



Report to:	Cabinet – Tuesday 14 January 2025
Lead Officer:	Stephen Kelly, Joint Director of Planning

East West Rail - Development Consent Order: Non-statutory Consultation Update and Draft Response to Consultation

Purpose of taking report to Cabinet

1. This report provides an update to members on the East West Rail (EWR) Development Consent Order (DCO) as well as setting out details in respect of the non-statutory consultation currently being undertaken by East West Rail Co., which commenced on 14 November 2024 and is due to end on 24 January 2025.
2. Recommendations outline key areas requiring further engagement and scheme development and seek to ensure the efficient and timely representation of the Council's current position in respect of the DCO procedures.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Cabinet notes the commencement of the non-statutory consultation for the EWR project, which began on 14 November 2024 and will continue until 24 January 2025.
4. It is recommended that Cabinet notes the content of this report and that a comprehensive schedule of feedback/responses (Appendix B) will comprise the consultation response from the Council, and delegate authority to the Director of Planning and Economic Development to submit the report on behalf of South Cambridgeshire District Council subject to any changes made by the Lead Cabinet Member and any minor amendments required in the interests of accuracy or clarity.

Reasons for recommendations

5. In the interests of efficient and timely conduct to ensure the Council's compliance with the DCO procedures.

Details

Background and proposal

6. The EWR project proposes to construct a new rail link between Oxford and Cambridge, which includes the construction of a new railway between Bedford and Cambridge and associated works to upgrade the existing railway between Oxford and Bedford.
7. The EWR project is being promoted and brought into use in three connection stages. The current non-statutory consultation relates to Connection Stage 3. This is the final stage of the EWR project and would enable passenger services to operate between Oxford and Cambridge via Bletchley and Bedford. To complete this work, as well as other upgrades between Oxford and Bedford, EWR Co. will need to apply for a DCO, which would grant consent to build the new railway between Bedford and Cambridge.
8. The EWR project is designated as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) due to its scale and importance. This designation is defined under Part 3 of the Planning Act 2008. Specifically, the project meets the criteria for an NSIP because it involves constructing a new railway line that: is wholly within England; forms part of a network operated by an approved operator; has a continuous route of more than two kilometers; and is not on operational land of a railway undertaker before construction begins.
9. Responsibility for accepting and determining the DCO application lies with the Secretary of State, not the local planning authorities. Local authorities, including those designated as statutory consultees or 'host' authorities, participate in the process as consultees.
10. There are several 'host' authorities involved in this NSIP project, including Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, and Huntingdonshire District Council. The Cambridgeshire based host authorities intend to collaborate closely throughout the DCO process to ensure thorough scrutiny of the project.

DCO timeline – pre-application stage

11. This application is currently in the pre-application stage of the DCO process, which involves early engagement and consultation with stakeholders to address concerns,

conduct necessary assessments, and prepare application documents for the acceptance stage. The content of the current non-statutory consultation includes preliminary design concepts and options, an Environmental Update Report, and a Transport Update Report among other consultation materials. It is expected that a statutory consultation will be carried out by EWR Co. towards the end of 2025 where more detailed information will be provided, including preferred proposals and preliminary designs, Preliminary Environmental Information Report, and a Draft Transport Assessment.

12. Previous engagement within the early pre-application stages is noted below:

- *First consultation phase – 2019*

EWR Co. consulted on five proposed route options for the new railway between Bedford and Cambridge. Feedback from communities and stakeholders resulted in the confirmation of a preferred option - 'Route Option E'. This route option linked existing stations in Bedford and Cambridge with communities in Cambourne and the area north of Sandy, south of St. Neots, received the most support from respondents.

South Cambridge District Council responded to EWR Co. in March 2019

Cabinet details: [Issue details - East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation response](#)

- *Second non-statutory consultation – 2021*

Nine alignment options were consulted on for the proposed new railway between Bedford and Cambridge and on other aspects of the wider project between Oxford and Cambridge. The alignments presented were within the area identified for Preferred Route Option E (the route announced by the Secretary of State in 2020), as well as possible route alignments partially outside that area, recognising the potential to serve a station north of Cambourne and/or to follow the route of National Highways' A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvement scheme.

South Cambridge District Council responded to EWR Co. in June 2021

Cabinet details: [Issue details - East West Rail Bedford to Cambridge route alignments and station locations consultation response](#)

- *Preferred route option – 2023*

Preferred proposals for the project were announced in May 2023, which confirmed the preferred alignment for the new railway between Bedford and Cambridge. EWR Co. concluded that the best option would be to follow the route known as 'Alignment 1' for most of the route, but with an emerging preference for a local variation to provide a new station at Tempsford. EWR Co. also confirmed their preferences for other elements of the project and explained where further work was necessary before the preferred options could be confirmed.

- *Third non-statutory consultation – 2024/25*

The non-statutory consultation currently underway, commenced on 14 November 2024, and is running for a six-week period, closing on the 24 January 2025.

Current stage: non-statutory consultation

13. The applicant has published the consultation material on their webpage¹. The information provided includes the following:

- Consultation Document
- Environmental Update Report
- Technical Report
- Transport Update Report
- Guide to Consultation
- Consultation Feedback Form
- Consultation Boards
- Fact sheet – Cost
- Fact sheet – DCO Process
- Fact sheet – Assessment Factors
- Fact sheet – Embankments and Viaducts
- Fact sheet – Freight
- Fact sheet – Our Approach to Powering EWR Trains
- Fact sheet – Our Approach to Land and Landowners
- Fact sheet – Door to Door Connectivity (D2DC)
- Fact sheet – EqIA
- Fact sheet – Our Approach to Accessibility and Inclusion
- Fact sheet – Our Approach to Construction Management
- Fact sheet – Our Approach to Habitat Regulations Assessment
- Fact sheet – Approach to the Environment
- Fact sheet – Our Approach to Nature
- Fact sheet – Our Approach to Noise and Vibration Management
- Factsheet - Our Approach to Historic Environment
- Guide to Serving a Blight Notice and Selling your Blighted Property
- Need to Sell Property Scheme - Guide and Application Form
- Fact sheet – The DCO Process and what it means for Landowners
- Guidance for Local Planning Authorities and Developers on the Safeguarding Direction
- Blight Notice Information Questionnaire
- Fact Sheet – The Blight Notice Process
- Fact Sheet – How you Sell your Property
- Factsheet – How you can apply to the NTS Property Scheme
- Factsheet – How we make an offer to buy

¹ [East West Rail | Consultation 2024](#)

Proposal

14. Connection Stage 3 is split into a number of route sections. Those relating to South Cambridgeshire are noted below, with proposed works summarised.

Route Section 6: Croxton to Toft

15. This section of the route begins at the roundabout east of St Neots, running north of Cambourne and the new dual carriageway to be known as the A421 and A428, before crossing the A428 and ending at the B1046 between Toft and Comberton. It is approximately 19km (12 miles) long.

In this route section, the proposed design includes the following:

- Construction of new twin-track railway covering approximately 19km (12 miles) and associated infrastructure.
- Construction of a new station at Cambourne.
- Construction of new passing loops between Brockley Road and the new Cambourne station.
- Construction of a new cut and cover tunnel beneath the existing A428, the proposed Bourn Airfield development and Highfields Road, with associated tunnel service buildings and an emergency excavation shaft.
- Temporary diversion of the existing A428 linked to the construction of the cut and cover tunnel, and temporary or permanent diversion of other highways and public rights of way (PRoWs).
- Construction of new overbridges and underbridges for road, track and path crossings, bridges and culverts for watercourses and associated diversions where necessary.
- Provision of various drainage and water storage ponds (referred to as balancing ponds).
- Utility diversions including overhead electricity power lines.

Route Section 7: Comberton to Shelford

16. EWR Co's route update announcement in 2023 set out their preference for Alignment 1 (Temsford variant) to serve Cambridge via a southern approach. This would include building an offline grade-separated junction in the Hauxton area to connect the new East West Rail (EWR) railway to the Shepreth Branch Royston Line (SBR) which is used by trains between Cambridge and London King's Cross. The SBR would then join the West Anglia Main Line (WAML) before passing through the proposed Cambridge South station. This route section would partly involve using existing railway

as well as the construction of new railway tracks and supporting infrastructure. New railway lines would be constructed between Comberton and Harston, a section of approximately 10.7km (6.7 miles). EWR would then use an existing section of railway from the proposed grade separated junction near Harston (referred to as Hauxton Junction), where it would join the existing SBR. North of Great Shelford, the existing SBR that connects to the WAML would be reconfigured. Two new tracks would be installed alongside the existing two track WAML corridor. This is a section of existing railway (SBR and WAML) of approximately 3.6km (2.2 miles).

17. This route section would cover approximately 14.3km (8.9 miles) in total. The works would include:

- Construction of two new railway tracks between Comberton and Harston, where they would join the existing SBR.
- Construction of a tunnel through Chapel Hill, south of Haslingfield.
- Construction of watercourse culverts, as well as two bridges over Bourn Brook south of Comberton and the Rhee/Cam west of Harston.
- Realignment of the A10 onto a bridge over the new railway.
- Construction of a grade-separated junction (referred to as Hauxton Junction) and realignment of the SBR south of Harston.
- Construction of passing loops at Hauxton Junction to allow faster passenger trains to overtake slower trains.
- Closure of level crossings in the Harston and Hauxton area.
- Modifications to Shepreth Junction and construction of two new tracks alongside the existing two-track WAML on the western side from Shepreth Junction, joining the existing four tracks at the new Cambridge South station, being built by Network Rail.
- Construction of new overbridges and underbridges for road, track and path crossings, as well as diversions and realignments.
- Construction of embankments and cuttings.
- Construction of balancing and water storage ponds along the route section.

18. Other route-wide matters directly relating to South Cambridgeshire include:

- *Proposal for powering the trains:* EWR Co's preference is discontinuous overhead electrification.
- *Rolling stock requirements:* Performance, train length, accessibility etc.
- *Approach to freight:* Proposals allow for capability of maintaining the current capacity for rail freight and make appropriate provision for anticipated future growth.
- *Train maintenance depot:* Potential location at the proposed Cambourne station.
- *Train stabling sidings:* Potential location at Foxton/Shepreth.
- *Accessibility impacts:* Impacts on Public Rights of Way (PRoW), highways and other access roads

19. Officers have sought to review the available consultation material as published on the EWR website: [East West Rail | Consultation 2024](#). Comments have been collated from technical officers to form the Council's formal response - see Appendix B.

20. Feedback has also been sought and received from members and parish council representatives. Two briefings were held by the Council at the beginning of the non-statutory consultation period to ensure key issues and wider comments were incorporated within the response – details of briefings noted below.

- Member Briefing re. EWR Non-Statutory Consultation – 19 November 2024 (17:30 – 19:00)
- Parish Council Briefing re. EWR Non-Statutory Consultation – 21 November 2024 (17:30 – 19:00)

Headline issues

21. The Council is commenting on headline issues of concern at this stage – there is still a considerable amount of technical information that will be required to allow the Council to produce the “Local Impact Report” required by the Inspectorate from the Council in due course. However, the limited technical details provided within the consultation material, does limit the ability of officers across the Council to provide detailed and definitive feedback at this stage.

22. Additionally, it is also noted that officers consider there to have been a lack of meaningful engagement with EWR Co. to date, particularly limited information sharing by EWR Co. ahead of the commencement of the non-statutory consultation.

23. Officer reviews of the consultation material to date has nevertheless highlighted the following key issues/comments that officers expect to address through further dialogue with the EWR Co. (see Appendix B for a full table of comments - Council response contained in Table 1, and parish council responses received summarised in Table 2):

- General
 - Concern by parish councils that the Council's position might not reflect or appropriately consider resident concerns
 - Business case and alternative routes (e.g., northern approach) questioned and further clarification sought by parish councils
 - Discontinuous electrification practicalities questioned particular with the pollution and noise impacts associated with freight
 - Cannot separate EWR from the Cambridge Growth Agenda
 - Impact on villages and countryside with minimal benefit to those living within the affected areas

- Accessibility and connectivity
 - Impact on footpath from Eversden to Comberton College impacted by railway line – further consideration needed to cycle and walking access for pupils (and horse riders) especially during construction phase
 - Concerns around connection to local schools and impact during construction especially
 - Concern of severance of services between villages (e.g., Eversdens doctors surgery linked with Comberton surgery)
 - Wide concern about the loss of connectivity between villages and subsequent isolation
 - Concern around cycle links and quality of cycle provision on existing links reflected in new structures (e.g., bridges to be accessible to cyclists)
 - Preference by local Parish Council for Option 1 for the links to and from Newton
 - Continued dependency on cars is likely
 - Concern around impact on bus services especially during construction
 - Question relating to how the EWR project is considering the impact upon GCP Greenways
 - Suggestion that a Non-Motorised User (NMU) path could run alongside the railway to provide fast access to the city centre
 - Proposed footpath bridges to cater for bicycles

- Consultation (events and materials)
 - Lack of available information relating to impact on individual properties

- Lack of information shared by EWR Co. with the Council prior to commencement of consultation period – this includes limited data and information within the consultation material to provide substantive technical responses
 - Limitation of consultation timeframes that extent over the Christmas period
 - Feedback from communities that EWR Co. are not meaningfully engaging with them – with long waiting times for responses to queries
 - The consultation feedback form boxes relating to the Cambridgeshire sections offer minimal space for handwritten comments
 - Positive feedback that members of the Local Representatives' Group can attend the consultation events early; however, more in-person events are needed to provide for better engagement – a few events resulted in queues out of the door due to limited capacity and high attendance
 - Concern raised that consultation events close to consultation end date (e.g. Comberton, Cambridge and Cherry Hinton) offers limited time for information to be understood and detailed responses provided
 - Libraries serving as information points have limited opening hours – suggestion that libraries with longer opening hours are also used
- Construction impacts
 - Concern about the construction phase, size and location of construction zones (especially those on, adjacent and near to homes), road closures, road congestion, air quality, noise, visual appearance and likely long duration of such disruption
 - Concerns about the impact of the development on schools – especially in terms of noise and general disruption (e.g., during school hours, examinations etc.)
 - Concern regarding further impacts to the condition of roads from construction traffic (e.g., requirement of road repairs, and mud on the road)
 - Concerns over impacts from working sites and the construction duration
 - Concerns around construction traffic routes, road closures and traffic management: concerns regarding HGV movements along inappropriate road and with inappropriate driver behaviour, as well as diversion routes and closed bridges
 - Need to maintain access along all affected roads (including bus services) and all footpaths to be maintained
 - Suggestion of a “Construction ombudsman” or SCDC representative who can communicate with EWR about issues and concerns raised by residents during the construction phase (estimated to be between 7 and 10 years) so that locals have a voice and to ensure EWR Co. listen

- Cut and cover tunnel
 - Concerns surrounding construction impacts of the cut and cover tunnel
 - The cut and fill tunnel under the A428, Bourne Airfield, and Highfields has the potential for a highly significant (temporary) negative impact to commuting and foraging barbastelle bats - preference for a bored construction methodology
 - Concern at the deep cutting proposed at Chapel Hill (up to 33m) – suggested that the tunnel should be extended to reduce the depth of the cuttings

- Route alignment
 - Concern relating to the proximity of the line to houses in (Comberton)
 - Suggestion that the railway is realigned, and embankment placed further away from residential properties in Harlton
 - Suggestion that the alignment could be moved away from Harston around 300-400m towards Foxton (this may mean a need to move less soil)
 - Suggestion that the railway “dives under” rather than over the existing Royston line
 - Proximity of holding loop around Harston – too close to residential properties and other village facilities resulting in adverse environmental health impacts
 - Suggestion to do a full scale engineering evaluation of the potential to move the proposed line around 400m -500m further to the West, towards Foxton, so that it runs close to Hoffers Brook, and to position the very substantial crossing of the two railway lines (EWR and Kings Cross mainline) a similar distance to the West, so that the crossing falls approximately half way between Harston and Foxton in open country, where it will have much reduced impact

- Impact to property
 - Impact of development on loss of farmland/viable agricultural land especially during and post-construction
 - Concern regarding height of new railway line and subsequent visual impacts

- Landscape and visual amenity
 - The embankment that the railway passes along is still considered high in places and has not been reduced in latest designs
 - Preference for A603 to run under not over EWR line due to visual impacts
 - Bourn Brook crossing and “excessive” elevation of the viaduct.
 - Concerns around impacts upon local landscape character.

- Transport and highway safety
 - Concern around vertical deviation and forward visibility sightlines for traffic leaving Washpit Lane and Royston Lane
 - Impact of road closures on Comberton due to limited access options to the village
 - Concern about impact of road closures: increased congestion on minor rural roads further exacerbated post construction road closures
 - Importance of maintaining road connections between villages both during and post construction
 - Concerns about new “rat runs” to Hauxton travel hub on A10
 - The need to widen roads to accommodate construction traffic
 - Highway safety concerns regarding the road south of Comberton
 - Traffic and impact of closures to Chapel Hill for an extended period
 - Concerns that Cambourne will see an increase in on-street parking associated with the use of the new station
 - Concern regarding impact on bus routes – during and post construction

24. In parallel, the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service is commencing work on a study of potential growth options on the land to the north of the A428 in the area surrounding the proposed new Cambourne Station. This includes considering growth options to underpin the joint local plan site allocation, and the exploration with EWR Co. of a Local Opportunity Plan – which would be used by EWR Co. to help contextualise the benefits/impact of Cambourne Station and EWR on the local area.

25. Officer reviews of the consultation material to date have highlighted the following key issues that officers expect to address through further dialogue with the EWR Co.

- Access and connections to the new Cambourne Station for the significant number of travellers in existing Communities to the south of the A428.
- The impacts of the design of the A428 Cut and Cover Tunnel on wildlife and the implementation of the Bourn Airfield project.
- The vertical alignment of the railway and resulting embankment heights and cutting depths – and potential for greater tunnel lengths to mitigate.
- The design and impact of key structures on landscape, wildlife and visual amenity.
- The very significant disruption likely to be caused to the villages and community facilities including schools adjacent to but also more remotely from the railway alignment caused by the construction phase of the project – reflecting lessons from HS2.

- The detailed implications from temporary and permanent road and path closures, new structures and the interaction (via bridges, underpasses etc) of the new railway with those local routes.
26. As identified in previous consultation responses, significant further work is still needed to understand the localised impacts of the scheme, the options for mitigation, their effectiveness and implementation including the sequencing with wider strategic infrastructure and development. The Council has not been able to assess issues in any detail, given the high-level nature of the consultation material, and as such is unable to support any of the options unequivocally at this stage. Thorough and detailed evidence will be expected to demonstrate how issues have been explored and addressed, and why the chosen route is the appropriate one.
27. EWR and the development of the corridor more generally will bring significant change to existing communities. The Council will urge EWR Co. to engage effectively with local communities to thoroughly test the options, to understand and explore their detailed concerns, to fully consider the issues being raised and provide further information to ensure a transparent process, as it progresses the project. The Council will also refer EWR Co. to the GCSP Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (adopted March 2024).
28. The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service led by the NSIP & Major Infrastructure Team is seeking to confirm a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with EWR Co. that will enable an intensification of engagement required not just with the district councils but associated with interests managed by other partners (notably highways and transport planning by the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire County Council) in the months ahead of the proposed formal consultation next year. The service will keep members informed of the how this application progresses, and further updates will be given in due course.

Appendices

Appendix A: Route Section Plans

- Route Section 6 - Croxton to Toft
- Route Section 7 - Comberton to Shelford
- Route Section 8 - Cambridge

Appendix B: Table of comments (SCDC)

Report author:

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