

Huntingdonshire / South Cambridgeshire Group – Meeting notes

Meeting #6 – Details

Date: Thursday 26 October 2023

Time: 5:00pm

Type of meeting: Virtual

Documents discussed in this meeting

The following documents were discussed during the meeting and are available on the Group's dedicated Community Hub site – [here](#):

- Agenda
- Action Tracker
- Slides

Key discussion points and outcomes

1 Welcome, today's agenda, and housekeeping

- 1.1 Sarah Jacobs (SJ) welcomed the group, introduced herself in her capacity as and chair of the meeting, introduced the EWR Co team members and allowed the councillors to introduce themselves. She then ran through the housekeeping and agenda for the meeting.

2 General updates

- 2.1 SJ noted that there had been a total of 12 community events held across June and July. She added that these gatherings drew in over 2300 attendees, with the Cambourne and St Neots events alone hosting over 280 participants. In addition to these in-person events, SJ also mentioned the availability of 'Your Questions Answered' videos, further enhancing the engagement and interaction within the community. SJ stressed that these efforts underline the commitment to fostering a strong and connected community through various channels of communication and participation.
- 2.2 SJ noted that the Accessibility Advisory Panel (AAP) consists of 12 people all who have various lived experience of disability and the impact it had with rail travel. The panel are residents across the EWR route from Oxford to Cambridge and are actively engaged with groups and campaigns to support inclusion in their areas and the future of rail. SJ added

that the group have three meetings thus far and that the fourth meeting is coming up soon.

- 2.3 An attendee noted that there was a mistake in one of the videos on the website where the direction of travel from Cambridge was incorrect. SJ thanked them for the help and assured them it would be raised.

3 Actions from the previous meeting

- 3.1 No actions were recorded at the previous meeting.

4 Topic – Approach to how we engage with you and your communities

- 4.1 SJ summarised the timeline of EWR Co engagement activities, beginning with the community's involvement in two non-statutory consultations in 2019 and 2021. Continuing that, in the spring of 2022, the LRGs were initiated to further foster community engagement. Moving forward to the summer of 2023, a significant milestone was achieved with the Route Update Announcement (RUA). SJ reiterated that EWR Co had been working closely with LRGs to shape how they engage with communities following the RUA, representing a critical step in this journey.
- 4.2 SJ noted that this engagement process would continue as EWR progresses towards the anticipated statutory consultation in the first half of 2024. Beyond that, EWR Co's activities would proceed through the stages of DCO submission, DCO examination, and eventually into the construction phase, all underpinned by ongoing community engagement efforts as they move forward.
- 4.3 SJ added that EWR Co set up the LRGs with the view of shaping engagement through the feedback of members and their local knowledge.
- 4.4 An attendee asked how the consultation process will be affected by the upcoming general election and the associated local and national campaigns. SJ explained that if the next general election is announced before the statutory consultation begins then EWR Co will wait until after to start this. However, if consultation begins before the election is announced then it will continue throughout.

5 Learning about your communities

Who should we be engaging with in your communities?	Suggestion
Accessibility groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cycle/sports groups – these can help understand what pathways need to be upgraded to improve door-to-door connectivity.
Environmental groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established environmental groups.
Others groups or portions of community we may not be aware of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Horse riding groups. Parish Councils – the best way to reach and share information with communities. Sixth form colleges and schools – there is currently no public transport from the villages to schools in Cambridge which creates a lot of traffic.

5.1 An attendee explained that during the COVID-19 pandemic, local councils had to write to every business and community organisations in the area to offer grants from the government which means they have an extensive database which EWR Co could utilise to do comprehensive community engagement. The attendee continued by asking how engaged with local authorities EWR Co is, noting that that EWR Co keeps assuring them that engagement is taking place but contacts from Central Bedfordshire and South Cambridgeshire Councils say they have not heard anything about this. SJ said that there is engagement taking place but for her to know exactly how much she would have to cross reference with colleagues.

6 Communicating and engaging with you and your communities

Did you attend the community drop-in events held across summer? What worked well? What could we do better?

6.1 SJ explained that EWR Co recently held drop in events and would like to receive feedback on them from attendees. She asked if the attendees had gone to any of the drop-in events, what they thought had worked well and what could have been improved.

Questions / Prompts	Suggestion
Venues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local village schools. Village halls.
Use and layout of space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very well organised.
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of information about the route – The events were more for people who did not know much about the project, so it was not useful for the attendees who have followed to project. Staff were well briefed.

6.2 An attendee felt that when asking about specific topics such as electrification at the event, that staff were not prepared and could not answer. Robert Milner (RM) mentioned that there was information on traction strategy displayed at the event, but no final decision has been made. The decision for this is between the Department for Transport and EWR Co but the traction power strategy is being looked at along the whole route. The design for electrification is simpler from Bedford to Cambridge as this is a new section of railway but much of the infrastructure along the whole route is still being discussed.

6.3 An attendee asked how EWR Co was planning to get more people to engage with the events. There are people who believe that the because the railway will not run near their community, they will feel none of the effects and thus they are not engaging. The attendee stated that with EWR Co talking about a new town at Tempsford, the knock-on

effects will have significant impacts on all surrounding communities, and he considered that it is EWR Co's responsibility to ensure they understand how they will be impacted. SJ explained that EWR Co is aware that the parties most impacted will be the most interested, so EWR Co is doing as much as possible to engage with all communities in the area.

6.4 SJ asked the attendees if they had any ideas on how EWR Co could get those less impacted by the project to engage. An attendee stated that people only engage if there is something to fear so EWR Co needs to educate people on the impacts construction and operation will have on their communities. SJ explained that EWR Co will communicate as clearly as possible so that people do not fear the unknown and so that residents know what EWR Co is doing to mitigate impacts.

6.5 The attendee added that villages around EWR have limited road capacity and EWR Co needs to be forthcoming about how the lives of communities will be blighted over a ten-year period while 50 to 100 lorries travel through their village every day. Construction between Caldecote and Haslingfield uses the A603 which splits many villages and there will be many communities that will be severely negatively impacted. RM explained that EWR Co will look to use appropriate roads for construction meaning HGVs will not be using unsuitable roads through villages. RM added that the A603 road already carries a lot of traffic so it is not the same as saying there will be 100 HGVs rolling through small unused village roads every day. RM also added that roads used throughout construction will be mapped out in the DCO and EWR Co will be constrained to these roads once construction starts.

6.6 Ellen Conway (EC) added that the construction phase will have a Code of Construction Practice or similar document that will outline any impact on the environment and communities and everything that will be done to mitigate the impacts. The attendee stated that residents are aware of the construction traffic that came with HS2 so how is EWR Co able to assure that this will not happen on EWR as well. SJ explained that she cannot comment on HS2, but EWR is a public project so will be held accountable.

7 How can we work more closely with you as LRG members to help disseminate information across your communities?

How can we work more closely with you as LRG members to help disseminate information across your communities? How would you like information to be shared?

Questions / Prompts	Suggestions
<p>Do you receive the community newsletters?</p> <p><i>Do you think these work well? Any suggestions for how they could improved?</i></p> <p>Potential locations we could use for posters/publicity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly newspaper – useful and well-read for South Cambridgeshire news. • Paid advertising. • Parish magazines. • Roundabout magazine – covers Little Gransden, Great Gransden, Abbotsley and Waresley. • Gamlingay Gazette.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poster locations – Parish council noticeboards and outside schools.
Any other local communications channels or local circulations we should be aware of and utilise? <i>Local websites, threads or newsletters?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish email forum - Touchbase

- 7.1 One attendee noted that in some villages the local magazine is not always delivered unless the postman already has mail to deliver to that house, so it is not the most reliable way to disseminate information.
- 7.2 An attendee stated they live very near the proposed line and is very concerned because the East Coast Main Line already runs through the village. The attendee added that it was not sensible to be concreting over agricultural land when we need to reduce our reliance on food imports due to climate change and supply chain issues caused by the war in Ukraine. The attendee also asked where the new station in Tempsford would be and how 40,000 houses are going to be built when the area does not have the facilities to manage that. RM pointed the attendee toward the Route Update Report as this has a lot more detail but explained that the station will be north-east of Tempsford village at the point where the EWR route crosses over the ECML. He added that there are targets for housing development, and future developers will be accountable for providing the services needed to sustain the population growth that would come with this. SJ added that she would be happy to set up a meeting with the Business Case team for the attendee to discuss this further.
- 7.3 Another attendee noted that the Central Bedfordshire plan has no mention of the development in Tempsford while EWR Co keeps talking about it. The attendee also mentioned that the transport secretary has also said, in a letter to the attendee, that housing development resulting from EWR is already allocated in local plans and that this is a contradiction. RM responded by explaining that there is sometimes a catch-22 because development would require appropriate public transport such as EWR in order for a development to come forward.
- 7.4 The attendee also asked about Michael Gove's statement where he announced his ambition for 250,000 houses north-west of Cambridge which they believe would contradict EWR Co's decision to approach Cambridge from the south. SJ said she would take this away and see if EWR Co can address this.

Post Meeting Clarification:

Michael Gove's announcement does not fundamentally change the plans for EWR but as the DCO period approaches and there are more detailed plans, if any part of the plan is affected, it will be taken into account. Additional housing would compliment EWR in supporting the growth of Cambridge, and the wider region. The rationale for approaching from the south, to better support Cambridge's economic growth and to get people into Cambridge and the biomedical campus quicker, remains strong. Our Route Update Report set out this rationale – a factsheet can be found [here](#).

8 Question & answer with area manager

- 8.1 Attendees mentioned the National Audit Office investigation into EWR Co which they believe resulted from Richard Fuller MP's request for an investigation into issues surrounding several aspects of the EWR programme and its business case. They asked if this was linked to the HS2 decision; what EWR Co have done since this was announced; and if the public would be able to access these reports once they are delivered. SJ explained that the audit will be published once completed so everyone will be able to access it but that this is very new information for EWR Co as well so she is not yet aware of any details or likely changes.
- 8.2 Another attendee asked for clarity on whether EWR Co's main goal is to build a railway or to facilitate the building of new houses as this is how it comes across locally and that many of the decisions being made have housing developments in mind. RM stated that EWR will provide very useful rail links between key towns, cities and communities but it will also facilitate growth and development in the region and part of that is future housing development and EWR Co has been open about that aim.

9 Closing remarks, future meetings, and topics

- 9.1 SJ noted that EWR Co is open to suggestions for future meeting topics. She spoke about several previously suggested topics that could potentially be covered in the next meeting. She also said that the group could have a meeting on the business case if they felt it would be useful as several of the concerns raised in the meeting seemed to be related to that.
- 9.2 One attendee stated that they wanted to hear about all the topics while another explained EWR Co needs to address the hard-hitting topics head on such as electrification and why EWR cannot go to St Neots. SJ said that EWR Co will take that away as a point to talk about.
- 9.3 SJ wrapped up the meeting, thanked everyone for their time and contribution and ended the meeting.

Outcome: Future topics below.

- Business case assumptions on housing and development
- Connectivity to St Neots

Summary of actions

- **ACTION 1:** EWR Co – To arrange a meeting with Councillor Jill Peters.
- **ACTION 2:** EWR Co – To amend a mistake in the video on the website, where appropriate.

Attendees:

EW R Co attendees

- Sarah Jacobs, Local Representatives Groups Engagement Manager
- Robert Milner, Area Manager
- Ellen Conway, Engagement Manager
- EWR Co production and support team

Parish Council representatives

- Kirstin Rayner, Gamlingay Parish Council
- James Catmur, Great Gransden Parish Council
- Jill Peters, Great Paxton Parish Council
- Sylvia Sullivan, Little Gransden Parish Council
- Ian Weitzel, Offord Cluny and Offord D'Arcy Parish Council
- Eleanor Jack, Waresley-cum-Tetworth Parish Council
- Sharon Brown, Longstowe Parish Council

Local Authority Councillors

- Sebastian Kindersley, Gamlingay in Cambridgeshire County
- Richard West, Great Paxton in Huntingdonshire

Apologies

- Abbotsley Parish Council
- Croxton Parish Council
- Eltisley Parish Council
- Graveley Parish Council
- Toseland Parish Council
- Yelling Parish Council
- Ken Billington, Brampton & Buckden in Cambridgeshire County
- Tumi Hawkins, Caldecote in South Cambridgeshire
- Mark Howell Caldecote in South Cambridgeshire and Caxton and Papworth in South Cambridgeshire
- Peter David Sandford, Caxton and Papworth in South Cambridgeshire
- Bridget Smith, Gamlingay in South Cambridgeshire
- Sarah Joanne Conboy, Godmanchester and Hemingford Abbots in Huntingdonshire
- Debbie Mickelburgh, Godmanchester and Hemingford Abbots in Huntingdonshire
- Brett Alistair Mickelburgh, Godmanchester and Hemingford Abbots in Huntingdonshire
- Mandy Smith, Papworth & Swavesey in Cambridgeshire County
- Stephen Ferguson, St Neots & Gransden in Cambridgeshire County