

BASSINGBOURN-CUM-KNEESWORTH PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO EAST WEST RAIL ROUTE OPTIONS CONSULTATION

1. Introduction

Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth Parish Council is concerned by the extremely short time allowed for consultation and the lack of information provided by East West Rail to enable a comprehensive response. In particular wider economic benefits of the different route options are not quantified and the cheapest option does not necessarily deliver the most benefits.

Having considered the route options proposed by East West Rail as well as the alternative put forward by the CamBedRailRoad Group, the Parish Council makes a clear recommendation for a northern route through Cambourne.

The reasons for this recommendation are detailed below.

2. Southern Route Options A, C and D though Bassingbourn

2.1. Supporting Economic Growth

A southern route option would fail to support significant economic growth or housing development as it is away from the key growth corridor between Cambridge and St Neots.

2.2. Supporting Delivery of New Homes

The only significant housing opportunity mentioned is Bassingbourn Barracks, the availability of which is uncertain.

2.3. Cost and Overall Availability

Cost of development around Bassingbourn will be adversely and severely affected by costs of additional infrastructure, costs associated with Bassingbourn Barracks and costs of environmental mitigation measures.

The A1198, A505 roads and C271 Bassingbourn High Street are already highly congested and the need for new highway infrastructure needed to support development would significantly add to the project cost. Furthermore, if a route to the south of Bassingbourn Barracks is chosen, additional cost will be incurred with new road crossings needed in the Meldreth and Shepreth areas.

Development of Bassingbourn Barracks would incur cost of Explosive Ordnance Disposal and increased development costs associated with the Zone 3 flood areas which surround Bassingbourn Barracks. There has been significant recent investment in Bassingbourn Barracks which would need to be replicated if the facilities at the Barracks were to be moved elsewhere, as well as the cost of the new site itself.

2.4. Benefits for Transport Users

The sustainability of delivering a railway station in Bassingbourn that would be a short distance from existing stations at Royston and Meldreth is questioned. Royston station is just 2½ miles away and already provides an excellent link into Cambridge and Cambridge North. Employment opportunities are limited around Bassingbourn and housing development there would probably attract London commuters who would be more likely to use Royston station rather than a new station at Bassingbourn on an east-west route. Royston station is already at capacity in peak hours and unable to take additional London-bound commuters, as set out in detail by the Royston and Villages Rail User Group response to the EWR consultation.

2.5. Environmental impacts

The southern route options A, C and D would have clear impacts on nature reserves, including RPSB at Sandy, Eversden and Wimpole Woods. It would impact on important heritage sites including grade I 17th century Wimpole Hall and Avenue (UID 1000635) and the setting of grade I St Mary's Church Whaddon (UID 1164317). It could potentially affect the setting of scheduled ancient monuments John O'Gaunts House and Garden Bassingbourn (UID 1010865), Perceptory of Knights Hospitallers, Shingay (UID 1006852) and a moated site south of St Mary's Church Whaddon (UID 1006889). Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth is a parish with 72 listed buildings including its Grade I listed church. Mitigation measures will add significantly to the cost. It is not yet known whether East West Rail will comply with the 2018 WHO guidelines on environmental noise but compliance is likely to be more challenging in the flat terrain of the southern route options, especially since it is understood that the line is not to be electrified and that Diesel trains are likely to be used.

3. Northern Route Options B and E through Cambourne & CamBedRailRoad

3.1. Supporting Economic Growth

The northern route options through Cambourne facilitate further economic and employment growth in the Cambridge – St Neots corridor as well as in the northern corridor overall.

3.2. Supporting delivery of new homes

The northern route options not only support existing and committed housing in Cambourne, West Cambourne and Bourn Airfield but may also open up opportunities for housing development elsewhere in the Cambridge – St Neots corridor which will benefit from planned investment in the A428 upgrade, and provide better alignment with new housing proposed for Tempsford.

3.3. Cost and Overall Availability

The northern route options would avoid the increased infrastructure costs associated with the southern route options and would dovetail with Highways England's preferred route for the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvements and the obvious opportunity for shared costs. The northern route options also provide an opportunity for an overall cost saving by rationalising the potential duplication by the Cambridge Autonomous Metro.

3.4. Transport User Benefits

There is clear need for better public transport connections to support existing, committed and future housing and employment growth at Cambourne, West Cambourne and Bourn Airfield as well as elsewhere in the Cambridge – St Neots corridor.

3.5. Environmental impacts

The northern route options have significantly less impact on environment and heritage than the southern route options.

4. Conclusion

The considerations listed above lead Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth Parish Council to recommend a northern route through Cambourne, either EWR route options B or E or the CamBedRailRoad route option.

Parishioners have expressed strong support for the CamBedRailRoad option of entering Cambridge from the north and it is proposed that the case for this should be properly re-examined.