

S62A/2022/0007 – Notes for Hearing 10 May 23

Objections on behalf of Elsenham Parish Council – Transport Issues

Sir, for your reference, the full details of the Parish Councils transport objections are set out in our original 'Transport Objections' report dated September 2022 and in our subsequent 'Response to Applicants Transport Addendum' report, dated March 2023. These identify two key areas of concern relating firstly to cumulative traffic impacts and secondly to transport sustainability.

The first area of concern is the cumulative impact of incremental traffic growth on the surrounding road network. Traffic conditions in Stansted Mountfitchet are already unacceptable and will further worsen with committed development. The piecemeal approach to planning in this area, with successive individual applications and appeals, has resulted in an incremental growth in traffic to the point where the cumulative impacts can no longer be satisfactorily accommodated. A further 130 houses on this site would result in severe residual cumulative impacts.

The planning application is supported by a large quantity of VISSIM modelling data that needs to be digested and understood. The original modelling results have now been superseded by an updated version of the model; the details of which are as set out in the applicants' latest Transport Addendum Report (TAR). However, the revised information does not diminish our concerns, for reasons I will set out shortly.

But, at the outset, I wish to point out that reliance on such models can be problematic due to their inability to properly reflect the full range of traffic conditions and the unique complexities of the highway network in Stansted Mountfitchet. In this case (and in other recent planning applications), the modellers have had to make simplifying assumptions to enable the models to operate; such as ignoring the grid-lock situations that take place, both in the model (Ref: para 3.2.2 TA Appendix H) and in real life. In doing so, the VISSIM models can only replicate best case, steady state scenarios where grid-lock never happens and where traffic continues to flow, albeit with significant queuing.

Notwithstanding this limitation, the results from the model still reveal a very bleak picture of future traffic conditions, once all the committed development has been built out. Full details of the future impacts are set out in section 2 of our response to the Transport Addendum Report; but in summary, based on the latest modelling, a five to ten-fold increase in queuing (relative to baseline conditions) is predicted at Grove Hill in the AM and PM peak hours respectively. The results for Silver Street are even worse where an eight to sixteen-fold increase is forecast, resulting in queues in excess of 1km long in the PM peak.

These results confirm that the cumulative impacts of development will be severe.

The applicant argues that the modelling results present a highly robust, worst-case picture but the various claims to support that argument do not pass scrutiny. Those points are examined more fully in section 2 of our response to the Transport Addendum.

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When considering modelling results, it should also be noted that no highway mitigation measures have been offered, other than the recent suggestion for 'Yellow Box' road markings. In practice there is no scope for any works that would make any material difference. Previous developers are obligated to install extra queue detection equipment at the top of Grove Hill. This relatively minor upgrade to the traffic signals is already built-in to the Applicants' modelling results, meaning that no further scope exists for additional capacity improvements.

The Highway Authority has raised similar concerns and reached the same conclusions regarding highway impacts from this development. These are set out in Essex County Councils latest consultation response dated 17 March 2023. The response provides a detailed appraisal of the modelling results with the conclusion (at para 21) that "***the highway authority considers the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe and therefore unacceptable***". The consultation response also points out that the severe delays within Stansted Mountfitchet will adversely affect the bus service to and from Elsenham, making this option less attractive.

Our second key area of concern is that Elsenham has only a limited range of facilities and services, meaning that for most day-to-day needs, residents are required to travel to surrounding towns, for which public transport options are limited. This is confirmed by the Census data which shows that 75% of journeys to work made by Elsenham residents involve the use of a private car. Rail accounts for 16% and bus 1%, again confirming that residents are highly reliant on car journeys. Even if the frequency of the No7 bus service is improved, as proposed, its long journey times and limited destination options will remain and there is no evidence that this will materially increase bus mode share or reduce reliance on car journeys to any significant extent.

The Applicant has prepared Framework Travel Plan, which seeks to encourage sustainable travel choices. However, the Plan contains no targets, only a commitment to consider providing these once baseline travel surveys are carried out at 75% occupation of the development; by which time travel patterns will have already become established, making change difficult to achieve. Based on this, there is no evidence to suggest that the Travel Plan can deliver any material modal shift or reduce the heavy reliance on private car trips.

Even if a small modal shift could be delivered, it would be unlikely to materially reduce overall traffic generation or be sufficient to off-set the adverse cumulative traffic impacts I have identified.

For all of the above reasons, the planning application should be refused.

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