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19 December 2017

I received your name and contact details on a petition that was sent to me regarding the extended closure of Woods Lane during construction work. Thank you for taking the time to express your concern on the impact this has had on you. I thought it worthwhile to set out what has happened so far. I also want to provide the details of some local councillors with whom I have worked to raise concerns and offer advice on mitigation to Suffolk County Council.

To start with the planning application itself, Christchurch Land and Estates secured the planning consent. Their application was rejected by Suffolk Coastal District Council. Appeals can be made to the Planning Inspectorate against any planning decision and in this case the appeal was allowed. The decision note sets out why the appeal was allowed and can be downloaded online at <https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/ViewDocument.aspx?fileid=12326538>.

Christchurch is a property company that specialises in identifying and securing sites for housing. They have won and lost other applications on appeal to the Planning Inspectorate in Suffolk Coastal in recent years. As often happens, the site with planning permission then gets sold on to a housing builder, in this case to Bloor Homes. Bloor Homes then has to comply with any planning conditions and building regulations, including connections to water and sewerage. The builder liaises with local utilities. I understand that Anglia Water asked Bloor Homes to connect in the centre of the road as there were other utility connections at the sides of the road.

From there, amongst other regulatory matters, the builder agrees a plan with the highways authority (Suffolk County Council) as part of its application to use the highway to undertake the necessary works. It is this stage of the process which I think went somewhat awry. The County Council has to grant permission for the work on the road to be done but I think that a lot of assumptions were made by officers in agreeing the traffic management and road closure plan. No meaningful consultation was undertaken and despite repeated questioning and meetings, even now, answers to certain questions have not been given on how officers agreed the assumptions on work patterns and the necessary length of road closure. That is particularly where local councillors and I have been pushing on both the basis of how the plan was agreed and then the actual management of traffic during the closure.

Bloor Homes has undertaken direct consultation regarding the next closure phase and whether working days can be extended. I certainly believe the road closure timing can be shortened if the construction hours are somewhat longer than they are now, though I would not expect the neighbouring residents to agree to 24/7 working or anything near that. I keenly await the outcome of that consultation.

That said, I would like to thank all officers and councillors involved in trying to mitigate the impact of this closure. I have been working with local councillors who represent those most affected, especially Councillors Alexander Nicoll (alexander.nicoll@suffolk.gov.uk; 07922586303), Andrew Reid (Andrew.reid@suffolk.gov.uk; 07545423799) and Geoff Holdcroft (geoff.holdcroft@suffolkcoastal.gov.uk; 07953309723). I also met Cabinet Member responsible, Councillor Jane Storey, to discuss this situation and future development proposals. This particular issue highlighted the limitations of Woods Lane and the Melton crossroads for access to Melton, Ufford and the entire peninsula. Our councils are ambitious for growth in building homes and businesses but we need to plan necessary infrastructure to accompany this, in advance, not afterwards or locate them in places that can upgrade the necessary roads and other infrastructure more readily.

If you have any further questions about the next phase of closure, as ever, if you contact me, I will endeavour to obtain answers or signpost you to the best person to help.

Yours sincerely,

Therese Coffey