Road Traffic concerns from the old eastern villages

Good morning and thank you for allowing me an opportunity to explain the fears of those of us who live in the old eastern villages about the potentially devastating impact of Wasdell’s proposal on our rural communities.

I am Chair of the Parish Council for Bishopstone and Hinton Parva, two very small villages to the immediate east of Wanborough, which are also meant to be protected by the council’s non coalescence policy. Our residents are dismayed that Wasdells traffic analysis takes no account whatsoever of the likely traffic impact on our rural, agricultural and conservation villages and the many vulnerable residents and recreational visitors who use our lanes. As I am also the Community Speed Watch co-ordinator for both villages, I’m very familiar with our current traffic problems; these can only get worse if the area of non-coalescence is allowed to become an industrial zone.

Community Speed Watch is part of Wiltshire Police’s community policing initiative, and Speed Watch teams are only approved and accredited where there are clearly identified traffic issues. Our Community Speed Watch team was set up because of serious concerns about excessive speeding through our villages, which was confirmed by official road traffic surveys. We now have six police-approved speed monitoring locations in Hinton Parva and Bishopstone, and our volunteers record and report excessive speeds in every session, at every location. The speed limit is 30mph: the highest speed we’ve logged in Hinton Parva is 52mph, and 47 in the heart of Bishopstone, close to the primary school and village pond. Very often, particularly in peak hours, the offenders are commuters, and distribution and delivery vehicles, passing through.

The lanes through our villages are narrow, in many areas only single track without passing places. There are very few footpaths and no street lighting. There is no local bus serving the villages, though a minibus from West Berkshire passes through to Swindon and there’s a school bus. This is an active farming area, with very large agricultural machinery using the lanes daily. Body Horse Hill is the most used route to and from Wanborough from this parish and along the Icknield Way to the Oxfordshire and Berkshire villages beyond. It is very narrow, winding, and steep, with high banks and hedgerows obscuring visibility. Vehicles regularly clash and lose wing mirrors and wheel covers, have minor collisions or are even forced off the road into the hedgerow and ditches. Accidents are not recorded if they don’t involve personal injury, so no statistics exist to prove the extent of the problem.

There are three, separate, stable yards accessed from Body Horse Hill and it is increasingly used recreationally, by children on horseback, cyclists, ramblers and people walking dogs. The Parish Council is so worried about the present danger to these vulnerable road users that it recently appealed to SBC for an extension of Hinton’s 30mph zone onto Body Horse Hill and a reduction in the speed limit to 20 in the centre of Bishopstone.

Living in these villages, we know when there are problems at junctions 14 or 15 of the M4, the A419 or the A420. Vehicle numbers increase exponentially, because satnavs direct drivers onto countryside routes. Before lockdown, the Community Speed Watch team was logging an average of 160 vehicles an hour passing through at peak times. Since the start of recent roadworks this has increased to over 260 per hour. I estimate maybe 10% stick to the speed limit. An employment site of the scale proposed, in this location, must lead to more traffic speeding through our villages. Wasdells estimate phase one alone will involve 5 HGVs an hour each way in peak times. Supply vehicles, and new staff, won’t all be travelling to or from the north, south or west as per Wasdells traffic analysis. Many, if not most, will be using the eastern routes to and from - Oxford, Reading, Heathrow, the channel ports and Southampton. When there are delays and problems on the major roads, which is a very regular occurrence, they would inevitably seek alternative routes in order to meet their obligations to Wasdell and it’s customers, and come thundering through our tranquil villages whose ancient lanes were designed principally for the horse and cart.

This will cause enormous disruption to people’s lives, and exacerbate the danger to vulnerable residents including animals, children and the elderly. We are not NIMBYS – in recent years both villages have embraced carefully planned and sympathetic developments for housing and rural businesses. Nevertheless, in these villages we have no option **but** to walk in the road to get from place to place.

I urge you, Sir, please, don’t let this inappropriately sited proposal go ahead – it would cause immense and irreparable harm to one of Swindon’s few remaining truly rural parishes and the 500 people who live and work here in the countryside.