? And how were they scored in an objective manner to come up with the result of route E?

Mr Gallagher: So what we do is we do the analysis which we set out and then we set out how, based on a qualitative assessment of those assessment factors, the logic for reaching the decisions that we reach.

[12:30]

Mr Barlow: So there was no quantitative objective measure? It was just subjective judgements?

Mr Gallagher: So, in individual areas there may well be quantitative assessments. So, for example in relation to cost or those sorts of areas in relation to transport user benefits for example there will be quantification. But the approach that we take, which is relatively standard in major infrastructure projects, is that we put all those assessment factors together and then we make a qualitative judgement on the application of those 15 assessment factors in the round. We set out that logic in our decision report and that's ultimately what will be tested.

[13:15]

Mr Barlow: So there's actually very little explanation in your decision report around each of those criteria that I've seen. Don't you think? You've picked the top five which suit the route that you want to choose.

Mr Blanchflower: I think we chose the ones that differentiate between the routes as some of the factors there is little difference, they aren't a differentiator at that particular stage, but might become a differentiator later on so the assessment is done against the major differentiators between...

[13:53]

Mr Barlow: But on a qualitative therefore subjective basis...

Mr Blanchflower: No, no, it's done on a qualitative basis, sometimes that has numerical figures behind that, but what... so the suggested things like a journey time or a journey time benefit so whether there's analysis behind... others done in a more quantitative fashion, but as we go through clearly we'll have more information so that assessment is reviewed.

[14:22]

Mrs Quince: I'm surprised to see costs up there still because I know that Richard Fuller is still working on our behalf with you to establish the information on costs and there is freedom of information questions still awaiting response. So I'm still surprised to see 3 and 4 with costs when we don't have any answers yet on the costings.

Mr Barlow: How did you differentiate between costs and affordability?

Mr Gallagher: So we will, so when you look at these things in the round, firstly, in terms of cost they are a factor there is absolutely no question about that, they have been a factor consistently. We have published a huge amount, an unprecedented amount on cost actually, in terms of how those costs are built up. If people have got particular questions on those then we can address those.

[15:12]

Mr Barlow: Have you published the costs for Bedford, Harlton to Hauxton, and Shelford to Cambridge from 2021?

Mr Gallagher: So in the 2021 consultation what we have published is the cost where they differentiate between route alignments which is what we're seeking consultation on.

Mr Barlow: So there's no way of checking what the end to end costs would be and therefore back checking that against the previous as you repeatedly tell us you're constantly back checking.

Mr Gallagher: We are constantly back checking, but the consultation is about a choice of route alignments and where there is an ability to set out different views on those route alignments, we set out the different costs.

[15:50]

Mr Barlow: But we issued an FOI request for those costs for those areas and you told us that that's not in the public interest despite it being public money and refused to respond to that FOI. So that we can help with your back checking.

Mr Gallagher: So we are working through the, where it was, in the public interest in terms of setting out the choices that people help us make in terms of the information they need to respond to the consultation we set out the differentiating costs between those route alignments.

[16:24]

Mr Barlow: Can you provide evidence of a documented back check that you've done?

Mr Gallagher: So, I think we set out in the non-statutory consultation document the processes that we've been through in terms of considering the northern approach into Cambridge, our positions on why route E was the right...

Mr Barlow: That wasn't the question, the question was can you provide evidence of where you've done a back check of something that you've done?

Mr Gallagher: So, we set out in the documents...

Mr Blanchflower: The northern approach to Cambridge.

[16:57]

Mr Barlow: So, you've got documentary evidence of that... (inaudible) So why haven't you done it for the costs for the route, for the section between Bedford and Cambridge?

Mr Blanchflower: Because we have got a single route option there that is, that was, a preferred route option which was announced by the secretary of state in January 2020 and...

Mr Barlow: But Will said...

Mr Blanchflower: If there is substantial information that suggests there have been changes that we need to take cognizance of ... so in terms of the northern approach into Cambridge as we were looking at station locations north of Cambourne and south of Camborne as part of this consultation and originally the route to the north of Cambridge was considering a station south of Cambourne, that was determined to be a significant differentiator in terms of the approach we're taking and therefore a full back check was done in terms of the approach into the north of Cambridge.

[17:52]

Mr Barlow: So the changes in Bedford between 2020 and 2021 for example the six track option, the bridge implications, the second station, they're not considered significant enough?

Mr Gallagher: So I think what we set out, one, as we go through this process we will look at what we're doing and go, 'does that warrant a back check?' and I think we've set out publicly that there's a set of three questions that we ask as we're considering what that back check is and whether...which stage we take that back check to and so consequently I think we set out in the reports that we have looked at where we are in relation to Bedford and, again, we have set out the logic that we've taken.

[18:36]

Mr Barlow: So it is not significant enough? What about destruction, inconvenience, disruption, in Bedford town centre including people's homes? Putting a new station in, the associated costs for that, the costs for the six track option all of that that wasn't included in 2019?

Mr Gallagher: We don't think there is anything that would reopen the decision, no.

Mr Fielder: I find that incredible. (inaudible)

[19:00]

Mr Barlow: If that's the case why not just share the costs? Why not say, you're right we should share those costs, here's what the cost is from Bedford to Cambridge and, look, it's still less than what we said in 2020 when we made the decision. Why not do that? What are you hiding? What are you afraid of?

Mr Gallagher: But we weren't consulting on differentiating options at Bedford itself.

Mr Barlow: No, but you've said repeatedly we back check consistently so you know what those costs are...

Mr Blanchflower: Because where there is a need to do so because factors are significantly changed and so...

[19:37]

Mr Barlow: So 95 homes in Bedford...55 in Poets isn't significant enough for you? Those homes and those people there are not significant for you? Reconstructing Bromham Road bridge after its just re-opened after 18/19 months of work, not significant enough for you?

Mr Fielder: I think the people in my parish whose house is going to be destroyed by the railway line would find that quite a significant factor.

[20:04]

Mr Blanchflower: But in terms of the differentiation from where we were when we made the decision about the route option...

Mr Gallagher: So does it change? Does what we have seen cause us to back check and it depends to which level we back check the differentiation between route E and any of the other routes for example A or B or the variety. And there isn't anything we have seen in the run up to non-statutory consultation that leads us to believe that that decision needed to be re-opened.

[20:37]

Mr Fielder: So what about the end to end costs of each route then you don't find that significant?

Several attendees: (inaudible)

Mr Paul: I'm sorry, but can we perhaps take Mr Fielder first and then Mr Barlow...

Mr Blanchflower: Brent, do you want to come in?

[20:50]

Mr Fielder: I keep wondering why we're not getting the end to end costs of not just East of Bedford to Hauxton. Why can't we have the end to end costs of each of the five routes as

they are now? And so we can look at how you've back checked and decide if that's significant or not. Because the people who have been really badly affected by this the people who are losing their homes, their livelihoods, their houses, their friends and neighbours, they think this is very significant and we think you should be providing that back check to us.

Mr Towler: I'd agree with that as well.

[21:25]

Mr Barlow: I don't understand why you wouldn't show the costs if that's no problem, if you've done those costs already then what's the issue?

Mr Gallagher: So we are continuing to develop our costs which we will continue to develop all the way through the report in relation....

Mr Barlow: But you've got those costs now, you've admitted that in the FOI but you just won't share them.

Mr Gallagher: So we do have some costs yes we do and we will continue to develop those through to the set of decisions we set out in detail the alignment we have selected through then to statutory consultation. So that information will be available when we have a complete picture to set out.

[21:59]

Mr Fielder: Well you've been saying that you continue to develop those costs for the last 6 months?

Mr Gallagher: I'm sorry that it takes a degree of time as we continue to develop this scheme and they will continue to develop, that is a reality and as we enter into preliminary design, into detailed design, these costs will continue to mature over the next period of time. We are not going to get to a definitive cost for this scheme really until shortly before you commence construction.

[22:28]

Mr Barlow: Doesn't need to be definitive does it? And so basically the sum of section C, E and F of routes 1-9 would need to total less than 1.3 to 1.7 billion, the sum of those three, in order to come under the 3.7 billion at 2020 decision point, right? So that's the query. Are those costs going to come in at less than 1.3 to 1.7 for those three sections. And you have that information so why not share it?

[23:02]

Mr Towler: Are the cost over runs going to be similar to HS2?

Mr Barlow: That's even without cost overruns (inaudible) constant 2020/2019 rate...the decision in the consultation. So you know if it comes in at more than the 3.7 total so a delta of 1.3 to 1.7 then perhaps it might be worth doing a bit more of a backcheck?

Mr Paul: I think there's another aspect...

Mr Blanchflower: We must remember cost is only one determinant here and there were 15 assessment factors that we used and we are quite clear so if you want to go onto the next slide...

[23:38]

Mrs Quince: Can I just say one thing, it is unfortunate Dr Cath Terry is not here because she would be very interested I'm sure...

Mr Blanchflower: She is here she's on call.

Mrs Quince: I mean here in the room because she I'm sure would be very interested in the costs and how we could save costs.

Mr Blanchflower: And we are working consistently with the DFT around how we make sure this scheme stays within an affordable envelope.

Mrs Quince: (inaudible) ... the electrification, the insulation would be a lot cheaper at build than if its built retrospectively and also the freight there is guidance on how steep the gradient should be and yet 24% of the line includes up to a maximum gradient between Bedford and the east coast main line.

[24:27]

Mr Blanchflower: And as we've said publicly we continue to work with the DFT on both the traction power strategy and the freight strategy for the route to make sure that those are clearly expressed when we get to the statutory consultation phase and people will have the full details around that, such that they can make informed responses to the statutory consultation. So we will continue to work with the DFT on that in terms of the wider decarbonisation strategy at work and the national freight strategy.

Mr Barlow: (inaudible) Maybe we can separate some of those...

Mr Blanchflower: We consistently said that and we will, that will be available as part of the statutory consultation.

[25:03]

Mr Barlow: Doesn't that seem a little bit [expletive] about face. I mean shouldn't you determine what the railway is used for and then design it accordingly rather than....

Mr Blanchflower: Well it's designed for freight usage...

Mr Barlow: The maximum freight usage W12 full aggregate 750 meter full aggregate trains its designed for that, complete with the gradient compromises that you need to do at Clapham.

Mr Blanchflower: The design for railways as a whole will accommodate freight...

Mr Barlow: Are you sure? You seem to be checking?

Mr Blanchflower: No I'm sure it is because its in compliance with a programme wide output specification which we published as part of the non-statutory consultation and the design

that we put forward are consistent with both the sponsors requirements and the project... programme wide output specification from the Department for the freight area.

[25:54]

Mr Barlow: So why all the veiled secrecy around whether there would be freight or not?

Mr Blanchflower: We've always said that there's potential for freight. As to quantum of freight and the wider connectivity, that is something we are still working on with the DfT in terms of whether they would want to take advantage of East West Rail for wider freight usage.

Mr Barlow: In 2019 at the route selection consultation you've mentioned the word freight about three times in two consecutive paragraphs or something like that. It was not consulted on at that point. It simply wasn't. You weren't open about it.

[26:32]

Mr Gallagher: So, I'm not sure I buy that actually because we are making, one at the time freight wasn't new, it was mentioned and we got representations on freight. I don't think it is a secret, you actually I think in your own submission make the point that the East West Rail consortium, as then it was called, has consistently said there is a case for freight on this railway.

Mr Barlow: (inaudible)

[27:05]

Mr Gallagher: The argument then goes what is the appropriate amount of freight, that is driven by several factors. It is driven by the level of demand for freight. It is not something like a train service you prescribe as it operates on an open access basis, that's point number one. Point number two is the cost benefit of providing that because freight doesn't come without a cost because you would need to build additional infrastructure to, not just on East West rail but elsewhere in order for freight to access East West Rail.

[27:42]

Mr Barlow: (inaudible)

Mr Gallagher: Which is why we set out in the documentation, which I think is very clear actually on this issue, that if you look at what anticipated demand might be, if you look at the level of provision on East West Rail, it is likely that you would have about one freight train per hour using East West Rail.

Mr Barlow: In each direction?

Mr Gallagher: In each direction. And so therefore, either we are being secretive about that or you're correcting me using the document that we published that explains the demand that we think is likely to be there so I actually don't think we've been...

[28:22]

Mr Barlow: Was that in the documents, the one ?

Mr Gallagher: Yeah the one freight train per hour is...

Mr Barlow: What, in 2019?

Mr Gallagher: In the 2021 consultation...

Mr Barlow: No, right, that's the point. Right, you've made a decision on the route on the basis of consultation where you barely mention freight.

Mr Gallagher: I don't...

Mr Barlow: And actually every time we brought it up, the same phrase came up: 'this is predominately a passenger rail'

Mr Blanchflower: It is.

[28:51]

Mr Barlow: Right, but freight is still in there and you're going to need it for your business case with regards to the passenger numbers dropping, I suspect. Which I guess is why East West Rail consortium as per their own minutes in December 2020 were pitching that to places like Felixstowe for a Felixstowe to Cardiff route. I mean, but then everyone kept saying 'its predominately a passenger railway' (inaudible)

Mr Gallagher: What I think, Mike, firstly, we're talking about up to four trains per hour in each direction for passengers and we're talking about one freight train per hour. So it's hard to argue it isn't predominately passenger. But also this is really important which is yes there may be some aspirations of some people, East West Rail consortium being a good example, to open up freight connectivity. We are hearing those representations and government will be hearing those representations, but there are still a set of decisions that are not just East West Rail decisions that are wider railway decisions that need to be taken which is what again we set out in the documents. As I say, there is still work going on on this and we will set out a clearer decision in terms of the wider rail network strategy and how it interfaces with East West Rail at the point of statutory consultation.

[30:09]

Mr Barlow: Ok, so, a significant amount of freight...

Mr Gallagher: No, no, no, no....

Mr Barlow: What 25% isn't a significant amount?

Mr Gallagher: The amount of freight we have set out in the non-statutory consultation document

Mr Blanchflower: But that is an opportunity for freight, whether freight takes that opportunity is another thing.

Mrs Quince: (inaudible) I think Will, the problem is that your stance does not reflect the aims of the relaunched East West mainline partnership which is talking about Felixstowe to Nuneaton corridor which we will be apart.

[30:37]

Mr Gallagher: So if you look at what the East West rail mainline partnership...I try to get their name right as they've recently changed...is they have a set of broader ambitions that they want to lobby for and broader connections. All we can do is deliver the programme wide output specification which is what we've agreed with the Department and, you know, make this a freight capable railway, but in terms of the actual demand for that we say the maximum that could reach in the current capacity we've got is one freight train per hour as I've said its open access but it would take and I think again I've been pretty open about this, a significant amount of investment elsewhere on the rail network to get any more than that.

[31:22]

Mr Barlow: Yeah, but it starts with this doesn't it.

Mr Fielder: Can I quickly speak Will?

Mr Barlow: You would be pushing through Bedford East West. And so if there's going to be a significant amount of freight why would you want to push it through the town centre where the air quality is already an issue? 55 days last year Bedford failed its air quality measures and you're going to be pushing diesel freight through it, and diesel passenger trains.

Mr Blanchflower: So I don't know whether we are going to be putting diesel passenger trains through the centre of Bedford because that decision hasn't yet been made.

[31:53]

Mr Barlow: Oh, I'm sorry I thought your operations director had said you were in the process of looking at a lease for six trains that were diesel? No, is that not right?

Mr Blanchflower: For the Oxford to Milton Keynes service.

Mr Barlow: Sorry?

Mr Paul: That's for the already under construction sections.

Mr Barlow: Ah ok.

Mr Paul: Which already have freight trains operating on it, diesel powered trains operating on the Oxford to Marylebone service.

Mr Barlow: Ok, and so the trains aren't going to be diesel?

[32:21]

Mr Blanchflower: So the trains we're looking at from Oxford to Milton Keynes is for an initial service and diesel will be considered as one of those options because that obviously gets the trains up and running as quickly as possible which is what we want to do. For the broader

service once the service is extended beyond Bletchley to Bedford and on to Cambridge there is still a wider decision for government as I said as part of the network decarbonisation strategy in how they want to bring that forward with respect to East West Rail and we will need to be clear on that before we go into statutory consultation because that will need to form a key part of the environmental assessments undertaken to support the statutory consultation.

[33:00]

Mr Barlow: So why would you push diesel trains through Bedford?

Mr Blanchflower: I never said I'm pushing diesel trains through Bedford.

Mr Barlow: Ok. They're not going to be diesel then?

Mr Blanchflower: I said that decision has yet to be made.

Mr Barlow: Ah ok. So, they're going to electrify the line then?

Mr Blanchflower: No, I said that decision is yet to be made.

Mr Barlow: Yeah, well at the moment the decision is that it isn't going to be electrified so that has to change yeah?

Mr Blanchflower: There is a wider network decarbonisation strategy that looks at the whole national rail network and how the government is going to bring forward plans for that.

[33:33]

Mr Barlow: So at this point (inaudible) a shorter, flatter, straighter route wouldn't use less carbon no?

Mr Gallagher: Well to be honest, no, it might not.

Mr Barlow: It will.

Mr Gallagher: Because if in order to achieve the flood plain mitigation that you get with the shorter, flatter, straighter route you need to use a significant amount of viaducts and you need to use a significant amount of embedded carbon.

Mr Barlow: So, yeah taking into account the embedded carbon when you did that environmental study did you?

Mr Gallagher: So we look at the environmental considerations in the round...

[34:08]

Mr Barlow: No, no, but did you look at the embedded carbon of the five routes when you made that decision?

Mr Gallagher: So we would certainly have considered the construction impact....

Mr Barlow: So yes or no, not 'we would have'.

Mr Blanchflower: We looked in qualitative terms at the overall environmental impact of the line which would have included consideration of the construction materials to be used as part of that.

Mr Barlow: So you're saying yes? You looked at the embedded carbon or each of those five routes?

Mr Blanchflower: Not in detail, we wouldn't have done, but we've looked in qualitative terms.

Mr Barlow: It's a quantitative thing, you measure carbon in a quantitative manner.

[34:46]

Mr Gallagher: But this comes back to again, as we set out, as you develop the scheme, you develop with increasing levels of detail and you basically get to the point where you know sufficient to narrow down your options.

Mr Barlow: That leads to another question then, you haven't looked at the embedded carbon for each of those five routes is what I'm hearing?

Mr Gallagher: We said we've done a qualitative assessment of the environmental impacts.

Mr Barlow: So that was a no then, basically. You know, look, just say it. Don't twist it with PR.

Mr Blanchflower: There are no calculation spreadsheets that go into minute detail about embedded carbon.

Mr Barlow: That you've done, no?

Several attendees: (inaudible)

Mr Blanchflower: At that stage, you asked me...

Several attendees: (inaudible)

[35:33]

Mr Barlow: That's quite right, so they weren't done at that stage.

Mr Gallagher: No.

Mr Barlow: Right, so a short, flatter, straighter route and I hear what you're saying about the viaducts, but these routes that you've chosen, alignments that you've chosen for north of Bedford between Bedford and the A1 are between 4.2 and 7.2 km of viaducts right? And that's with some rather dubious assumptions around where you can put viaducts and where you can put embankment. So for route B it was a lot less than that even with the flood plain, no?

[36:08]

Mr Gallagher: No, I think where you basically, where you end up is again, how are we comparing these when you look at what we were doing on route E, when you look at what

you're doing on route B you do end up in that section from south of Bedford through to where you sort of head across towards the east coast mainline you do end up using a lot of viaduct on route B.

Mr Barlow: So more, more on route B?

Mr Gallagher: I'll need to refresh my memory but I'm pretty sure yes.

[36:40]

Mr Barlow: (inaudible) So why wasn't that prevalent? Why wasn't that evidenced before the 2019 consultation? I mean, that flood plains been documented since the Domesday Book which is only nine hundred years, but they seem to have missed it on the 2019 consultation. Because that's what the reason was for the costs wasn't it?

Mr Gallagher: So what you do is as we're developing the routes by which you begin to look at what assumptions you make and the assumptions in relation to flood mitigation in terms of the balance of viaduct and embankment that you use. I think its set out in the reports that were published, we move to where you have flood mitigation we use viaducts.

Mr Barlow: So we didn't do, (inaudible) I'm sorry Brent, go for it Brent.

[37:42]

Mr Fielder: Ok, thank you, so you've not properly explained the 15 assessment factors you've said cost's only one and when we try to pin you down you say that's just one factor. Number two on your previous list was housing, and looking at the slide now I don't if the rest of you can see but 'how route options B and E ranked' route option B came second and E came first for supporting delivery of new homes. Well, that was fine when you had Bedford Borough Council at your beck and call and they were supporting houses through that northern route, but in their local plan they're now championing houses south along the route that we're suggesting so why doesn't that trigger a full back check with full transparency?

[38:31]

Mr Gallagher: So I think again, you know...look, I think it's important that we're clear here that as we set out in the documentation one of the things we consider is it's not simply housing along the line of route, it is housing around the stations that will be created.

An attendee: (inaudible)

Mr Fielder: So every time you come up with something like that you just change the goal posts the whole time, the goal posts are moving the entire time.

[39:04]

Mr Barlow: How can that have been first if that's the case Will? That's just utter [expletive]. Honestly, (inaudible) that Northern route between, there is very few houses.

Mr Gallagher: (inaudible) Just to be clear that is the ranking that the public gave (inaudible)

Mr Barlow: That's what people think so that is totally subjective.

Mr Gallagher: That is, what we're saying is that's the consultation feedback.

Mr Blanchflower: That is the consultation feedback, that we got at the time
[39:36]

Mr Barlow: And that includes the three and a half thousand responses from the wildlife trust of your seven thousand responses?

Mr Fielder: All asking about trees.

Mr Blanchflower: If they commented on those particular items that will be included.

Several attendees: (inaudible)

Mr Barlow: Interestingly the wildlife trust does say unequivocally about the five routes that route B is the most environmentally friendly and it says that in its response, the one you've published. And they've had three and a half thousand people write in and that's half of your responses.

[40:08]

Mr Paul: Could I perhaps clarify the point, the responses which we believe were part of a co-ordinated campaign by the Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust were provided as free text responses so they wouldn't have been factored into those particular quantitative assessments based on a ranking of 1 to 5 which those particular responses would not have provided.

Mr Barlow: Ok, I get it, so you only include subjective views where it's a tick a box, not where its written in text

Mr Gallagher: No, all of them get read and it all gets taken into account. What we're sharing with you, is where people ranked, this is what they ranked.

[40:47]

Mrs Quince: Could I just remind you of the numbers. The total of homes in the area we're talking about: 2,827. The number of postcards you've sent: 914. Responses received in total: 122.

Mr Gallagher: So I think, firstly, we sent a postcards to those in the area of the consultation.

Mr Barlow: You didn't, only 5% of homes in Clapham are on your postcode list. 5% in that parish.

Mr Gallagher: That will be driven by the consultation zone that we set in terms of the wider route.

Mr Barlow: And Roxton by the way...

Mr Johnston: I haven't found anybody in Wyboston, Colesden and Chawston that actually had a postcard at all.

[41:41]

Mr Barlow: Gordon, we should probably do the piece of work and check the postcodes and make sure that we've got fully quantified and numerical and objective view of that because the quantified, numerical, objective view is that Clapham only got 5%, Roxton only got 5% and those are the postcodes that you published. Which is why we were so keen to get that postcode list, which is still made really difficult to work with, but it would be nice if you could send it on an excel spreadsheet or something that would be great so that we can chop and change it rather than pdf I'd really like that, because there's a lot of lines on there. Urm, but you didn't and also there was some of the parishes weren't on your consultee list. Am I right? Was Wilden one of them, Clapham one of them? Ravensden, Wilden? Which... it goes through...weren't on your consultee list. You never wrote to them to tell them about the 2019 consultation. Those parish councils.

[42:36]

Mr Gallagher: So, firstly given it's a non-statutory consultation there isn't a prescribed consultee list (inaudible)

Mr Barlow: But you're making decisions (inaudible)....

Mr Fielder: And that makes it alright then?

Mr Barlow: You're making decisions at the pre-statutory consultation stage so the more you say that the broader it makes the distrust, because you're making decisions that impact those parishes at that stage. It doesn't matter whether it's statutory or non statutory to those people. You're going through their homes, Will. We don't care whether its statutory or non-statutory.

[43:05]

Mr Gallagher: And so, look I think there's a question then that either we debate this on technicalities which is the point you were making to me or we debate it on substance. And if we want to debate it on substance then the question is did those parishes engage, did those parishes respond, did we get responses from those areas, did those people attend events and the answer to all four of those questions is yes.

[43:30]

Mr Barlow: Do you answer their questions? Have you shared the information to help them? No, you don't, you don't. You act in a closed opaque manner.

Mr Gallagher: I'm sorry...

Mr Barlow: Yes you do.

Mr Gallagher: I don't really agree with that.

Several attendees: (inaudible)

Mr Barlow: I don't care whether you agree or not. It's a fact.

Mr Blanchflower: Look, can you let Will finish his answer.

Mr Gallagher: we published on our website all our consultation documents, we advertised in the local media all our consultation documents.

[44:00]

Mr Barlow: Can I ask a point about that? Where did you advertise in the Bedford media that reaches the villages?

Mr Gallagher: So, I think we certainly went to the Bedford media and I think we have again, you'll forgive me that I can't remember the precise...

Mr Barlow: Simon said in an interview, he said we went to the Bedford Times and the Bedford Citizen newspapers, not realising that actually they are one in the same thing – it's the Bedford Times and Citizen. That paper doesn't get distributed in a lot of regions including my own and I live in town.

[44:34]

Mr Gallagher: So the question is, as I said, if you want to talk about substance did those parishes, were they aware of the consultation? Did they engage with it and did they respond to it? And looking at Parish council minutes, looking at the responses that we got, looking at the attendees of the events that were held people from those parishes did engage with the consultation. So, was it effective in terms of people being informed and responding, yes.

[45:02]

Mr Barlow: I don't know if you want to cut in here Brent? Let me tell you, when you count those people that attend those events, Brent how many of those events did you go to?

Mr Fielder: I went to about 7 of those, well 5 of those events actually. I was counted every time, but it's not that, what really gets my goat about this whole meeting Will is we've got a chap whose spent a lot of time working on these figures. He could give you them...he can recite them chapter and verse, but of course he was turned down by (inaudible) he wouldn't let him in the meeting. We've not been allowed any of our experts in.

[45:37]

Mr Fielder: Mike's doing a fantastic job as is Amanda and the rest of the team, but they can't be across everything. You've got dozens of people working for you full time, we're a set of part time parish councillors. I actually find it appalling that you don't uphold the same values that we do. Our parish councils...transparency is our main one, honesty and integrity. Why wouldn't you let those people in so they could give you the facts and figures?

[46:05]

Mr Blanchflower: Phillipa, did you want to come in you've had your hand raised, sorry?

Mrs Martin-Moran-Bryant: I do, but if you answer Brent's question first I think that would be more useful. Thank you.

Mr Gallagher: I think we've set out the approach that we're taking to engaging and I think that is several-fold. Firstly, we held a non-statutory consultation, with events that people were open to come to. Where everybody, BFARe Limited and others, were able to make submissions. There was absolutely no limit on those people who were able to submit and engage in consultation.

Mr Fielder: I'll just stop you there Will. You didn't hold a single consultation meeting anywhere in route E. So, route E, the one that's going to have the railway line through it didn't have a consultation meeting. People couldn't go there, all the people in the villages, they weren't able to walk anywhere. So, how is that clear and transparent?

[47:10]

Mr Gallagher: So we chose venues...

Mr Fielder: The wrong ones in the wrong places...

Mr Barlow: You chose Scott Hall in the south of Bedford which is extremely difficult to get to from within Bedford never mind from outside of Bedford and you've got the councillor responsible for transport, if you want to get a bus from Chawston to Scott Hall you have to leave about 4 hours before hand. And you didn't even put the address on the card.

Mrs Quince: I think you could say that was a deliberate ploy to be as evasive and opaque as you possibly could.

[47:43]

Mr Gallagher: I must say I...

Mr Blanchflower: I think I disagree, because we went out of our way to find locations that were accessible, which would suit the type of exhibition that was being held and would be accessible to a range of people.

Several attendees: (inaudible)

Mr Barlow: Simon that is really not a credible, if you'd been to Scott Hall that is not a credible response.

An attendee: That's the worry as we've got some fantastic village halls with some amazing spaces and ample parking. I mean I'd like to know where you got Scott Hall from, I suspect, I know....

Mr Barlow: I'd never even heard of it, until this consultation got picked up I'd never even heard of it. I've only lived in Bedford all my life. It's not a credible response, sorry.

[48:30]

Mrs Quince: Simon have you taken on board the fact that there was no consultation anywhere within the route E? Have you taken that on board tonight?

Mr Blanchflower: We have taken on board the fact, as Will has said, that we had quite a strong representation from people, from Parish councils, from individuals as part of the original 2019 consultation...

Mrs Quince: That's not my question, my question is have you taken on board and accepted that there was a flaw in your consultation...

Mr Blanchflower: No...

Mrs Quince: Which you've chosen not to have any consultation within route E, in that it was accessible to the villagers and people like in Brickhill who are now going to be affected by your choice of route E. Have you taken that on board?

[49:10]

Mr Blanchflower: I don't think it was flawed and I don't we, we chose a number of locations across the region that we thought would be accessible to a range of people who would be affected by all of the routes (inaudible). So we're in St Neots, we were in a number of other places across in South Cambridgeshire, we're in Cambridge and we're in Bedford.

Mr Barlow: We don't care about the other places.

Mrs Quince: We're talking about North Bedfordshire and the villages and the residents of the North Bedfordshire constituency that did not have equality of access, if you like, to that consultation process.

Mr Barlow: Where the decision was made to put the route through the houses...

Mrs J Walker: I did actually point that out as well at the councillor consultation you had at Borough Hall when I pointed out there wasn't then any in the North that you could get to. That was when you met the councillors. (inaudible)

Mr Towler: I think if you've decided that you ought to be transparent then you should've spoken to parish councils and said 'we need a meeting, where do you think is the best place to hold it?' So we can inform the residents. That never happened because that would've come up with an answer that you didn't want.

Mr Gallagher: I think that the primary insinuation here is that we had decided before the consultation, that we wanted route E, so (inaudible). So if that is your contention then one, I'm not sure it reconciles with the cost information that was published, you can't have it both ways. One and most importantly, we went out there to all those involved in those route areas, in terms of the postcards we sent out, we presented the information as it was available at the time, we considered those 15 assessment factors and when they produced an outcome, that was the outcome we announced. I guarantee you we did not have a preconception of (inaudible)

Mr Barlow: You said that, not us. (inaudible) you're right on one point and this is next to that, the two things are connected, you're right, so, you didn't write to 95% of the residents in Roxton or Clapham and some of the other villages. So, they didn't represent themselves, so

when you say those rankings for the route B or route E were public feedback on your little tick box, they didn't get the opportunity to do that so one is the function of the other. You're right.

Mr Gallagher: So, as I said we publicised this consultation far and wide...

Mr Barlow: No you didn't.

[52:00]

Mrs Quince: Will can I just give you (inaudible)

Mr Blanchflower: Can I bring Phillipa in? She's been waiting very patiently.

Mrs Quince: Ok, then I will bring a statistic to you.

Mr Blanchflower: Phillipa and then Sarah?

Mrs Martin-Moran-Bryant: First of all I'd like to just echo Jane's point, as borough councillors we did point out that villagers weren't having events in their areas. I've got a number of questions. First of all, Will you mentioned that there's a back checking process and that you ask 3 questions and I wonder if you could remind us of what those 3 questions are? And with that in mind and the question was raised about the Bedford Borough local plan, have you back checked against the local plan and what conclusion did you come to? Also when you back check and facts change from your end do you then reconsult the public on that information too? Is that your strategy or not? And also, there's lots of talk here about non-statutory consultations and statutory consultations, what I think would be very interesting and helpful to know for this discussion is how are these non-statutory consultations described as part of the development consent order process? Because clearly I would be understating if I said that there was clearly disagreement in the room, how are these evidenced that you've done one thing and that residents obviously feel differently about it as it's a non-statutory consultation? How is that going to play into the application process? It would be very useful to know that. Thank you.

Mr Blanchflower: Thank you Phillipa,

[53:39]

Mr Gallagher: to take those questions in turn. The back checking process, the first question is, is there new information? If there is new information you then go to the second question which is, does that lead to a reconsideration of the issues? So, you look at that in more detail. Then the third question is whether that reconsideration of the issues leads you to...would you take a different decision? Now if you got to a point where you would take a different decision, depending on the materiality of that then there would definitely be scenarios in which you would need to reconsult, I can't envisage every scenario, but there might be times on issues that were relatively minor where you wouldn't reconsult or you might do a geographically limited consultation, for example where it affected a particular area. If we were in a position where we needed to reconsult we certainly would. So, I think that sort of picks up the points

you were making. In terms of the consultation process, where the non-statutory consultations that we've been holding fit in to the decision making process, they will be taken into account by the planning inspector in terms of the build up to the decisions that we've taken on the application that we make and the key part of that is the consultation feedback reports and the reports that set out the decisions that we've taken and both of those things will be available to the planning inspector.

[55:23]

Mr Blanchflower: There's also a local Bedford Borough Council planning permit as well.

Mr Gallagher: So, in terms of the Bedford Borough Council local plan. So, are you talking about the one that they're currently talking about right now, or?

Mrs Martin-Moran-Bryant: Yes, that's the draft of the strategy that we've just had the consultation about.

Mr Gallagher: So, to the extent that there is new information in that, we would look at that through the context of those 3 questions.

Attendees: (inaudible)

Mrs Martin-Moran-Bryant: That consultation has happened, the draft development strategy has been published, was that on your timetable to check on that base? Given that that information is out there?

Mr Gallagher: So, if its publicly available information, I'm not completely on the detail on this one if I'm honest with you, but I will double check with the team. But if it is publicly available information then that is something that would inform our considerations, yeah absolutely.

Mrs Martin-Moran-Bryant: It definitely is and it should definitely be on your to do list.

[56:30]

Mr Blanchflower: Sarah, Sarah Walker I think you've got your hand up?

Mrs S Walker: Yes, thank you. I'm really conscious that the whole point of the Planning Act and the DCO process is that, the consultation and stakeholder engagement is all front loaded and is all designed, so the whole process is designed to put stakeholder engagement at its heart. And I think what we've seen this evening is that you by your approach to stakeholder engagement have created an environment of complete mistrust. And I think we could debate the 2019 consultation forever and a day. And I'm sure that that's probably not what you want to do this evening although many of us would continue to see flaws in it. I think it's your approach to engagement, which is pure rich two way engagement that has really been missing up until now. Not just talking about the 2019 consultation I'm talking about the whole approach to consultation. It's been completely unidirectional. And I think as a representative of a parish council in Clapham which whichever route you select is going to be impacted massively. I actually want to know actually when you're going to do us the courtesy of coming out and having an open and constructive discussion and proper rich engagement with us

about issues from flooding to freight, from electrification to legacy and tunnel options. Because at the moment we're being talked at and not talked with. So I'd really like to know when we can look forward to having that conversation with you?

[58:13]

Mr Gallagher: So I think, lets. First of all, I think we genuinely we do want to have an open dialogue, we have, bluntly, lots of allegations thrown at us but ultimately we do want to have an open dialogue. Where did we start with all of this? So we went through the non-statutory consultation process in 2019. Following the announcement of the route option we then had a series of meetings with Ward Councillors, with Parish Councillors and what were the primary conversations that we wanted to have and actually, what's the type of engagement you want? What's the kind of information you want? And we had a series of events before COVID got in the way in terms of the type of engagement we wanted to have. I remember having a number of conversations potentially with some people in this room, certainly with some people who are online this evening, about that type of engagement. So, I personally, in some ways what I heard the last time round doing this engagement is, when are you going to actually tell us the answer? You are spending a lot of time talking to us, in preparation for that answer. And, in honesty, we were having that conversation because we wanted to develop the best way of communicating with you, engaging with you, in advance of setting out those answers.

[59:49]

Mrs S Walker: I think I was in a couple of those early conversations, when you asked how often did we want to hear from you. But I think what we've felt and seen since is that we haven't felt listened to, we haven't felt, ok lets put adequate consultation to one side, we felt that we've been told and we've been told what we can ask and when we can ask and the terms under which we can ask it. And this evening is a pretty good example of that. So, my appeal really is, please come and talk to us, not just to Clapham but to other Parish councils. Come and talk to us and more to the point, listen, please listen to us. We've got some really concerned people in our communities and I can't overplay that really, and they feel very un-listened to.

Mr Gallagher: And we can, you know, debate the past and I recognise people want to do that, but one of the things that, and I think we've said it publicly, if we haven't then I'm saying it tonight, we will be setting up a set of community forums so that we can continue to have dialogue. And if we can do that in a way that brings your communities into that conversation then I'm very keen to do that. What we are trying to do is make sure we do elected representatives the courtesy of having that engagement through elective representatives. We think that genuinely is really important.

[61:27]

Mr Barlow: So, the BFARe organisation was formed by the Parish councils, but it includes people that are not elected representatives. So, the only reason we formed a company was so

that we can protect peoples liabilities when it comes to judicial review, right. So, its funded, its voted for, it's a company that's backed by the local government. I know we're only Parish councils, not central government or the DfT but actually when you look at it, it's no different to EWR. None of you are elected, right? You represent a company that is government backed which is formed by the elected people. BFARe is no different, but you've chosen to exclude it. We'd like, look, please if anybody wants to disagree with me you know that I'm open to disagreement, we can have a chat about it (inaudible) but if anyone wants to disagree with me then please say so, but we feel that actually, this letter from Jordi that basically says 'you're not invited because you're not an elected representative' because you didn't realise that I was an elected representative, was, it's reflective of the mistrust that you've built and I would ask that from this meeting that we do get, as Sarah's just suggested, a two way dialogue with the people that know what they're talking about, because, I'm just repeating stuff verbatim, Simon, that's what I do, I just sell stuff right? So, we get a two way dialogue, a proper two way dialogue, not a stage managed tick box exercise, which is what this felt like from going around the room. And I also think that there needs to be a public engagement subsequent to that as well. So, where people can get the opportunity to air their views directly to you, because, I mean, its emotive right? But I'm bored of people saying 'we understand that there's people gonna be upset by this route' or 'people are going to be affected'. I'm bored with it. I'm also really upset that I get people phoning me, telling me, that they're worried, they're scared, they can't sleep at night, it's their home, it's their farm. I don't know whether you get that? But I do, and I'm sure all these elected representatives do and we just feel that, as Sarah said, that it's been a brick wall. With regard to new information, Bedford only declared a climate emergency in March 2019 which is when you were doing the consultation. There is a climate emergency going on. In the UK, two weeks ago we heard that the UK leads the world in destroying rural habitats, we've got COP26 coming up. We know that actually we've got to try and maintain global warming to 1.5%, 1.5 degrees rather. You guys chose these routes without doing an embedded carbon calculation. Selecting a route with higher embedded carbon and then trying to mitigate that through planting a million trees a year, although where you're going to plant them I don't know? That's putting lipstick on a pig. It is creative carbon accounting. The full environmental impact should be fully calculated at the point of route selection, not trying to repair it afterwards. And I don't care what the DCO process says if the DCO process says that's the right way to do things then the DCO process is wrong and actually you guys should be looking to challenge that if you're going to work in a way that's responsible and looking after our children's futures.

[65:43]

Mr Blanchflower: Personally, I am extremely committed to protection of our environment, I'm delighted that on the section of the railway that we're building at the moment between Bicester and Bletchley, we can demonstrate that we're giving a gain to biodiversity across that section of the route and that is something that we will continue to do as we extend the railway further East in terms of that commitment to biodiversity net gain. So I'm delighted that we've got a track record of that which we can evidence through the work that we're

doing in the current connection stage which will be then extended to other sections of the railway.

Mr Towler: Isn't that a disused rail bed anyway?

Attendees: (inaudible)

Mr Towler: You're just using an old track line rather than a new track line that you're carving through Bedford.

[66:31]

Mr Blanchflower: Interestingly, the biodiversity in that section of the route because it was a rail corridor, was actually very high because that's where nature populated, so the work we've done there...

Mr Towler: You're still using it you're just not...

Mr Blanchflower: Trains haven't been using it for many years and we had to relocate a number of badger sets, built a new otter den. We've worked in terms of protecting the bats along that route in terms of the activities that we've done. We've done an awful lot of work in that section of the railway which I think is clear evidence of our ambition and desire to make sure that we are protecting nature.

Mr Towler: Ok...

Mr Barlow: I think that's really positive, I do.

Mr Blanchflower: Thank you.

[67:15]

Mr Barlow: I think driving that biodiversity net gain is really positive and it will be really positive, but only for 20 years because if we damage the planet with the carbon that you're putting in, that biodiversity will burn, the weather will change, the natural habitats will change...

Mr Blanchflower: Which is why we are also doing work on embedded and operational carbon to make sure that we can demonstrate that we will be consistent with the government's ambitions, in terms of the milestones set out in terms of 2037 and 2050, so that is the core part of what we're doing. We will be able to demonstrate through the work that we bring forward in terms of our carbon base.

Mr Barlow: So, you'll be able to demonstrate that the embodied carbon and choosing route E is lower than the embedded carbon of any of the other routes, yeah?

[68:08]

Mr Blanchflower: We've gone past that point, we have now got a preferred route option which is route E, what we're now looking at is the different alignments within that route option and as part of bringing forward the statutory consultations to development consent

order we need to demonstrate as part of our carbon assessment, how the route alignment we bring forward will be able to meet those...

Mr Barlow: that's putting lipstick on a pig. It's polishing a carbon turd.

Mr Blanchflower: Well I disagree with you...

Mr Barlow: Ridiculous.

Mr Blanchflower: I disagree with you because the work that we're doing here is moving forward at quite a pace in terms of what we're seeking to achieve in terms of our embedded and operational carbon.

Mr Barlow: Unless you can prove that that was the lowest carbon route to start with you're just polishing a turd.

[68:54]

Mr Blanchflower: I would disagree on that point. There are two people who have their hands up. Has one of those gone down now? Justin did you have your hand up at one stage? Do you want to come in or?

Mr Griffiths: Only very briefly and going back a couple of statements about having certain representatives from BFARe not being allowed to attend tonight. So everybody understands that this is a very technical matter, those people that have not been allowed to attend are basically our technical experts which we have, as Parish councillors, we really need so we do insist that those people are allowed to participate and represent us at any meetings going forward. I don't want to detract away from anything anyone else said but just wanted to make that point. Thank you.

Mr Blanchflower: Thanks Justin. Brent is that a new hand or...you've got up?

[69:49]

Mr Fielder: Yeah, sorry if I've been shouting everyone, the volume on my PC has just suddenly shot up and I can hear you all now, I've been shouting really loud so that you can hear me. Sorry about that.

Mr Barlow: We can hear you loud and clear Brent, we're used to it.

Mr Fielder: Very good. I wanted to just pick up on a point from earlier, the point that Justin was just picking up on. The parish councils are a group that were against route E long before, and then we decided to give ourselves a name, BFARe, all the Parish councils contributed money, a thousand pounds from my Parish council and we only get 10 grand a year, but we feel so strongly we gave 10% of our annual precept towards BFARe so BFARe are the Parish councils. And Simon, I'm going to press you on this, here is (plays recording) 'will you say today that you will engage with us and meet BFARe to discuss our three-way option which covers everything that you want for an Oxford to Cambridge railway which delivers every (inaudible) of Bedford Borough Council for regeneration in the town centre (inaudible)

Mr Blanchflower: Sorry, Brent, I can't hear anything I'm afraid.

[70:57]

Mr Fielder: I'll tell you what it's saying then Simon, it's me asking you live on three counties radio, I'm happy to send you the link through, it's me asking you live if you will meet BFARe to specifically discuss the three-way plan and it's your voice on there saying yes I'm very happy to sit down with yourself and your group and discuss this with you. Now you seem to be saying now that you won't do that. Are you going back on your word? You say you want the dialogue, are you now renegeing on that or were you just pleasing the crowd there?

Mr Blanchflower: I don't think I'm a crowd pleaser in any sense of the word, but we've chosen to meet with elective representatives tonight. Will who has talked about the fact that we will be setting up local community forums as our next step which will be initiated I think next month. So, let's see how we can bring forward some proposals which allow you to bring in some technical discussion into those meetings.

[72:03]

Mr Fielder: I do have to reply to that Simon because you said live, I will be going back to three counties radio and will be playing that clip and will be asking whether you've answered it, what you've said now is you won't, so you're actually going back on your word. Don't worry, that will be on three counties radio, it'll certainly be in the press. So, I think it really would be in your best interest to meet with BFARe. If the BFARe, what are you scared of? Why are you so scared of us bringing along a few people who know what they're talking about.

Mr Blanchflower: Brent, I'm not scared. Justin do you want to come back in, Phillipa, I see you've got your hand up as well?

[72:45]

Mr Griffiths: Well, I'm afraid it's the same question to East West Rail. Will you allow our technical experts to represent us at meetings when you're meeting with Parish councils next time?

Mr Blanchflower: I think we'll take that away and have a look...

Mr Gallagher: We'll take that away. I think our point is...

Mr Barlow: Help me understand what the issue is, why you wouldn't? It just doesn't make any sense.

[73:15]

Mr Gallagher: Our view is that, and this is a consistent view right across East West Rail, that the best way of engaging with local communities is through the representatives of those communities who are elected. And that's why we engage with Parish councillors and ward councillors and therefore those are the people who are elected to speak on behalf of their communities so when we engage with....

Mr Griffiths: Sorry Will, I'm going to cut in there.

Mr Gallagher: Just let me finish. If we are to speak on behalf of...if we are to engage between formal periods of public consultation, so, it's not that we haven't been engaging with the public or any limited company or organisation who wishes to engage, but between those periods of public consultation where we are engaging with local areas, wanting to make sure we're talking to local communities so we can take on board your views, prepare for the next round of consultation, all those sorts of things, we think the right way to do that is to engage with locally elected representatives. If we were in a position where there was a group of people who set themselves up as a limited company who had no democratic representation at all, and who were making completely the opposite argument that you're making, you would say to us 'why aren't you engaging with the democratically elected representatives'. The one test that it seems to me in terms of the representatives of communities is whether they are democratically elected representatives of communities, that is where we have got to and what I would say is that going back to the substance of all of this, we know that those Parishes that want to make those representations which are the route alignment that you wish to talk about then we are here to hear your representations on that.

[75:21]

Mr Fielder: Will, that's absolutely a load of tosh. Now, let's just listen to what Simon said (inaudible)

Mr Blanchflower: Sorry Brent, we can't hear anything sorry (inaudible)...

Mr Towler: Can I just say something

Mr Blanchflower: (inaudible)... The gentleman at the end yes?

Mr Towler: Can I just say something? As a Parish councillor and a councillor when a Parish council needs expert advice we'll ask for expert advice, we're only laymen to the extent that we don't understand the ins and outs, but we'll ask the professionals be it a highway person or anything else, and we will get their advice to move forward. You seem resistant to actually going forward with this for expert advice coming from our side towards you, who can in the long run help you.

[76:08]

Mr Blanchflower: So, I'm aware we've only got 10 minutes left of our meeting tonight. So, are there any other key subjects that people would want to cover off in the remaining 10 minutes? Because I do want to respect peoples' time and not go on past the designated hours. So, Phillipa, is there something additional you want to make sure we cover in the last 10 minutes?

Mrs Martin-Moran-Bryant: Well, if it's just, just to say I have emailed over the link to the new draft local plan 2040. I just wondered if you were able to commit to us when you back checked against that? Please.

Mr Barlow: You broke up a little bit on that last bit.

Mr Blanchflower: so I think it was about the local plan I think and just what sort of time scale it will be for us or when we will be reviewing that I think. Well, I think that was the question. Is that correct Phillipa?

Mrs Quince: I've just emailed it over to you Will.

Mr Blanchflower: Ok.

[77:01]

Mr Gallagher: Ok, so you know, I'm literally going to what (inaudible) I think this is something you've flagged that you wanted to raise so I'm just having a look. But I think we are, what the team have said is we are monitoring the progress of emerging local plans across the whole route. So we definitely are taking those things into account. If you sent it to me, one, I'm sure the team will have seen it, two, given that you've sent it to me I will make sure that the team look at that. And if there is anything in it that is new information then that would take us through those back check questions.

Mrs Quince: There is new information and that new information will give rise to you reconsidering the route and (inaudible). You're first public engagement forum should be with BFARe.

Mr Blanchflower: Ok.

Mr Fielder: Completely agree, as promised Simon.

[77:53]

Mr Blanchflower: So, are there any other points anyone would like to raise bearing in mind we've got 7 or 8 minutes?

An attendee: Yes

Mr Norris: Simon, can I say a few words. I've been advising Renhold Council throughout this process I've done a lot of research and I think I can put into context (inaudible). You may know that there is a freedom of information request still outstanding from East West Rail which was couched around the representativeness of the consultation back in 2019. If you look that up you will see there is clarification about the points of concern (inaudible) but basically (inaudible) preferred route at that stage you had 5 routes to choose from as part of the preparation, you did a trial alignment for each one to see if it was a feasible route through it which you then applied the costs to (inaudible) Now in order to work out who could be involved in the consultation you had to bound the whole of the pattern of all 5 routes and that came up with the shapefile which enabled you to go to the post office to get the addresses of who to send the post cards to. It took some time to get hold of a copy of the shapefile, but if you look at it, you'll see (inaudible) the boundary of the shapefile as it goes past the north coast of Bedford is very tight (inaudible) the shapefile boundary, normally a

couple of kilometres, so people would not necessarily loose their gardens, but would be aware that there was going to be a (inaudible).

[80:08]

Mr Norris: So, from the shapefile came the addresses to which you sent the postcards. We know that certainly over 100 houses were missed off in Renhold, we've learnt that Clapham was very poorly served and within the same operation you had to create your list of preferred, not preferred, consultees. For some reason we know that Wilden, Ravensden and Clapham did not appear on that list, because they didn't appear on that list they weren't written to about the earlier announcements to allow them to start preparing their parishioners and so it was left to the postcards effectively.

[81:11]

Mr Norris: The postcards were not addressed by name, to the occupier, it was a very non-descript postcard, not very much information. It advertised the first 2 public consultations, the first one was in St Neots and the second one was in the middle of Bedford. Neither of those addresses were full addresses. They didn't say where in St Neots or where, in a particular road, in Bedford. The rest of the eight venues were all properly addressed so the first two face-to-face consultations which were for this area we're talking about were poorly announced (inaudible) and not surprisingly we can't find very many people at all who actually attended those first two meetings.

[82:09]

Mr Norris: Furthermore, a predominant feedback (inaudible) the quality of maps produced were vague, people couldn't see where their village was. And in your documentation you say that after the first 2 you say that those maps were re-issued for the other six consultations. Your documentation, the feedback report, I read it again this afternoon, goes to great pains to say that it's not a statutory consultation, but you effectively make it as close to that as possible. How we choose our list of prescribed consultees accords with the (inaudible).

[83:20]

Mr Norris: For some reason, 3 key Parishes were missed off (inaudible) because the edge of the shapefile actually runs down the Midland Main Line so Biddenham, Bromham wasn't included and Queens Park ward wasn't included and we know that they are equally at risk of having some collateral damage depending on whether you go for six lines and which side of the Midland Main Line they're built. So, people are (inaudible) I got the first response (inaudible) all it did was trumpet (inaudible) with 6 days left of the consultation period. Far too late to interact with parish councils and for them to refer back to their communities (inaudible).

[84:30]

Mr Norris: The postcode exercise – there was a lot of which were delayed a long time whilst an operation was done to them effectively to cut out the last two characters of each postcode

(inaudible). The list of postcodes did in fact identify (inaudible) and Ravensden. And by adding up those you could get the answers, the numbers that Amanda (inaudible) It wasn't very much. A couple of hundred people from the whole of the area concerned, a couple of hundred people from the Parishes, something like 122 houses responded.

[85:33]

Mr Norris: (inaudible) tick box consultation (inaudible) and included their postcode. I can't think that the local community would commonly exclude their postcodes. So when you put the comparisons and the stories around it you can't really say that it was a majority that said 'this is the most environmentally least damaging route' bearing in mind the shapefile that was in use, it extended to the northeast of Cambridge for the northern option and obviously bulged down to cover routes at Bassingbourn. What's the ratio of (inaudible) and they all have votes A B C or D and (inaudible) so it really is a concern and I got a poor response back (inaudible) much further detail. It's now 25 working days since that went back in.

[87:02]

Mr Barlow: I guess one of the points Peter's making is that you've got a massive number of responses from east of the East Coast Main Line but not very many from west of East Coast Main Line. Your quantitative measure there is deciding what's happening (inaudible)

Mr Blanchflower: No, I didn't say that. The public consultation response was one factor that was considered as part of that so, just to be clear it is not a referendum, it's not a vote, it's just to get indications from members of the public in terms of preferences which is part of the public consultation.

Mr Barlow: You make a very big thing about that, you say 'this is what's in the public's eyes' you make it, you do promote that as being...

Mr Blanchflower: Because it is factual in terms of the responses that we got in that consultation.

An attendee: (inaudible)

Mr Barlow: Ok, but the impact was one of many factors that you can (inaudible)...

Mr Gallagher: The reality is the decision making approach that we take is the 15 assessment factors, I think we're very clear about that, we set that out consistently (inaudible)

[88:14]

Mr Barlow: But you can't tell us how they were scored? So just to summarise...

Mr Gallagher: I have told you how they were assessed, I have told you how they were assessed. You might not like my answer in that we take a qualitative approach...

Mr Barlow: That is subjective

Mr Gallagher: No, no, we take a qualitative approach that is then considered and assured and informs and advice to ministers because it's ultimately a ministerial decision.

Mr Barlow: But that didn't include comparative carbon contribution from the building of each of the 5 routes no?

Mr Gallagher: So, I think we've been over the ground (inaudible)

Mr Barlow: But you've still not said yes... (inaudible)

Mr Gallagher: What we said was embedded carbon would have been a consideration in the broader qualitative environmental assessment that we did at that point, which was appropriate for that stage of development.

Mr Barlow: But you couldn't show us the calculations?

Mr Gallagher: (inaudible)

[89:01]

Mr Barlow: So, how many of the other considerations are there where you can't show us the calculations out of the 15?

Mr Gallagher: So, look we have set out the logic in our preferred route option report, so we've given you...

Mr Barlow: That's the reason I'm asking you the question because the logic in your preferred route option report, look, I deal with public sector bodies all the time right? I have to go through scoring criteria down to the nth degree all the time. What I don't understand is why on something as strategically important where you're spending literally billions of tax payers' money, you're not going through a full quantitative, objective scoring mechanism. I just don't get it. Maybe it's my naivety, maybe these things work like magic, like that, I don't know, but certainly not in my field and there is one more point I'd like to bring up.

Mr Blanchflower: I am going to have to draw this meeting to a close because we've gone beyond the time that we set out.

[90:00]

Mr Barlow: Ok, just one more question? And it relates to the relationship with Bedford Borough Council and the large number of meetings you've had with Bedford Borough Council where there are no agendas, no minutes, no action emails, follow-up, that you'll share with us. And these include things like the discussions around 6 track option in July and August 2019, which weren't revealed to the residents of Bedford by the Borough councillors that were responsible for that, they weren't even revealed to the fellow borough councillors. And, you know, actually hiding that kind of information, again just goes to add to the distrust because you guys knew that the 6 track option was possible in July 2019, you announced your decision in January 2020. Those residents not knowing about that of course their right to judicial review expired in March 2020 so 3 months after your announcement in January. So, you know, I would expect because I would get fired if I went to meetings without agendas, without follow up actions at least and preferably minutes, I'd get fired. I don't understand why your organisation doesn't have those when they're meeting with a public body to discuss

decisions and implications that affect the public and you're spending public money to do it. It just seems unprofessional. I don't get it.

[91:34]

Mr Barlow: And then, you hide behind FOI and say that every time we ask a question it's gonna take too long to find those emails, we all know it doesn't. I mean I work in IT, it would take me about 20 minutes to find the right emails. You know, it's nuts. So it would be, this is what we mean about openness and transparency, because we also feel as Richard Fuller said in Parliament, people of Bedford feel duped by their own borough council or certain members of their own borough council because all this has been pre-ordained by them, they've taken what is, well what do I know about democracy, but it seems like they've taken a pretty loose mandate and made decisions in a dictatorial basis about what route they're gonna support and they've proactively worked with you guys in order to support that. And I know that's not your, you guys' fault but actually, those meetings...the content of those meetings should be available so that we can understand how they impact the constituents.

[91:42]

Mr Blanchflower: We've responded to the...

Mr Gallagher: We've responded to the FOI...

Mr Barlow: No you haven't...

Mr Gallagher: We have a series of...

Mr Barlow: You've told us when the meetings were and who was there. There's no detail, no agendas, no minutes, no actions (inaudible). If I ran meetings like that, like I say, I'd get fired.

[93:01]

Mrs Quince: I think this can be easily summarised as lies, damned lies and statistics and before you close the meeting we do want to go back to the very beginning to ask for your assurance once again, Simon, that you will meet with BFARe so that we can have our knowledgeable experts to answer all the questions that you may be able to dodge with the likes of Mike and myself who are just mere amateurs.

Mr Blanchflower: We've heard your request.

Mrs Quince: And what's your action?

Mr Gallagher: We've heard the request, we will take it away, but...

Mr Barlow: When will you respond?

Mr Gallagher: Our position has been that we engage with elective representatives but we've heard what you as elected representatives are asking us to do and that is something we will take away. In terms of a response, let me touch base with the team tomorrow and I will reply tomorrow letting you know when we will be able to come back to you.

Mr Barlow: okay.

[94:01]

Mr Blanchflower: So, I do need to draw the meeting to a close...

[Correction 25 November 2021] Mr Towler Mr Johnston: so can you make it quick, because you've effectively put planning blight on at least 80% of that group that have (inaudible) which is really impacting on residents. So...

Mr Blanchflower: We will get our consultation response report out as soon as we can, but together with details around a preferred route alignment, that is likely to be early in the new year.

[94:31]

Mr Blanchflower: So, thank you very much everybody for attending this evening. Thank you for those who have contributed, thank you for those who have attended and have listened in and as we've said the recording of the meeting will be made available.

Mr Barlow and Mr Beascoechea: [discussion regarding preparation of a transcript] (inaudible)

Mr Blanchflower: Ok, safe journeys home.

[ENDS]