

Ravensden Parish Council

Response to the site visit of Steve Christian and Fiona Mann from EWR, 19th August 2025

Over the summer, Ravensden had a site visit from two members of your team, Stephen Christian and Fiona Mann. During the course of the visit, we were made aware of some changes that EWR were considering for the route through Ravensden, from those put forward in the last NSC. The most significant change was to delete the bridge proposed across the rail line where it would bisect Graze Hill Lane. During construction, the residents of this narrow ancient lane will experience massive disruption as their road is carved in two, with a huge stockholding/ construction site, liable to flood, on their doorstep. At the end of construction, they will be left with two cul-de-sacs, which will adversely affect the lives not only of the residents, but the many others who regularly use the lane.

*The junction between Graze Hill Lane/ Wood End and Thurleigh Road/Mill Lane has inadequate visibility splays for the speed of traffic on the Thurleigh Rd, making pulling out of the junction difficult. Because of this, many residents currently leave the lane at the Ravensden Park end. If this is to be a no-through road, more than half the residents won't be able to do this, exacerbating already serious road safety concerns at this junction.

*The lane is not only a public highway in its own right, but it is also the essential connection between the public Rights of Way and Bridleways which link to it, thereby enabling use of the overall footpath/bridleway wayfinding network across the area. That connectivity should be preserved in the public interest. It is also popular with cyclists, who use this lane to avoid the speeding traffic from the top of Cleat Hill to Ravensden Crossroads.

*The lane is an ancient right of way documented back to the 13th century, and is of historical interest, with many listed buildings. This historic lane should be maintained intact.

*Antisocial behaviour, which is already a problem near the Ravensden Park entrance to Graze Hill Lane, would increase, as the end of the 'cul de sac' would be better hidden from view and more likely to be used. Fly tipping which has been a long- term issue here, would no doubt increase.

*There would be considerable disruption to the postal service, deliveries, refuse collection and emergency services. Changes of route could solve the problem, but these vehicles would have to use the dangerous access junction at Wood End to access properties to the north of the railway.

Ravensden Parish Council suggests that a single-track bridge should span the rail line along Graze Hill Lane, so that when the work has finished the lane will be reinstated as far as possible, and residents who will have had their lives disrupted for at least 6 years will finally have their ancient lane back. We would also suggest that fast growing trees, such as willow, be planted in advance around the Stockholding/ Construction site off Graze Hill Lane.

We were informed that a second change to the design of the route through Ravensden is to have a viaduct across Thurleigh Rd and Ravensden Brook to replace part of the 12 metre high embankment that had been proposed in the January non statutory consultation. We welcome this change, but the design of the viaduct needs to be in sympathy with its surroundings and be suitably landscaped, including within the footprint of the structure. It would be helpful to have a 3-D visualisation of the proposed viaduct. We would also request that the footpath along Butler Street be continued under the viaduct and on to Wood End. This would ensure continuing connectivity with the rights of way and bridleways from Graze Hill Lane and around the Wood End crossroads.

Our third request – not currently in the design plan - is to have a ‘bespoke’ green-grey bridge across the rail line where it is crossed by BOAT61, Green Lane, instead of a lengthy diversion alongside the rail line and a crossing over the B660 bridge. The cost of this option would be offset by not building an overbridge from FP35. This footpath has not been used in living memory and so a bridge is not needed here.

The Parish Council maintains its view that an exemplar recreational bridge which incorporates ecological features should be installed to safeguard the special qualities of the Green Lane. We welcome the opportunity to work with you to create a bespoke design which maintains this distinctive and historical right of way. The width of the lane varies, depending on whether the hedgerow boundaries are present. It could be that a modified bridleway bridge, with a width of 8-10m could support the lane's many users - which includes farmers with large machinery as well as walkers, horse-riders and off-road vehicles, as the lane is a "Byway Open to All Traffic".

To maintain the wildlife corridor a typical depth of soil (subsoil would support the greatest diversity of flora) of 40cm would enable a grassland vegetation cover to establish. This should be laid over 10-20cm of hardcore to provide drainage. It could be that the soil profiles are varied- the central section most likely to be used by vehicles and horse-riders could have less soil but a greater depth of hardcore in order to provide a more resistant surface. A deeper soil profile could be located to either side to provide suitable conditions for the wildflower grassland to establish.

The Parish Council considers that if groups of trees were planted to either side of the bridge, this would help to provide sufficient connectivity for species such as bats, so that the inclusion of hedges or trees (which require a much greater depth of soil) would not be necessary.

We also need to ask what will happen to access and traffic management when the bridge is being built to take the B660 over the railway near the water tower. Also there appears to be an access road nearly opposite The Grange on Sunderland Hill. This needs to be moved as its position is highly dangerous, close to the brow of a hill.

Finally, we consider our requests to maintain the integrity of Graze Hill Lane and Green Lane with EWR providing suitable overbridges in situ should be seen as entirely reasonable. Where highway infrastructure schemes are proposed elsewhere, invariably Highways England strives to maintain all highways and rights of way as close as possible to their existing alignments and not sever or divert them well off course. As the Parish Council has always maintained, EWR has chosen the wrong route around Bedford but now it has to live with the consequences of its decision, which gives rise to the need to carve across the grain of the local landscape. The ridges through which EWR will cut have always been associated with movement and connectivity and the importance and integrity of these routes must be maintained. Ravensden's landscape and route network should not have to suffer the consequences of EWR's choice of railway corridor, when other options, as we have put forward, are available.

