

WCC PAPER No. 4

Winchester City Councils Comments on Examining Authorities Position to Further Site Inspections

Winchester City Council has noted the comments made in the new Timetable letter dated 11 January 2021 relating to the position being taken by the ExA regarding site inspections. This is further explored in annex C of the letter. Having read and consider the contents of annex C, the conclusion is drawn that the ExA are indicating that they cannot foresee any accompanied site inspections being organised during the remaining period of the Examination. Furthermore, with the existing unaccompanied site inspections that have taken place to date, they do not see the need for any further site visits as they consider those inspections have provided them with sufficient information and understanding of the application site.

If the Council has understood the above statement correctly, then it wishes to take issue with the position being adopted. If no further site inspections are undertaken then it appears that the application will be examined without any member of the ExA setting foot on those section of the Order Limits at Lovedean where the Converter Station is to be located, at Denmead Meadows and on the land on the south side of Hambledon Road. Such an action is not considered acceptable.

The Council has made comments on the site inspection arrangements on several occasions during the process. Initially, during the Preliminary Meeting and more recently, at Deadline 4. In the most recent comment, the Council was encouraging the ExA to undertake unaccompanied site inspections without delay given the uncertain future that we all face.

The Council has read all the records of the unaccompanied site inspections that are recorded as EV-001 to EV-007 and EV-013. To date, all of the visits have been confined to observations taken from the public highway and public spaces. There are no public footpaths crossing any of the actual application land at Lovedean or Denmead Meadows. Based on the site visit undertaken by officers in the summer of 2019, it is questioned if you can actually see any part of the application site from the road that boxes in the Lovedean site.

As previously stated in the Deadline 4 submission, the Council is of the opinion that the ExA does not have a sufficient understanding of the site characteristics to address any concerns relating to the treatment of biodiversity matters on any of the

land at Lovedean or Denmead Meadows. The recent emergence of ash die back exemplifies the need for knowledge of the features around the site. The question therefore arises how the biodiversity impacts can be adequately assessed without some understanding of the features and habitats involved. It is the Council's view that this can only be achieved by visiting the land at Lovedean at Denmead Meadows and that land south of the Hambledon Road.

This concern is unique to the northern end of the proposal as the vast majority of the rest of the route follows the highway network or at Eastney (Fort Cumberland) is located within publicly accessible areas.

It is recalled that at the hearings in December the ExA did ask a number of landowners from Lovedean to express a view on the arrangements necessary to allow them to visit their land. As previously expressed, the Council would be content if the ExA made unaccompanied site inspectors providing there was at least two individuals from the inspectorate present.

In view of the significance of this matter and the benefits that the visits would bring to the hearings in February 2021, the Council requests that the ExA consider and undertake the visits at the earliest opportunity. It is believed that these inspections can take place in accordance with current government regulations relating to the coronavirus lockdown.

END.

25 January 2021

