

**A417 MISSING LINK OPEN FLOOR HEARING (OFH1) – MONDAY 24th JANUARY 2022 –
Submission on behalf of BJ and CE Ford, Highgate Farm - Meeting Room 1**

1. Introduction

Stuart Milsom, a Partner of Moore, Allen and Innocent, Rural Surveyors acting for B.J. and C.E. Ford.

2. Context

B.J. and C.E. Ford own and farm Highgate Farm, a, off-lying block of circa 220 acres of good quality productive farmland located approximately 16 miles to the north of their main agricultural centre of operations. It is farmed as part of an off-lying block which forms part of a wider agricultural holding. There is no farmhouse or residential property at Highgate Farm.

3. Access During the Scheme

The existing access is via Cowley Wood Lane and allows for large, modern agricultural machinery to be brought on to the land with relative ease, at certain times of the year (principally harvest) there is considerable agricultural traffic to and from Highgate Farm.

Access is possible via Elkstone as an alternative to Cowley Wood Lane. This would increase disruption to the residents of Elkstone and Cowley many of whom park their cars on the narrow roads outside their homes.

It is not clear when Mr and Mrs Ford will lose access via Cowley Wood Lane under the current proposals nor when alternative access will be available. Will this be only when the new road is in place?

4. Future Access

Our clients wish to be reassured that future access, post scheme, would continue in a manner that does not disadvantage them or harm their business.

5. Cowley Wood Lane

Cowley Wood Lane is essential to the viability of Mr and Mrs Ford's land at Highgate

Farm. The proposal to stop up the land and install locked gates with keys given to local

Residents is not a viable solution; Mr and Mrs Ford require access for contractors and casual staff which will necessitate a great many keys being provided. It seems likely that stopping up the road could result in an increase in trespass on Mr and Mrs Ford's land, particularly if the proposed gate is not adequately fenced off – road users could simply drive around the barrier over Mr and Mrs Ford's land.

Who will be responsible and liable for the maintenance of the private roadway? How will this be managed into the future?

6. Accompanied Site Visit

Mr and Mrs Ford view an accompanied visit as a necessity, not only is there a need to

demonstrate the need for continued agricultural access, there are also certain recent improvements to the land, notably land drains, that will be adversely affected by the proposed scheme. This in turn will reduce the productivity of the land with a commensurate impact on income.

Recognising that the site visits are not an opportunity to discuss the merits or otherwise of the scheme, can an accompanied site visit be arranged to enable Mr and Mrs Ford (or a representative) to explain the significance of the key features affected by the proposal?

7. Compound Area

The area to be acquired (both temporarily and permanently) covers approximately 10% of the entire holding at Highgate Farm. There is currently no mechanism to claim compensation for the compound area which will cover circa 20 acres of key, productive and strategic farmland.

The agricultural sector is working through the ongoing transition into the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMs) which requires landowners to make long term multiyear commitments to land management and usage with statutory obligations placed on the landowner.

8. Communication Concerns

Communication has been very poor, and no contact has been made by the newly appointed Land Liaison Officer.

Mr and Mrs Ford have neither the time nor the expertise to access the numerous online

documents relating to this matter and have had to engage professional support. It remains unclear if the cost of professional services can be recovered which leaves Mr and Mrs Ford out of pocket through no fault of their own. In addition to this, too much professional time is taken up working through the large number of documents within the scheme archive. Can a process be implemented that identifies relevant documents and ensures that targeted document packs are sent to the relevant parties and organisations?

9. Questions

Any questions?

Stuart Milsom, a Partner of Moore, Allen and Innocent, Rural Surveyors acting for B.J. and C.E. Ford.