

**ANDREW HARDING**

**Statement to Examining Authority**

**A12/A120 Widening Scheme – Junction 24**

**Open Floor Hearings**

**Witham Public Hall**

**12<sup>th</sup> January, 2023**

Unique Reference: 20032843

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

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I do not propose to explore highly technical nor detailed argument. I would like to bring to the attention of the Examining Panel the emotional cost, the distress and harm to the many residents of the villages of Messing and Inworth, because of the way in which NH have conducted themselves throughout the whole 'consultation' process.

It seems to us in these two tiny villages, no more than 168 houses, just 250 people, that the reality of the plan - how it affects daily lives, dreams and aspirations, has been lost in figures and statistics. The skill of technical road planners and designers, the science of it all, has overtaken the consequences of this. This is all to save just three minutes journey time for a 25km route. All these technical phrases and highly detailed plans - cost benefit ratios, swept path analysis, roundabout radii and access gradients. But what of the people affected? What of our lives, and livelihoods? What of children trying to get to school? Of elderly folk trying to cross the road? All this is forgotten in a blizzard of technical detail that completely ignores the simple, deep, human cost of this plan for Junction 24.

There is a solution that does far less harm and inflicts far less distress on far fewer people. NH and ECC will not listen to that because it is too difficult, and their myopic bias has set their eyes in only one direction.

This proposal has ignored the pleas of residents living along the B1023, whose homes will be blighted but who are assured in 'cold legalese' that there are no mitigations possible. This is the destruction of their homes and their dreams;

Messing is a village that has a large, elderly population. I have seen some of these folk in tears on their doorsteps as they believe this is a 'made decision'. They feel their quiet, peaceful lives will be shattered by these substantial volumes of increased traffic. They know the village of Messing will be used as a 'rat run'. A fact on which both NH and ECC agree, but have proffered no viable, workable solution;

Shutting roads, one of ECC's more bizarre ideas for mitigation, amongst other things would cause our farming community great harm. They already navigate difficult narrow roads. We have one bus a week – how would that operate, potentially cutting villagers off still more;

Facing large oncoming vehicles on roads less than 3m wide, which have been forced around circuitous routes, will result in endless delays and probable accidents or damage;

There are no turning or reversing areas. Private driveways cannot be co-opted into traffic management by NH and ECC, who appear intent on trivialising these very real fears;

Many houses in Messing have their foundations actually next to the road. This is an ancient village – dating back to the 200's and the Romans. No attempt has been made by any authority to assuage the fears of damage and destruction by vibration and proximity to traffic for these ancient houses;

Messing has an ancient church, dating back to the 1400's, which is surrounded by a wall that 'The Friends of Messing Church', a registered charity established to protect the fabric of this ancient building, believe is at severe risk.

These concerns are as a result of the illustrations in the 'swept path analysis', which proves roads around the Church simply cannot take large vehicles. The wall will be inevitably and irreparably damaged as large trucks try to manoeuvre through a village that will not accommodate them;

No one from NH has even spoken to them;

The parents of one child, who is severely disabled, feel that speeding traffic on Harborough Hall Lane - already a problem - will make their child a virtual prisoner in his own house. The volumes of traffic will make it far too distressing and dangerous for him to be taken out along the side of the road;

There are no pavements on the approaches to our tiny village school. Children already have to walk on the roads. At this time of the year this is in the gloom of late afternoon, or into the dangerous angles of sunlight at school start time. Traffic increases of the scale anticipated by cold statistics are terrifying for these small children;

Huge vehicles, and substantially increased traffic volumes generally, will create an exponential risk to their very lives. The pollution as 'rat running' vehicles of all sizes accelerate up the hill by the side of the school playground, further adds to the danger and loss of amenity that these children have a right to expect;

NH has sacrificed our villages to stop what it describes as 'extra traffic' going into Tiptree – but where is this 'extra' traffic coming from? The leader of ECC does not agree with his own officers. What are we to make of that?

All roads have increases in traffic volume. NH have determined, as the line of least resistance, to squeeze these extra vehicles - a 'substantial' increase even by their own admission - onto the country lanes and narrow byways of Messing.

The B1023, through Inworth, is a speed-way. A fact fully acknowledged by NH and ECC. The Post Office will not deliver to properties along that road as it is already too dangerous to find safe parking and cross back and forward to properties. Residents have been forced to collect their post from the Office in Tiptree. The NH plan will proffer no improvement to those conditions;

In all conscience, how can we, as the residents of two small villages, unite to combat such blind arrogance in the face of self-evident danger and destruction?

Tiptree Neighbourhood Plan calls for a complete re-siting of the junction to Prested Hall area, as they believe the damage caused to Tiptree will be immense. The argument from NH fails on their own logic between two sets of conflicting information given to Tiptree. Traffic figures are amended and shifted by NH to suit the topography of any opposing argument;

Our roads are narrow and unlit. Parked cars prevent the turning circles needed for large vehicles and the prospect of two vehicles facing each other on these roads is a nightmare of dangerous proportion.

All of this NH has ignored, marginalised or tried to shift to ECC as their responsibility.

Whilst these two bodies vie to avoid responsibility and accountability, our villages are being sacrificed and destroyed.

I do not agree with the NH assessment of costs or land requirement for the Main Alternative. That plan has already led both NH and ECC to reappraise several factors they had blithely, and blindly, accepted as gospel.

NH have persistently created the false narrative that your decision has been made. That the NH plan for Junction 24 is a 'done deal' and there is no alternative. Your role, with respect, has been subsumed by NH creating the erroneous impression that you had reached your determination before these hearings even began.

This cannot be right. We are small communities, and the residents feel we are being sacrificed at the altar of NH Junction 24 plan.

A plan they are determined to ram through at all costs – not just financial costs, but human costs and the destruction of the very quality of life in these two ancient villages.

Thank you.