

Wansford Parish Council

Deadline 9 Submission

Comments on the Applicant's Response to the ExA's Recommended Amendments to the Draft Development Consent Order Document 9.37

A47 Wansford to Sutton Dualling

In response to the Examining Authority's recommendations that Wansford and Sutton Parish Councils should be included in consultations about further stages in the scheme, the Applicant wrote:-

"The Applicant resists consultation with the parish councils not only due to concerns about delay, as has been noted by the ExA, but also on the basis that parish councils often do not have the administrative resource and are therefore not equipped and do not have the required expertise to consider details to be approved. Also, where practicable, the relevant highway or planning authority may seek the views of parish councils. In no other circumstances, such as the grant of planning permission under the Town and Country Planning Act regime, are parish councils usually named on the face of planning certificates to approve details. Moreover, neither the M25/J8 DCO nor the M54/M6 DCO have reference to parish councils being consulted."

This response displays a complete disregard for the contribution that the two Parish Councils have made to the development of the scheme so far. The two Parishes have provided a level of continuity that Highways England/National Highways have been unable to manage (see reference to the alignment selection meeting in 2017).

National Highways have no knowledge of the administrative resources or the expertise available to the Parish Councils and yet they use this as the basis for resisting the Examining Authority's recommendation. Both Parish Councils have shown that they can draw on expertise that on occasion has been demonstrated to be better than that used by National Highways. The communities that the Parish Councils serve are full of very highly qualified people working for a number of major consulting engineers, contractors and public bodies. The Parish Councils regularly draw on this pool of expertise.

There is a distinct similarity between the National Highways approach to this as to that shown earlier when the Parishes were excluded from meetings with Peterborough City Council, the Environment Agency and Historic England on the basis that the meetings were for "professionals". In reality the team that the Parishes would have fielded had better professional qualifications than the Highways England team of that time. Had the Parishes been included in those meetings, many of the disagreements that are still going on could have been avoided.

Reference is made to the ability of the Highway Authority to consult the Parish Councils. In this case, Peterborough City Council is under considerable financial stress and they are therefore seeking to pass as much as possible out to the Parish Councils.

With regard to precedents for including the Parish Councils, it is Government Policy that all planning and development matters should be dealt with at the lowest level competent within the various tiers of government. Continuing to involve the Parish Councils is exactly in line with that policy and can be seen as an evolution of the earlier DCOs.

One reason for the Parish Councils wanting to remain involved is that National Highways' predecessors have a very unfortunate track record of going back on agreements made earlier when they got to the detailed design stage. In Wansford this resulted in a direct complaint to the Secretary of State and a considerable amount of rework to a scheme that was close to completion.

The two Parish Councils request that the Examining Authority continues with his wish to include the Parish Councils in the next stages of consultation.