

16<sup>th</sup> January 2023

**Written submission to the Planning Inspectorate examining the A12 Widening Project**

This submission relates to the oral submission given by me at Witham Public Hall at the end of the afternoon session of Open Floor Hearings, that took place on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

My Name is Mark Tonge, I am a resident of Messing, I am also a Director of Messing & Inworth Action Group Ltd (MIAG). My oral submission on 12<sup>th</sup> January and this written submission and opinions herein are my own and not representing any other party.

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The stretch of the ‘new’ A12 between new junction 24 (Inworth) and junction 25 (Marks Tey) is planned to be located to the south of the existing A12 pathway. Previously this repositioning was influenced by the land and road connectivity / capacity needs for the new West Tey Garden Community, which in the meantime failed to get permission and has been scrapped.

The repositioning will bring the A12 physically closer to Messing, literally just a couple of fields away and at the same time will completely blight the sense of place of Prested Hall (a beautiful 15<sup>th</sup> century part-moated manor house). Villagers in Messing are naturally unhappy the proposed repositioning of the A12, its visual impact as well as the increase in noise and air pollution and the particulate matter it will bring to the village. Villagers however are not nimby’s and can see the value of a widened A12 as a bigger economic generator for all, however villagers do not agree with the need to reposition this section of the A12 and whilst it is not our biggest concern, it does raise several questions that should be pursued by the Planning Inspectorate:

1. Why is the repositioning of the A12 and the extra connectivity and capacity derived from the de-trunking of the existing A12, still necessary when the West Tey Garden Community will not be built
2. Why in these straightened economic times isn’t the Department for Transport and the Chancellor ensuring that the taxpayer gets best value for its money and testing the absolute need for the repositioning of the A12. The cost to reposition it is extremely expensive and is most likely not needed. This is an aspect that the Planning Inspectorate needs to consider in its review
3. All of this begs the question whether it is the case that National Highways is being penny wise and pound foolish in not being willing to consider the ‘Main Alternative’ (a no or low-cost increase to reposition the B1023 behind Inworth village and linking to an alternative J24 access roundabout situated further South-West from that proposed by National Highways). This main alternative proposed by Messing-cum-Inworth Parish Council and MIAG and supported by Priti Patel MP, Essex County Council, Kevin Bentley and all the local community would prevent traffic gridlock on the B1023 and save the blighting of the village of Inworth

**Site Visit Request 1**

It is imperative that the Planning Inspectorate conducts a walkabout site visit throughout the entire length of the village of Inworth both during daylight and darkness including at peak times

Moving on to Junction 24. The Junction 24 roundabout design, its connectivity to the local road network, the limited capability of that road network and the impact on the local area must all be deeply considered by the Planning Inspectorate. As is the current design and the many assumptions that go with it means that the Junction 24 and local road network will not be fit for the expected purpose once built.

As the Planning Inspectorate will learn from various other submissions, the design of Junction 24 is technically flawed and is a bastardisation of multiple design standards.

The design and its proposed location clearly lack local knowledge and insight. For example, the extreme pinch point that is Hinds Bridge (located just to the north of the A12 where it passes over the B1023 between Feering and the proposed Junction 24 roundabout at Inworth) is a significant shortcoming. On a good day it is only just wide enough for 2 cars to pass one another, larger vehicles cannot and must give way to one another. Currently with long-term unrepaired potholes any navigation is dangerous. National Highways has dismissed Hinds Bridge as being Essex County Council's problem, not theirs. Yet this pinch-point is clearly incapable of absorbing the explosion of traffic that will need to pass over it to access from/to the new junction 24. Essex County Council reasonably contends that it doesn't have the funding to widen Hinds Bridge, nor to maintain it. Where is the grown-up strategic view here that considers this issue in its entirety and its high risk to jeopardise the whole scheme in respect of Junction 24

#### **Site Visit Request 2**

It is also imperative that the Planning Inspectorate conducts a walkabout site visit at the location of Hinds Bridge including at peak times and in the dark as well as in the daylight. The B1023 is unlit along most of its length including the section between Hinds Bridge and the new Junction 24.

The design of the Junction 24 roundabout also features direct connection and access to Kelvedon Road, an unmarked, unfinished (no kerb) and unlit single track road with very few passing places and a 90' blind bend (which has had 1 fatal traffic accident many years ago) en-route to accessing Messing Village, its listed houses, its 600 year old church that is located on a S bend that is incapable of providing the necessary swept path bandwidth for HGV's to navigate. On the other side of the village lies a single-track road with similar characteristics, called Harborough Hall Lane used to access from/to the B1022 (Maldon Road). The link between the new Junction 24 on the B1023 and the B1022 via Messing Village is at enormous risk of being used as a rat-run as people living in Heckford Bridge, Birch, Layer Marney, Layer-de la-Haye, Abberton, Mersea Island and some parts of Stanway etc all seek to seek to short-cut their route.

#### **Site Visit Request 3**

It is also therefore imperative that the Planning Inspectorate conducts a walkabout site visit along the entire length of Kelvedon Road, The Street and Harborough Hall Lane both in daylight and in the dark and including at peak times

Finally, I would like to comment about National Highways. So far, in this entire process, National Highways has not, in my opinion or in the general opinion of villagers from the parish of Messing-cum-Inworth in general, acquitted itself very well. In summary:

- It has failed to communicate
- Above all it has failed to consult properly with the local community
- It has failed to be consistent in its supporting data, which it has changed numerous times to be self-serving of its preferences and objectives
- It has failed to provide a robust design for Junction 24 that fits to a single design standard
- It has its contractors who have a beneficial interest in the project do its bidding for it, as was evident with the presence of contractors from Jacobs and Mace representing and presenting as National Highways in Witham Public Hall
- It has a complaints process which is not fit for purpose and a complaint count which is staggeringly high. Why?

I could go on ..... and on

In short, the local community has not trust or confidence in National Highways in respect of Junction 24

Given that the local community wants to pursue its proposed 'Main Alternative' for the Junction 24 roundabout and B1023 routing, which National Highways has summarily dismissed as unworkable and too expensive, it is not lost on the villagers of Messing and Inworth that National Highways has some recent form in this respect, namely the failure to adequately consult on and consider alternatives for the Stonehenge tunnel underpass. As I am sure the panel is aware, that resulted in a judicial review which found against National Highways, found against the Department for Transport and found against the Secretary of State for Transport\*

It should already be concerning to the Planning Inspectorate that the local community has found it necessary to form an action group (MIAG), raise funds and appoint Stephen Humphreys of Ashfords LLP as its solicitor to represent it, as it did at the Witham Public Hall on 12<sup>th</sup> January. I trust, indeed all villagers of the local community trust, that a judicial review for this case, will not be needed.

\*At Witham Public Hall on 12<sup>th</sup> January, Reuben Taylor's oral reply commenting on my oral submission as above, indicated that National Highways were not at fault or to blame. However, that appears to be at odds with the findings of the judicial review into the Stonehenge scheme, which according to the New Civil Engineer article (from 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 by Rob Horgan, copy enclosed) stated that the Secretary of State's decision was 'unlawful' and as a result the Secretary of State had asked National Highways to provide greater detail on why it had ruled out alternative schemes. Clearly if National Highways had done its job properly, this would not be necessary. The article quotes the Secretary of State's letters to National Highways as stating "A number of consultees have raised the issue that it is not clear how the Applicant (NH) has arrived at the conclusion that the alternative tunnel routes would only have minimal additional heritage benefits over the Development. The Applicant is asked to explain fully the basis on which they reached this conclusion." It continued "The explanation should include full detail of reasoning, the matters considered and any methodology that was used and, where applicable, be cross-referenced to the examination material or subsequent information provided to the Secretary of State". The judgement also requires the Secretary of State to prove that (he) has considered the environmental and carbon impact of the scheme. In respect of the A12 widening in general and Junction 24 specifically, I trust that the Planning Inspectorate will automatically hold National Highways accountable to account for every single one of these aspects as part of its process as well as the all in important environmental and health impacts from Particulate Matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>)