

Talking notes for presentation of evidence to CC Appeal

Traffic, access and highways

I am here at the invitation of the Inspector to talk about traffic and related issues.

I am a resident of Lympstone and have been since 2001. I have interests in village history, geography and community matters; I am chairman of the village hall management committee.

The survey and analysis work described later in this statement is informed by previous employment in market research and membership of the Market Research Society.

The appellant and Devon Highways have discussed highway and traffic matters extensively, culminating in DH withdrawing their objections. Central to this was the assessment made by PCL Planning for the appellant of the impact of the development on the junction at Courtlands Cross and adjacent local lanes in Lympstone parish.

The evidence I will present today will show that, in a number of important respects which were central to Devon Highways withdrawing their objection, PCL did not carry out a satisfactory or accurate assessment of the traffic impacts from the development and that this area needs to be revisited.

After we became aware on 3rd January that EDDC would not contest this topic at this appeal hearing, we, as residents in Lympstone parish, mobilised to conduct traffic counts, and also surveys of residents car use, route use and places of employment to establish facts. We also filmed video evidence of the local lanes so as to better consider the impact of the proposed development.

We have made our own forecasts of the impact of the development on Summer Lane and on other local lanes and roads. We anticipate an increase on Summer Lane of over 40% and will explain why this is so later.

First, I would like to set the context from a traffic perspective.

Lympstone is a rural parish. Whilst it is bisected by the A376, built in the 19th century as a turnpike road, all other roads in the parish are narrow country lanes or narrow village streets. These already carry significant levels of traffic and we believe, for reasons I will describe, that the proposed development will significantly increase these, presenting hazards to motorised road users, cyclists, pedestrians and horse-riders.

I need to remind the appeal that SLP have, disingenuously in my view, consistently referred to the site as an extension of Exmouth. In fact it is a greenfield site in a rural parish, adjacent

to narrow and unimproved lanes and this fact has a marked bearing on my comments on highways and traffic.

I would now like to show a video which illustrates well the local roads in the area close to the proposed development site.

VIDEO HERE

The appellant and their consultants have assembled a full and detailed transport case, building on census data, traffic generation data from comparable developments already completed and traffic counts at junctions along the A376. We accept much of the data presented by them, including that based upon traffic generation models and traffic counts which show substantial volumes of extra traffic generated by this large, mixed use site.

However we do not accept and are here to contest major aspects of the traffic distribution forecast by PCL in their report of 14 November. We believe we can prove from survey data that they are very wrong about local traffic to and from the development site.

We will also show that the physical characteristics and existing uses of local lanes makes them unsuitable for the substantial increases in local traffic which will be created by the development.

We have prepared a detailed report on the matters I will raise which includes survey data and other evidence, together with supporting maps, and I have made this available to the appellant and EDDC, and also to Devon Highways.

Phil Townsend of Devon Highways has told me:

“Although it is relatively easy to establish what numbers of vehicles a site will generate, it is always difficult, if not impossible to make accurate assumptions about where vehicles will actually go when they leave the site. There are so many variables that can apply it cannot be done with any real degree of accuracy.”

After reviewing current and likely future use of Summer Lane, we dispute the foundations of PCL’s modelling of traffic headed towards destinations south-east, east and north-east of Courtlands Cross. Summer Lane is a busy and established rat-run used in a predominantly tidal manner during rush hours to fill in for the missing final link of Dinan Way. It is also busy throughout daytime hours. It links the major housing and employment areas in eastern Exmouth with the A376, providing a short and direct route. It is a predominantly straight, though narrow, lane, with 10 well-used informal passing places in its 0.7km length. However, PCL assert that traffic leaving the development will not use it. PCL claim “all but 1% of the residential traffic will travel by the A376”, and (about Summer Lane) “in reality

few vehicles are likely to travel by this route due to the narrow carriageway". Their modelling says that only 4 vehicles leaving the development in the morning peak hour and 3 in the evening peak hour will enter any of the parish lanes – out of a total of 228. This beggars belief to us.

We know from surveys that existing residents of Courtlands Lane use Summer Lane as their predominant route to destinations to the east of central Exmouth, using this route for over 90% of journeys. We also know that they use Summer Lane intensively – from our survey data on average 7.2 trips per household per week. We conclude that many of the short distance journeys made from houses built at Courtlands Cross, over and above journeys to and from work, will use Summer Lane – for trips to Tesco, B&Q and the recycling centre for example.

PCL suggest that instead of Summer Lane vehicles to and from the proposed development will use one of three routes through suburban Exmouth. We have travelled, measured and timed these routes and compared them with routes using Summer Lane. The routes proposed by PCL are in every case longer in distance, have more junctions, have up to 6 traffic lights and consequently take much longer to travel. We conclude the routes suggested by PCL are and will be less attractive for journeys eastwards from Courtlands Cross.

So we dispute PCL's forecast of very low use of Summer Lane, and hence very low levels of turning traffic at Courtlands Cross.

We conclude that, taking into account the evidence here, the likelihood that new residents will behave as current residents do. We also note that sat-nav systems show Summer Lane as the best eastbound route from Courtlands Cross. Our modelling, detailed in our report, shows that traffic levels will rise very considerably. In our written evidence we forecast an increase of 42%.

I have dealt so far with peak hour traffic because that is what the appellant gives us data for. However that is only a fraction of the traffic that will be generated by the site. Our measurements on Summer Lane show that the total of daytime traffic between 7am and 8pm is around 8 times the peak hour. This is common sense when one considers the trips to schools, shops, the gym, the recycling centre and to the very many leisure facilities that exist around the area.

We know that Lymstone Village will be a major draw for people who would live on the proposed development. The destinations in the village include:

- The 4 nearest pubs
- The nearest primary school
- The nearest railway station

- The nearest tennis courts
- The nearest community hall
- The nearest GP surgery
- The nearest sailing club
- The nearest hairdresser
- Parish church
- Parish allotments

My colleague Helen Dimond will say later that neither the shop nor the community centre included in the plans by the appellant will be viable, so we can add those too.

We know that existing residents in Courtland Lane that they use cars for the majority of journeys to Lymptone Village, although some walk or cycle. We think that new residents would do the same.

We believe that the resulting journeys will substantially increase traffic on Courtlands Lane. The appellants have proposed a 'pinch point' where the proposed spine road through the development leaves the estate. This would not have legal force (by a traffic order) and would not deter traffic heading towards the village. If, perhaps at a later stage, it did deter some traffic, that traffic would use Longmeadow Road to access village facilities, adding to the severe traffic issues there.

I would like to read you part of an important letter from the headmaster of the village school, Tony Priest. I do so because of its bearing on traffic

“Traffic through our village at 8:45-9:15 and 3:15-3:45 is beyond the capacity of the current road infrastructure. This significant spike in volume is overwhelmingly due to the number of families driving to and from the school to deliver or collect their children. Whilst about 55% of our children live within the village or in village married quarters and walk/cycle to school, about 90 children (this is about half the total roll) arrive daily by car. Very few of these families live near enough to the school to make walking a realistic option. This situation is going to become worse with children joining us from the proposed new development. I would be very concerned about the safety of our children walking and cycling to school if the volume of traffic increases still further.

The appellant will say that schoolchildren will not go to the village school and will go instead to schools in Exmouth. However Mr Priest says:

“The two other nearby primary schools, Brixington and Exeter Road , have already advised DCC that they have no capacity to take more children than their current limit (Exeter Road 210 pupils Brixington 420 pupils) without additional capital investment, investment that DCC have not yet committed. It may well be therefore that only one or two schools, not necessarily anywhere near their new homes, will have spaces for children of these new families.”

He also says:

“In any event we live in a schooling climate where parental choice is a national and local political priority. I am confident that the majority of these families will apply to come here and, if their initial application is rejected by DCC's Admission Team, that many will appeal. Many appeals are successful (certainly the majority) and the expectation is then placed upon the school to manage the logistics of any additional children. An overcrowded local school, losing its distinctive nature as a consequence of size is another factor here, but my principle point is one of traffic management.”

Dealing now with the routes to the village that you have seen on the video, we are concerned that:

- Courtlands Lane beyond the development site and also Sowden Lane would experience significantly increased traffic, and that this would present unacceptable hazards. This route has a typical width of 2.7m with lesser minimum widths, blind corners and long stretches without footways.
- This traffic would exacerbate the severe traffic issues along the on-road section of the Exe Estuary Trail cycle route on Sowden Lane and in the village centre. This already the subject of discussion with Devon CC because of the impact of 200,000 pedestrians and cyclists a year.

We think that, certainly at some times of the week and throughout the summer, these lanes have reached and often exceeded their capacity. Going beyond a ‘tipping point’ deters non-motorised use of these lanes.

The appellant has made much of the sustainability of transport links, and I welcome this as a committee member of the Avocet Line Rail Users Group. However, the opportunities suggested by the appellant are less attractive than suggested.

Car parking at Lymptstone station is severely limited (to a total of 11 spaces which are habitually used by residents rather than travellers). We surveyed bus and train connections at Topsham and found no-one using these at all in a morning rush hour. The appellant understates times to travel to Exeter in this way; bus and train timetables are not synchronised and buses are often delayed by traffic conditions on the A376.

Cycling, to Lymptstone, Topsham and Exeter, depends on Courtlands and Sowden Lanes offering a safe route for cyclists. This is currently marginal and would worsen considerably as car and van traffic from the proposed development was added.

Other sites in the village exist to accommodate the 40 or 50 houses EDDC say are appropriate for Lymptstone in the next 15 years. Because such sites are within or

immediately adjacent to the existing built-up boundary of the village, they would produce per household less traffic. Residents would be able to walk to village facilities. And of course the overall scale envisaged by us and EDDC is so much less.

Overall we forecast very significantly increased traffic on rural lanes and village roads in Lympstone parish. We think this is unacceptable and is a valid reason for the application to build on this site to be rejected.