

Open Letter

I'm writing to tell you about the appalling treatment myself and my family have been subjected to by Highways England since the time we were informed that our home would be affected by the Mottram Trans-Pennine upgrade.

Our turmoil began in February 2018 when my wife – Toni – and I attended an open meeting for the community of Hollingworth put on by Highways England (HE) discussing the planned project of the Mottram Trans-Pennine upgrade. Shortly after this meeting we were visited by planners in our home who informed us that our home would be significantly affected by the proposed bypass. This led us to have two possible paths forward, either stay in our home and receive no compensation for the damage done to our property by the bypass' construction or receive a compulsory purchase order (CPO) and leave the home which we had planned on spending the rest of our lives in. At the time, [REDACTED], our only option was to take the CPO in order to ensure we remained with a roof over our heads.

Since then, Highways England has changed its plans a number of times. At one stage we were told that the planned route for the bypass had changed and that our home would no longer be affected by the development. This caused my wife and I enormous relief as we finally felt released from the axe that had been hanging above our heads. This relief, however, did not last long. Less than 6 months later we received another letter informing us that the development plans had changed again and that we were back in a situation where we would lose our home.

I would like to stress at this point that our foremost hope is – and has always been - to remain in our property so that my wife's [REDACTED] and our son's [REDACTED] remains unaffected, and we can remain in the home where - until the proposed development of this bypass - we had planned to spend the rest of our lives.

During the latter half of 2020 - upon the advice of Brown Rural [REDACTED] on behalf of Highways England - we reluctantly began the process of valuing our home so that we might be compensated sufficiently. Sufficient compensation (market value plus ten percent) being an assurance that Highways England have given to me and my family throughout this entire process.

As instructed [REDACTED], we sought out three estate agents to carry out valuations of our home. We contacted: [REDACTED] all of whom are local establishments with excellent working knowledge of the area and it's property values. The average value assigned to our home across these three valuations was [REDACTED]. These valuations were communicated to [REDACTED] via email on the 23rd of October 2020.

In early 2021, Highways England extended a provisional offer for the compulsory purchase of our home of [REDACTED] – considerably less than their guarantee of “sufficient compensation”. This offer was accompanied by a list of supposed issues with the property which Highways England deemed serious enough to reduce its value by more than [REDACTED]. This seemed a dramatic and unreasonable reduction in value, and it led me to decide to personally investigate the cost of solving these issues. I began by consulting professional tradesman - many of whom were involved in the work that had been carried out on the property thus far – to attain quotes for the work which supposedly needed done to achieve full market value. Please see the attached separate document – titled ‘Supporting Evidence – Personal Investigations’ - which contains a detailed

breakdown of the supposed issues accompanied by my investigations into the cost of each issue. To summarise the investigations: several of the jobs can be accomplished with little-to-no monetary output and have now been completed, several of the supposed structural issues have been described as unproblematic and very much usual for a property of this age and highly unlikely to affect the value of the property on the open market. Only one of the supposed issues requires significant work to correct with the estimated cost of correction arriving at around two and a half thousand pounds. Clearly, these works do not equate to a reduction in property value of over one hundred thousand pounds. This leads me to the conclusion that HE are seeking to strongarm me and my family into accepting less than market value for the home that they are forcing us from in order to save money in their budget for a new bypass; budget and spending being an issue which has been highlighted several times by the community group 'Save Old Hall Lane' spearheaded by local residents: [REDACTED].

Recently, and again at the recommendation of [REDACTED] we had our property valued again on the 31st of August and the 3rd of September (2021) with a third valuation booked in for the 16th of September 2021. This time the average valuation for our property (across the two valuations carried out so far) was around the [REDACTED] further highlighting how insulting HE's ridiculous offer of [REDACTED] is.

Furthermore, my wife's [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] She has a client base that is very much rooted in the local area which of course means that if we are forced to vacate our property, she would not only have to seek a new business premises but also establish an entirely new client base if our future home was located too far from our current one.

HE have completely disregarded her business in this entire equation and have neglected to take the loss of earnings into account when considering the impact that their compulsory purchase will have.

Most important, and again something which HE have shown no evidence of considering, is the emotional impact that this entire process has had on me and my family. As mentioned above, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] we first encountered HE's plans to build a bypass and destroy our home in the process. The emotional impact this has had – and continues to have - should need no explanation but nevertheless, I will attempt to outline it in the following passage.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. When the news came that we would likely lose that home, it set us on an even longer and more challenging road – one which we still walk to this day - filled with immense stress and uncertainty for our future. This was made drastically worse by HE's ever-changing narrative of what was going to happen with the development of the bypass and it's impact on our home. When our son was born, we faced all the usual challenges that first time parents face but, of course, these were greatly compounded by the pressure of potentially losing our home. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

Thankfully, we managed to weather that storm through great personal efforts and have conquered the challenges that we faced as a family but presently, we continue to face crippling uncertainties:

Personal investigations into supposed issues outlined by Highways England

Regarding your email about the potential issues raised by [REDACTED] (Highways England) on my property:

I've spoken to a qualified roofer, and a qualified joiner both of whom carried out jobs that are outlined in the email.

I've contacted [REDACTED] who has fitted 2 x Velux windows in my attic/study room along with treating the main 2 beams for wood boring. I've asked [REDACTED] if he could come to my property and give his expert opinion on some of the issues raised by Highways England (HE) and he agreed to do so on Friday the 19th of March, 2021.

1. The chimney stack leaning slightly:

[REDACTED] said although the chimney stack is leaning slightly it is not dangerous and is in good condition. For a house of this age, it is what he would expect.

2. The depression in the roof:

The installation of 2 x Velux windows has had no impact on the slight depression in the roof. The Velux windows were put in correctly and safely. Again, the depression in the roof is safe and is to be expected in a house of this age.

3. Evidence of wood boring:

[REDACTED] treated this in 2018 even though there were no signs of wood boring taking place at that time. He said there's still no signs of wood boring and he's happy to treat it again if needed.

4. Timbers installed under purlin:

Although it wasn't [REDACTED] who put the kitchen extension roof in, he said he can see that the timbers used may be too thin and not to spec. To change this, the roof would have to be taken off and new timbers installed. This could be done by him if needed and the estimated cost of this job is in the region of £2500.

5. Air bricks covered:

At the time of inspection (when the issue was sighted), the air bricks were covered by a temporary structure (garden waste bins) which have since been moved to a more appropriate location therefore nullifying this issue.

6. Structural timbers cut to provide staircase to roof space:

This was carried out by a company [REDACTED]. After speaking to them I was assured that no major beams had been cut through and moving the opening of the old ladder to an opening for a staircase, if anything, has strengthened the timbers because extra timbers were used to strengthen it. The staircase is to spec. [REDACTED] also said the same thing. I would also like to add that at no point has this been classed as a third bedroom and the property has been valued accordingly. The floor is not to spec, and this is the reason it has been classified as a study room and can be altered or reversed at any point so the room is not used.

7. Wall at the end of decking:

The wall over the years before I arrived in the property had weakened due to weathering etc. It has recently been strengthened by using props and filled in with stone and is now safe.

8. Structure of the decking:

This has been built with 12 x railway sleepers as foundations, 3 full into the ground with sand and cement. The decking has been further strengthened with the addition of extra support beams along with sixteen 12-foot-long beams. It is structurally sound.

9. Vertical crack between rear and left-hand extension:

The crack is due to settling and over the past 3 years there has been no evidence of it worsening. Due to the nature of the house's site and situation, a certain degree of settlement is unavoidable. Yearly signs of movement are to be expected but are unlikely to affect the structural integrity of the house.