

Wendover

– House of Commons Select Committee Report

Extracts from the House of Commons Select Committee Second Special Report of Session 2015-16 (22 Feb 2016):

Wendover

131. Petitioners from Wendover were concerned about operational and construction noise effects—including at St Mary’s church and the Chiltern Way Federation school, possible vibration damage to old buildings lacking foundations, and visual impacts. They were worried about blight on local businesses and loss of tourism. They were especially worried about peak noise.

132. Rt Hon David Lidington MP pressed the case for a bored or mined tunnel instead of the cut-and-cover tunnel proposed in the Bill. Alternatively, residents wanted a covered section south of Wendover, including the viaduct at Small Dean. When we gave our preliminary view that a long tunnel through the entire AONB was not justified, we said that we were minded to recommend a southward extension of the proposed Wendover tunnel unless the Promoter produced a very convincing scheme of further noise mitigation.

133. The Promoter came forward with a proposal in SES4 for a short southward tunnel extension and enhanced noise barrier protection. Significantly, the Promoter indicated that it would also pursue installation of protection against existing noise from the A413. This will be developed in cooperation with the highway authority. It is predicted to reduce the cumulative overall noise levels to the east of the railway to below those which are currently experienced.

134. Wendover residents disputed the benefits of SES4. They disliked the visual intrusion that may derive from the southward tunnel extension and from greater noise barrier protection. There is a trade-off between effectiveness of barriers and visual intrusion.

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The Promoter has offered to provide funds to Aylesbury Vale District Council for visual mitigation of barriers.

135. Under the Bill scheme, 18 dwellings in Wendover were predicted to experience noise effects at or above the lowest observed adverse level (on an averaged basis), and 392 to experience maximum noise effects at or above the lowest observed adverse level. With the SES4 scheme, those figures are reduced to zero and 122. The latter figure is 19 higher than for an alternative mitigation scheme with higher, more visually intrusive barriers.²⁵ As we have already indicated, there is a trade-off between mitigating noise and visual effects. We incline to the view that the visual impact of taller barriers at the north of Wendover may be less acceptable than noise effects.

136. The Promoter has allocated some £250,000 to noise protection measures for St Mary's church. Representatives of the church were not satisfied with the SES4 mitigation. Among their requests was a design error assumption of 5dB and a radically higher mitigation fund for the church. We forbear from commenting on the latter, which exceeded by a factor of three the amount that we heard was spent on improving the church as a concert venue.²⁶ We believe the church will sufficiently benefit from the SES4 mitigation package including the protection it provides in relation to noise from the A413. The cost of the SES4 proposal will be approximately £10m. Protection from noise from the A413 will cost in the region of £1m. The latter will provide direct benefit to the church. In comparison, we heard that the costs of bored and mined tunnel would be upwards of £200m. We do not believe that a bored or mined tunnel would be justified. We believe that the SES4 proposal constitutes a proportionate and adequate package of mitigation for Wendover.