



Valerie Vaz



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Labour Party Candidate for Walsall South

Mr David Stephens
Deputy Chief Executive, Sandwell MBC
Sandwell Council House
PO BOX 2374
Oldbury, B69 3DE

Our Ref: a/ciw/BescotSlper/Let

9 December 2019

Dear Mr Stephens

Re: Bescot Concrete Sleeper Factory (The Site)

I am writing again to object to the proposed Sleeper Factory at Friar Park ahead of the Council's Planning Committee meeting on Tuesday 17 December 2019 and to ask that the meeting be deferred for proper consultation with the public.

I am setting out below the reasons the facility should not be placed at the Site:

(i) Environmental Statement

I was informed in a letter dated 8 February 2019 that many of the questions I had raised about the Site with Network Rail would be answered in their Environmental Statement. However, despite requesting the Statement in letters dated 12 April 2019, 13 May 2019 and 25 June 2019, Network Rail did not provide me with a copy. The Statement, only made available on the Sandwell MBC's Planning Portal on 6 August 2019, is over 2000 pages long. It is impossible for my constituents to consult this document only on the website. This would not be deemed to be an accessible consultation.

(ii) Traffic

Walsall has some of the highest levels of air pollution in the country owing to its proximity to the M6 and congestion on its major roads. It is estimated that 4000 HGV deliveries would be needed during construction and that between 7,776 and 12,816 deliveries would be made each year once the Site is operational. The Site would operate twenty-four hours a day and the route would pass homes, schools and care homes in my constituency. There is a significant human cost of the proposed development and my constituents are opposed to the development.

I can find no consideration of the environmental impact of traffic through Walsall South in Network Rail's Environmental Statement despite having raised concerns about the increase in congestion and air pollution in every interaction I have had with the organisation.

(iii) Consultation

Network Rail's conduct has been opaque and obstructive throughout this process. They maintained that it had conducted adequate consultation about the new development despite not contacting Walsall residents until March 2019. Whilst there were two consultation events on 29 and 30 March 2019, these events did not provide all the necessary information to the public as the Environmental Statement was not available for public scrutiny.

(iv) Planning

In a letter to me dated 14 August 2019 Sandwell MBC's Director of Regeneration and Growth noted that the 'proposed development does not accord with the provisions of the Development Plan in force in the area in which it is situated' (encl).

(v) Alternative Sites

In a meeting on 25 January 2019 Network Rail said that they had considered 28 sites overall and had narrowed this down to 8 sites, including Crewe. In the Environmental Statement Crewe is not referred to and no reason is given why this prospective site was refused further consideration by Network Rail. It appears that Crewe, as a well-connected rail hub with extensive rail infrastructure, would be a preferable site for a Sleeper Factory.

I have written to Douglas Oakervee CBE, Chair of the independent HS2 review, as I have serious concerns about how the decision was made to close the Washwood Heath site, how Bescot was chosen as an alternative and how Network Rail have conducted themselves in pursuing this development.

I have requested that the review investigate the decision-making process behind Network Rail's proposed Concrete Sleeper factory.

Moreover, you will be aware that currently, Parliament is dissolved and there are no MPs. To consider such an important application which has far reaching effects without any MPs having the time to consult our constituents is one no reasonable authority should undertake.

In my view, a Planning Committee consideration of this application ahead of the publication of the Oakervee Review and when MPs would only be sworn in from 16-19 December 2019 is premature, unreasonable, would be detrimental to my constituents and should be deferred until January 2019.

Yours ever
Valerie Vaz

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cc. Constituents

cc. Chief Executive, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Encl. ✓

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