Notes for Harston residents interested in East-West Rail's proposals

You are probably familiar with the plan to build a high-speed passenger/freight railway just to the south of Harston. These notes may help you make informed responses to the 2026 'consultation', which closes on the 9th June.

There is a LOT of information on the East-West Rail web site: https://eastwestrail.co.uk/

The 2026 consultation

It's quite restricted in scope, but until development consent is given, comments can still be made on any aspect. https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation/consultation2026

It does not address the Harston section at all. However, you can use **Section 17, 'Other Feedback'** to make points about the proposed route of the line near Harston. EWR staff said that they still accept comments on any aspect of their proposals.

Northern route

Many believe that EWR should have chosen the cheaper and more useful northern route. EWR dismiss it, but there is no harm in asserting that the Northern route is still a better and cheaper choice. They may still be forced to change.
It is also important to address the shortcomings of the current proposals and to make suggestions about how they can be improved.

MAPS

It is worth spending some time looking at the latest maps.
https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation/consultation2026/maps-and-plans
EWR staff say you can request a hard copy of any of the maps.

Harston section:
https://ewr-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/public/ListsBlockMedia/ae6d0ba830/Comberton-to-Shelford-Perm-1M8VHR3.pdf
You will see that there are small but significant changes to the route near Harston.

- The line is now a little further south than it was, especially near Station Road.
- It's now at ground level, only rising slightly where it crosses the river Rhee.
- The A10 crossing is now a large ramp and road over-bridge.
- There is a third track in the section crossing the Rhee, to hold a goods train.
- The main line to London now has one track going up and over an EWR track.

The embankments and cuttings are hard to follow on the map, but it shows an EWR track in a 'Box Structure' where the main line passes over it.

This doc: East-West Rail notes
https://tinyurl.com/davids-east-west-rail-notes
Please feel free to print this first page to use as a hand-out.
The barcode or the web address shown here will take you to the full document, which will contain more help, suggestions and web links.

EWR visualisation video

There is a video showing a computer-generated fly-over model of the track, from the end of the Haslingfield tunnel to the main line just east of Harston.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8XBIEQaZjA

You can see they propose some earth banks for screening near to the tunnel exit.
Interestingly, they do **not** propose earth banks near to Harston.
Adding them to the proposed tree planting would reduce noise from the trains.

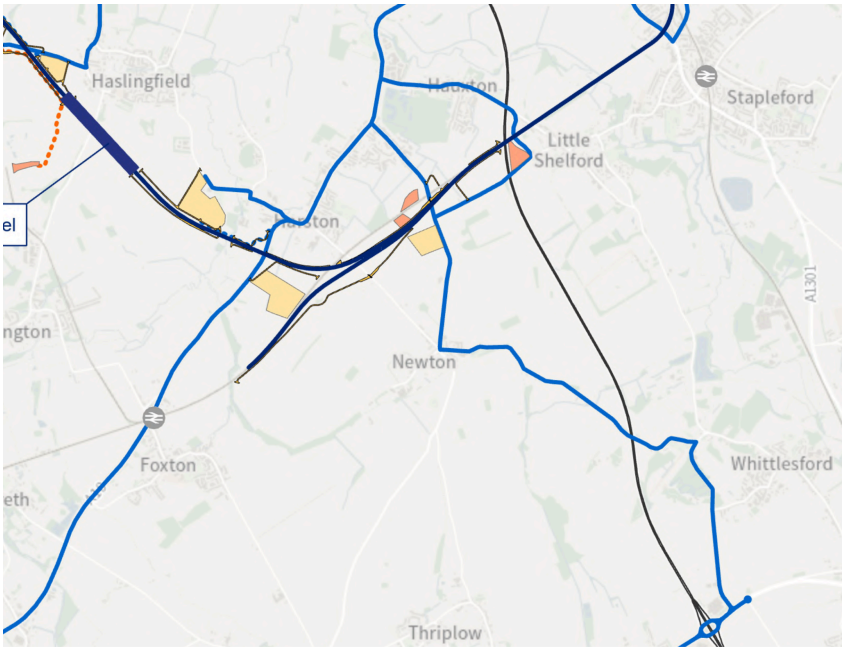
Here is a still from the video:

Use of local roads for heavy earth-moving traffic

EWR has published a map showing which roads they would use to move vast quantities of earth around in heavy lorries.
https://ewr-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/public/ListsBlockMedia/877d135594/Comberton-to-Shelford.pdf

Bizarrely, they propose Church Street in Harston and the long, twisty road from Newton to Whittlesford.

Residents should be aware of the extreme disturbance and hazard this would cause.



Use the EWR web Feedback Form to respond to the 'consultation'

On the EWR web site, click on the tab marked **Consultation 2026** and click through the links in the orange boxes.
…or use this link: https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation/consultation2026

Section 17 "Other feedback' can be used to comment on any feature of the proposals.

Harston Parish Council *would very much like to see a copy of your response*, so it's recommended to **compose the text of your response in your email program** and then copy-paste it into the Section 17 box on the EWR Feedback Form.

Responses won't be accepted by EWR after the 9th June.

EWR also state that if you don't want to complete the Feedback Form on-line, you can email a copy of the form to them at consultation@eastwestrail.co.uk
or post it to Freepost EAST WEST RAIL.

Please copy your responses to Harston Parish Council

Send to:
EWR Working Group c/o Parish Clerk Harston eastwestrail@harstonparishcouncil.gov.uk

Harston Parish Council web site: https://harstonparishcouncil.gov.uk/
Clerk of the Parish Council: clerk@harstonparishcouncil.gov.uk

Please write to your MP, Pippa Heylings

You might begin your letter by explaining that you are copying her in on your responses to EWR's 2026 consultation, and then supply the text you have already prepared.

Email: pippa.heylings.mp@parliament.uk

Web sites: https://members.parliament.uk/member/5078/contact
https://www.pippaheylings.org.uk/

Please write to your local representatives

A simple letter or email, forwarding a copy of your response to EWR, would suffice.
The more letters they get, the more they can do on your behalf!

South Cambridgeshire District Council (Harston and Comberton)
https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx

Cllr Dr Lisa Redrup	cllr.redrup@scambs.gov.uk	(re-elected, May 2026)
Cllr Ariel Cahn	cllr.cahna@scambs.gov.uk	(re-elected, May 2026)
Cllr Laurence Damary-Homan		(elected, May 2026)

Council Leader:	Cllr Bridget Smith	Bridget.Smith@councillor.online
Deputy Council Leader:	Cllr Brian Milnes	cllr.milnes@scambs.gov.uk

https://www.scambs.gov.uk/our-district-election-results-2026
https://www.scambs.gov.uk/election-results-2026/our-district-election-results-2026/harston-comberton-ward

Cambridgeshire County Council (Sawston and Shelford)
https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/ccc_live/Councillors.aspx

Cllr Laurence Damary-Homan	Laurence.Damary-Homan@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Cllr Peter Fane	Peter.Fane@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority
https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/
https://www.paulbristow.org.uk/

Mayor:	Paul Bristow	paul@paulbristow.org.uk

Paul is a fan of 'Light Rail' (Trams) which is more or less the polar opposite of EWR.
His organisation is responsible for major roads and transport services, which makes him a good person to write to.

Some points you might like to use in responses and letters

You may find additional useful material on the **Cambridge Approaches** web site.
https://cambridgeapproaches.org/
Cambridge Approaches is a local campaign group that has put a lot of work into challenging the EWR proposals.

There is merit in pointing out ways that the EWR proposal could be improved, because this places pressure on them to demonstrate that they are trying to listen to feedback, even if the suggestion is not taken up.

Reconsider the Northern Route

On EWR's own figures published in 2023, the Northern route is cheaper and better value for money. There is no harm in pointing this out.

Insisting that trains have to run directly from Cambourne to Cambridge South (the Biomedical Campus) does not make much sense. Trains entering Cambridge from the North could pick up passengers from Northstowe, run into Cambridge and then straight on to Cambridge South. As it stands, EWR is really only useful if you live in Cambourne.

A Northern Route would mean freight traffic would not have to pass right through Cambridge City to and from Felixstowe. If you know anyone in the city, please tell them about this.

Failure of Environmental Protection on Southern Route

A major difference between the Northern and the Southern route is that the Southern route alone affects the chalk environment of Cambridgeshire. In turn that affects the chalk streams and rivers, particularly the Rhee.

The UK is home to some 80% of the chalk streams in the world, and chalk streams form a unique habitat. The Rhee itself would be particularly vulnerable from the operation of the line, particularly given the freight passing loops located over the river. Given that the freight locomotives would be diesel, there is a clear likelihood of the river being polluted.

Severance between Harston and Newton

One of the really unsatisfactory aspects of the proposals is the pair of really long ramps joined by an over-bridge, supposedly to re-join Harston and Newton for foot/cycle/horse traffic.
This would add around a mile to the current distance. It cannot be completed until the rest of the work is done, leading to an extended period of complete severance, with consequences for school traffic. One suspects that the location of the foot/cycle/horse bridge was chosen for cost reasons, not because it is the best solution.

A major concern here is that Harston and Newton school would face falling rolls if parents in Newton decide to send their children elsewhere, to avoid the detour via London Road and the A10 during the years of construction work. This could possibly lead to school closure.
The long ramps up and down to the proposed over-bridge make it a really long detour. Why cannot the ramps be doubled back and the bridge accessed by steps as well?
The current proposal is a complicated mess and inconvenient, wherever you are starting from.

Residents are concerned that they will have to wait until construction is complete before the old rail track can be repurposed as a road.
The new road linking Station Road to London Road could end up being a ‘rat run’ at busy times, funnelling extra traffic along Station Road.

Un-used parts of the old line should be completely cleared of debris and rehabilitated so that plants can grow, not left as derelict land.

A10 over-bridge

The plans show the A10 crossing the railway with two massive ramps and a bridge. We understand that the speed limit would be moved out to include the bridge, but it still has the potential to be noisy. Mitigation measures such as **noise control features** and **quiet road surfacing** are not mentioned, but would be essential to minimise the impact.
Making the slope as gentle as possible would reduce noise from heavy goods vehicles struggling up-hill.

Perhaps the ‘bent’ shape of the new road bridge could be made greater to discourage traffic from travelling fast into the village? (Not all traffic obeys speed limit signs.)

Street lighting on the bridge must minimise light spill onto the surrounding areas.

Construction road traffic

EWR publish a map which shows 'more than 10 per day' of heavy earth-moving lorries along **Church Street** and out over the narrow bridge over the river Rhee to one of their compounds.
This proposal is utterly unacceptable for many reasons, such as:

- Church Street is far too narrow to take heavy lorries. Delivery vehicles to and from Button End have to mount the pavement in places. It has blind bends, one of which is a right angle, where only one car can pass safely at a time. It's just not safe to use it for heavy lorries.
- Harston Surgery is in the middle of Church street. It serves many other villages and the only viable way for patients to get there is by car. The car park is often full and cars usually line the street. Heavy lorries loaded with soil thundering past is beyond reason.
- Church street is overwhelmingly residential and is lined with old buildings. It is the original heart of Harston. The imposition of noise, damage, pollution and danger of using it as a construction route are completely unacceptable.
- The bridge over the Rhee is narrow and quite old. It's debatable whether it would survive the pounding from heavy lorries passing over it.

EWR must use land they have already taken, to build access routes for construction vehicles, not using small roads. In the case of Church Street, EWR could easily build an access directly off the A10. It's completely unreasonable to assume the use of narrow streets for construction traffic.

Precautions must be taken (vehicle washing stations) to avoid vehicles carrying dirt onto the general road network, because this would create a hazard for other road users and particularly for pedestrians (dust in summer, splatter in winter).

There is a danger that EWR could decide that Station Road was a convenient route for their heavy goods vehicles. This must not be allowed to happen, not least because the road is already in a pretty bad state, but also because it goes right past houses and a school.
If this were to happen, it would be terrible publicity: It would not look good if EWR used the route to Newton for construction access, while cutting it off so that local people can no longer use it.

Provisional:
EWR want to use the private drive to Linden House as access to the works.
This will directly affect the two adjacent houses in Station Road as well.
The gap between the houses is barely wide enough for the horse box, so clearly unsuitable for construction traffic.
EWR should use land they will have already taken to build direct access from the A10.
We are awaiting more information on this. There is potential for major pain right in the middle of Harston.

The impact of freight traffic on Cambridge city

One of the reasons for building EWR is to create a freight route which will eventually reach Felixstowe. Using the southern route into Cambridge means that freight will have to travel right through the heart of the city, which is not a clever idea at all.

Freight traffic should not be allowed to run at night, because of the impact on people trying to sleep in the villages near to the EWR track and in the city.

'Serving communities'

EWR claim to be linking communities, but this is directly at odds with the aim of providing a high speed railway with few stations. The practical upshot of this is that the railway is useless unless you happen to live in Cambourne and want to travel to and from the Biomedical campus.

EWR brings no benefit at all to the villages south of Cambridge, just pain, stress, disturbance and financial loss in the form of reduced property values.

Lack of any published business case

EWR have stalled on producing any business case, probably because their predicted passenger numbers are so low that they can never justify the cost. EWR staff made weak and unsubstantiated claims about general economic benefit, but it's hard to see how this works unless you include unrelated development in areas not actually served by EWR stations.
The government have recently changed the rules on planning and EWR now state that they don't need to consult again before going for consent to develop. This means that the railway could well be built without anyone having to justify the huge spend of public money.

Electrification

EWR staff state that it is now policy to use electric passenger trains with batteries that are topped up by overhead wires placed on some sections of the track.
They must not be allowed to row back on this and use diesel powered trains.
Railway rolling stock has a long life, and once in use would remain for decades.

Even electric trains travelling at 90 miles per hour will be very noisy, *but diesel powered ones would be much louder*. Also, running a new railway on fossil fuel would be environmentally crass and not in keeping with government policy to reduce carbon emissions.

Requirement for noise control measures

It is not good enough to simply build a railway and then say ‘well railways are noisy’.
Properly engineered noise mitigation should be built in from day one.

- Cuttings should be simulated to find the best way to absorb and deflect noise.
- Noise performance of bridges should be modelled to determine the best profile, using low walls with hard surfaces to deflect noise from the wheels upwards rather than out.
- Elevated sections should be equipped with low walls or noise absorbers to reduce noise from the wheels and track. This is important because elevated track will radiate noise a long way, particularly in cold weather.
- Track at ground level should be edged with effective noise barriers where it faces housing.

The bridge over the Rhee will be high enough to radiate noise over a wide area, particularly since goods trains will park up there on the third track, most probably with their engines running. Proper noise barriers must be engineered into the whole of the track where goods trains can park up. This includes side walls on the bridge which are designed to deflect and absorb sound, since the bridge is the highest point.

No matter what the initial plan is, there is a likelihood that goods traffic will use the line mostly at night, causing intrusive noise in an otherwise quiet area. This makes it imperative to design in mitigations from day one.

Mitigation measures must be designed to last, not just a bit of wooden fencing.

Use more earth banks

On some parts of the line, it is proposed to add earth banks ‘for visual screening’. These will also help with noise, but none are proposed for the section near to Harston. The proposed tree planting has a number of problems:

- Trees take a while to grow, so for many years they will have little impact.
- Unless trees are planted at the right time of year and looked after, most will die. This can be seen alongside many recent road developments.
- When there are no leaves on the trees they will have minimal effect on noise.

EWR should **add earth banks** to their proposed tree planting, to improve noise control as well as visual screening. They should take continuing responsibility for keeping the trees alive while they are getting established and replace the dead ones so there aren’t any large gaps.

Moving the line further away from Station Road

It would be possible to reposition the line and the junction a little further south, avoiding the severance of the road from Harston to Newton. This would avoid the complicated mess that is currently proposed.

Moving the line south would greatly reduce the noise impact on Harston, both during construction and when trains are running. There is plenty of space in the gap between Harston and Foxton.

It could also nudge the A10 over-bridge a little further from the edge of Harston, improving safety. Current plans show traffic descending an incline straight into the edge of the village.

Flood modelling and effects on watercourses

The bridge over the Rhee should be long enough to deal with rare severe flooding, which will inevitably become much more frequent as the planet warms up. The bridge should be made longer to avoid it becoming a dam during severe flooding.

There is concern over wetland used for pollution control from runoff being inadequate for safeguarding the Rhee, which is a chalk-fed river and environmentally sensitive.

The very real possibility of diesel spill and exhaust pollution reaching the river must be properly addressed. Leakage from trains carrying liquid fuel or even (heaven forbid) nuclear material could likewise reach the river.

Aquifers and Water Supply

Chalk acts as an aquifer and engineering construction can damage the aquifers as has happened with HS2 tunnel passing through the main chalk aquifers in the Chilterns.

Chalk in general is affected by numerous structural fault lines that are rarely shown on geological maps. These fault lines may provide preferential routes for water flow and would need to be taken into account by engineers working on a project.

The tunnelling work itself can lead to pollution problems, as was found with HS2 tunnelling through the Chilterns. Construction and operation may lead to dewatering.

Ongoing maintenance of trees, ponds and wetlands

Must be the responsibility of EWR - it's unreasonable to transfer the cost of maintenance to local authorities.

Tree planting and replanting must be mandated, including looking after them and planting at the right time so they don't just die off, as seen so often by major new roads.

About this document

Edited by David Clarke on behalf of Harston Parish Council, with individual contributions from members of the Parish Council EWR working group.

Open StreetMap

If you want free, really detailed mapping which shows existing railways, try **OpenStreetMap**.

> Either Google for **Open Street Map**,
> or go to https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=13/52.1701/0.119

Here is a sample: