

Policy and Programmes

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Vale of White Horse District Council Response to Non-Statutory Public Consultation on East West Rail - closing date 9 June 2026

Thank you for consulting Vale of White Horse District Council (VWHDC) on the East West Rail (EWR) Non-Statutory Consultation. The Council acknowledges that the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 removed the requirement on NSIP developers to undertake a statutory consultation (although notes that the secondary legislation to bring this into force has not yet been enacted).

In the absence of a statutory consultation the Council would like to engage with EWR going forwards as VWHDC has not been involved until this point. This response will only cover material EWR has provided as part of the 2026 public consultation.

The Council is disappointed that it has not been involved in discussions regarding the new Kennington loop prior to the final consultation ahead of the submission of the Development Consent Order in mid-2027. This extension of the EWR Draft Order Limits into VWHDC was only brought to our attention by colleagues at Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), which points to a failure of EWR to adequately consult host authorities.

Despite this, VWHDC's overall position is of general support for East West Rail. VWHDC understands and supports the economic benefits that this key rail link between Oxford and Cambridge will likely bring. This additional route for train travel, both for passengers and freight, would help promote sustainable economic growth. EWR should consider services continuing from Oxford to Didcot Parkway and then onto the Great Western Main Line towards Bristol and the South West. Services continuing to Didcot would also allow for faster and more sustainable transport links to Harwell Campus, Culham Campus, Milton Park, and the rest of the science vale. These are major science and innovation centres in Southern Oxfordshire, and their accessibility from the railway would support the overall EWR strategy of connecting two major knowledge economy

hubs. VWHDC supports Oxfordshire County Council's position on this as set out in OCC's Rail Strategy.

The key features of the proposals within VWHDC include:

- A new northbound passing loop near Kennington, to allow faster northbound freight trains south of Oxford to wait for an available train path through Oxford station to then use EWR towards Bletchley

We are concerned by the lack of detailed information in the consultation documents regarding the proposals at Kennington. The consultation documents include maps and plans for the whole route, including this section, although these do not show the detail of what is being proposed. The other documents published set out very generalised approaches to various topic areas, with little or no detail regarding local issues.

Following a meeting with your team on 30th April 2026, the detail as to what is being proposed can be summarised as the creation of a new "down loop" by extending an existing line onto an old track bed. This would be approximately 600m of track and would provide a place for northbound freight trains to stop to allow passenger trains to pass through to Oxford. Currently there is no confirmation of how often this section of track would be used, or how long freight trains would stop for.

Given the lack of site-specific information provided, beyond generalised statements, it is difficult to provide constructive comments. However, the Council's concerns are set out below.

Traffic and Transport

Generally, VWHDC supports OCC's position as the Highways Authority for this area and expects robust assessment of the transport impacts of EWR. It is disappointing that VWHDC have not been involved in discussions regarding the transport impacts of the proposals thus far. The information published is useful as a strategic summary only. It does not yet contain sufficient detail to allow a full understanding of the likely impacts on the local highway network, either during construction or once the scheme is operational.

Further detail will also be needed in relation to construction activity and construction traffic, including HGV numbers, vehicle types, abnormal loads, route suitability, access arrangements, temporary traffic management, and the controls that would be put in place to monitor and manage impacts on the local road network.

There are multiple pedestrian bridges which cross the railway in this area. It should be ensured that these routes are retained during construction and operation. If they are impacted by the proposals, alternative routes should be provided, and the original routes

should be re-instated once works are complete. There is no information within the documents as to whether the pedestrian routes would be affected.

Construction Management

The proposals would require the construction of a new 600m section of track in close proximity to residents in Kennington to the west. It is unclear from the information provided how the site would be accessed by construction traffic, and no detailed information has been provided at this stage. Prior to the DCO submission, the Council strongly encourages EWR to work with VWHDC to identify the potential construction impacts and ensure that appropriate construction management safeguards are put in place to form part of the DCO.

In general, the delivery of materials should be achieved via rail given the proximity of the site to the existing tracks, and road usage should be kept to a minimum. Furthermore, an appropriate location for a site compound would be required to ensure minimal impact on nearby residents and other sensitive receptors.

Noise, Vibration, Lighting and Air Quality

The proposals would result in an increase in freight and passenger traffic on this section of the line. In particular, the new loop would allow for freight trains to stop and wait for passenger trains to pass through. Given the new loop would be on the western side of the tracks, it would be closer to the existing residential properties on Kennington Road, which back directly onto the railway line. Some properties are as close as 30m to the existing tracks, which would be reduced by the introduction of an additional track. The magnitude of impacts on receptors (i.e. the residential properties on Kennington Road) at this location is likely to be greater than in other areas along the railway, as the adverse effects come from stationary / idling locomotives.

The proximity of the proposed passing loop to houses is extremely concerning, and the proposals are very likely to result in a significant increase in noise, disturbance and an increase in light pollution to those properties on Kennington Road, as well as an impact on air quality. Freight trains are generally diesel locomotives and therefore are noisier and cause more air pollution than the proposed electrified passenger trains. Clarification on the type and number of trains using the passing loop is required, as well as the hours of operation and how long trains would be idling and should feed into the noise assessment. No detail has been provided relating to the number of trains which would use the proposed loop, when this would occur or the length of time they would idle 30m away from the rear elevation of these properties, and within several metres of the end of the gardens of these houses. It is therefore likely that without significant mitigation, an unacceptable level of harm would be caused to the resident's living conditions through the increased noise and disturbance, light pollution as well as the impacts on air quality.

VWHDC strongly recommends that the noise, vibration and air quality impacts of the proposals are fully assessed prior to the DCO submission – particularly for the Kennington Loop. This information should be published in advance of the DCO submission so officers can assess the impacts of the proposals and work with EWR on an appropriate mitigation strategy. EWR should strongly consider whether the position of the proposed passing loop on the western side of the tracks is appropriate given its proximity to neighbouring residents.

Landscape and Visual Amenity

The site is within the Oxford Green Belt, and so consideration should be given to the relevant policies in the Local Plan, as well as the NPPF. Robust justification for development within the Green Belt is required, and the openness of the Green Belt should be protected. It is unclear as to whether any structures beyond the track would be required, but EWR should ensure that these are kept to a minimum and where required appropriately justified.

In terms of wider visual impact, the proposals are within Area 14c (River Valley) of the Landscape Character Assessment 2024. Relevant issues identified in this document include:

- *Tree cover provides some screening, but tranquillity and rurality are significantly impacted by major road and rail infrastructure, electricity pylon routes and proximity to urban areas. The A34, A4074, A423 and the railway line all border the urban edges, and both the A423 and the railway line cross it, through the narrow gap between Kennington and the edge of Oxford at New Hinksey. These routes are generally well-screened from view but are an aural detractor.*
- *Good recreational access including the Thames Path National Trail, Shakespeare's Way, National Cycling Route 5 and recreation on and in the Thames itself; the A34 and the railway partially sever east-west movement across the landscape.*
- *The wooded ridge west of Kennington provides a distinctive backdrop to many views. Layers of vegetation provide some screening, including to the settlement edges of Kennington and Botley, as well as the A34 and railway line.*

Given this, the proposals should ensure that effective screening of the railway is maintained and reinforced where necessary. Appropriate tree and vegetation protection measures should be in place during construction and additional planting provided where appropriate to screen the additional track section. The impacts of additional noise and light on the enjoyment of the landscape should also be considered, with appropriate mitigation measures put in place. Access across the railway, particularly for active travel options, is very important and should link directly with existing routes.

Biodiversity and Ecology

The site is surrounded by important biodiversity sites. To the east is the Iffley Meadow Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), to the west is the Kennington Pool Local Wildlife Site and the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) has identified areas on both sides of the tracks as Priority Habitats. Furthermore, numerous protected species have been identified nearby, including a several species of bats, swifts, fritillary butterflies and a variety of flora.

These areas and species are highly sensitive to change, and the proposals would introduce a significant increase in noise, air pollution and light pollution. It is critical that EWR undertakes a full assessment of the impacts on these receptors and provides sufficient protection to prevent harm. Where necessary and appropriate, EWR should also provide mitigation measures to offset the likely harm which would arise as a result of these proposals.

No details have been published as part of the consultation documents regarding ecological surveys or mitigation strategies. All surveys should be carried out with sufficient time to allow their findings to be written up and submitted as part of the DCO submission. If this is not the case, then the Council will not be able to agree to the significance of any impacts to environmental assets as it will not be possible to agree the evidence base. VWHDC strongly encourages EWR to undertake these surveys as soon as possible so that the impacts of the proposals can be fully understood prior to the submission of the DCO. The findings should be published and discussed with officers at the earliest opportunity. The general approach set out in the published documents is supported but lacks any site-specific detail. Officers are keen to be involved in meetings going forwards to ensure the proposals avoid impacts on biodiversity.

Flood Risk

The area is covered by Flood Zone 3, which is the highest level of flooding likelihood. The council will require robust evidence that the sequential and exceptional tests have been applied and will require robust evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of any proposed floodplain compensation schemes.

In order to demonstrate that the proposed development will not result in surface water being displaced outside of the site boundaries EWR must produce a Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy as part of their submission documents. These documents need to be informed by ground investigation to demonstrate that attenuation rates within the site area will support SuDS features and not result in increased offsite run off. The drainage strategy should be discussed with the LLFA and Local Planning Authority in advance of submission once the design is at a suitable level of detail.

Climate and Sustainability

The Council welcomes the inclusion of themes on environment, carbon and climate resilience in the design principles. However, a detailed definition of these principles is not provided in the consultation documents, and it is therefore unclear what their scope is, how they interact and overlap with each other.

There is no quantification of carbon performance expectations, nor an explanation of how any targets will be developed or what benchmarks will be used when developing the designs. There is very little reference to carbon, climate resilience or sustainability in the published documents.

The consultation material does not provide sufficient detail for the council to interrogate the way in which EWR has assessed and mitigated potential environmental impacts with regards carbon and climate resilience.

Land Contamination

The site is within an area identified as contaminated from previous land use. EWR should undertake the appropriate investigations and subsequent mitigation measures as required. Officers are available to discuss details where appropriate.

Conclusion

Overall the Council supports the aims of the EWR scheme but is concerned regarding the detail and potential impact of the proposals. In particular, the Council supports OCC's rail strategy and encourages EWR to consider electrification between Oxford and Didcot.

Given the section of the scheme within VWHDC seems to be a recent inclusion in the wider EWR scheme, it is critical that the relevant surveys and mitigation strategies are developed in partnership with VWHDC. Although this section of the scheme is small in comparison to the entire proposal, it has the potential to significantly impact residents' amenity as well as sensitive biodiversity sites.

VWHDC is keen to be involved more fully in the process going forwards and would welcome a more collaborative approach in the lead up to the submission of the DCO.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Oruye

Director of Policy and Programmes

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils