

# THE DAILY GRUNCH

SERVING VILLAGE COMMUNITIES IN NORTH BEDFORDSHIRE



*Produced by Grassroots Publications*

*Previously The Rural Grunch*

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**THE EAST WEST RAILWAY  
IS COMING TO WILDEN  
CLOSE TO THESE HOUSES**

**EVERYONE MUST FIGHT THIS  
PLEASE DO NOT BE COMPLACENT**

# EAST WEST RAILWAY ROUTE THROUGH WILDEN

The announcement was made on Friday 26th May that the East West Railway would go to the north of Ravensden and also to the north of Wilden.

This is instead of the alignment that would have gone to the north of Renhold.

It was always the case that East West Railway would go for their preferred Route E option. These were alignments on that route.

Before Ravensden and Wilden, the route leaves Bedford via Poets, goes up between Clapham and Brickhill then proceeds via Graze Hill and Butler Street, edges past Great Wood and crosses the B660 between Grange Farm and the Water Tower.

It then crosses Shrubbery Lane near to the junction of Ravensden Road, then goes about 150 metres north of Wilden Village Hall and crosses the North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail and Colmworth Road before heading out to Colesden.

## WHO WILL IT AFFECT

Everyone in Wilden will be affected. Obviously it will affect some more than others.

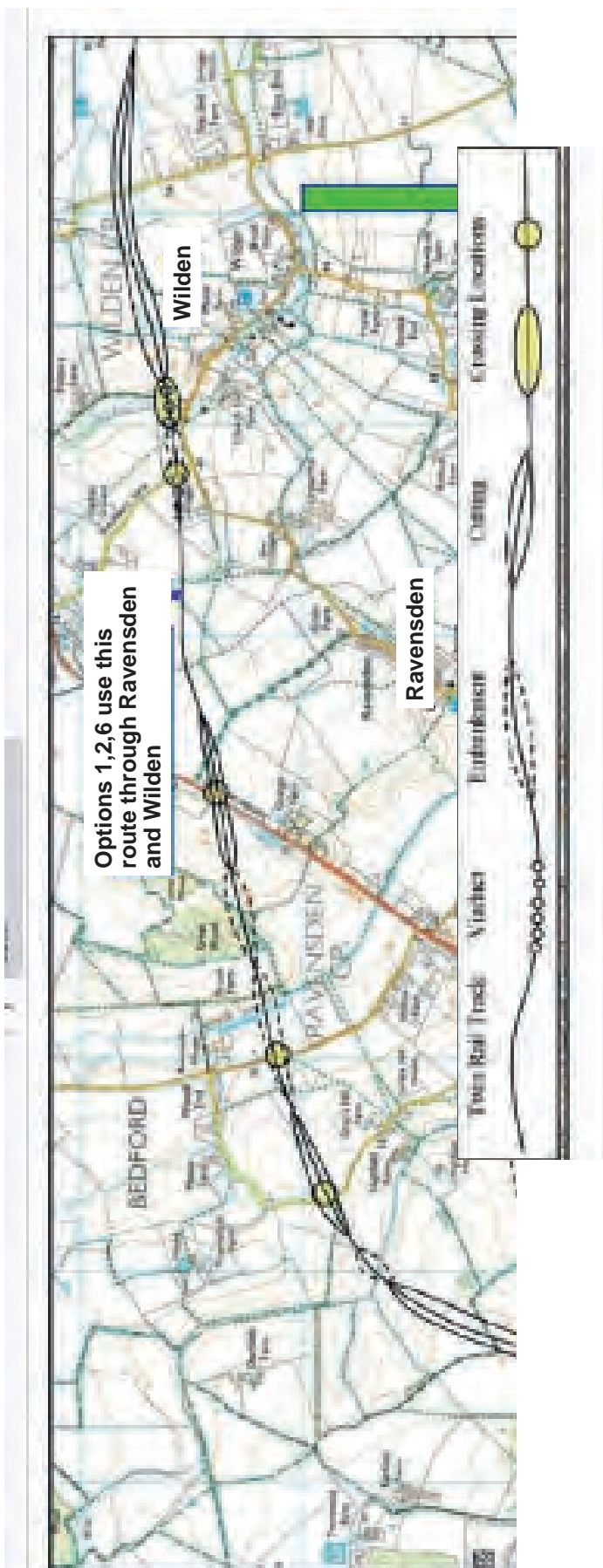
The general coverage has focussed on other areas that the East West Railway will affect such as the Poets area in Bedford. There will be additional coverage on the movement of the St John's Station to an area close to Bedford Hospital.

This may mean Wilden will move down the pecking order in terms of coverage. Therefore it is important that Wilden makes a noise on this matter.

As the proposed route approaches Wilden it will cross Shrubbery Lane not far from Wilden Cricket Ground.

Those living on the High Street close to the Village Hall will be within ear shot of the railway line.

Walking routes in the area will be badly affected including the North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail.





# RICHARD FULLER RESPONSE TO EAST WEST RAILWAY ANNOUNCEMENT

## 26th MAY 2023

*North East Bedfordshire MP Richard Fuller responds to the news that the East West Railway will pass through rural north Bedfordshire. This is a transcript from his video message*

**The government has made an important decision about East-West Rail and the route that it will take from Bedford to Cambridge.**

This decision has significant implications for local residents, particularly those directly affected, but ultimately for us all.

But I have to say that I do not support this extension to the railway. I do not support the government's decision.

And I want to explain to you, really what's been announced today and then how my initial enthusiasm has changed over the intervening years to scepticism and now to opposition.

So let's have a look first at the announcement of the route decision. As residents will know, there were five route decisions for consideration, two of which route alignments, eight and nine went south, and three that went more northerly through Bedfordshire – one, two and six. And that's the set that East-West Rail has decided upon.

So coming out of Bedford and turning north between Clapham and Brickhill and then going to the north of Ravensden, just to the north of Wilden, before travelling east.

But then East West Rail's decision is not what they put in the consultation. They have now decided that the route will cut perhaps south of the Black Cat roundabout to create a new station at Tempsford before the route then circles north again towards Cambourne in Cambridgeshire. And that railway station in Tempsford is marked as an East West Rail station, not an interchange station on the information that I have right now, and that's a point I want to follow up with East West Rail.

The Sandy station is not at all threatened by this. But I know that the decision, the route



● **The East West Railway will cross Shrubbery Lane in Wilden, somewhere in the picture above. It will be close to the junction with Ravensden Road.**

decision, going through some of the most beautiful parts of rural north Bedfordshire will be a great disappointment to many of the residents particularly those in Ravensden and Wilden.

And let me make another point, East West Rail was supposed to present at least an outline business case today, alongside the Chancellor's announcement, but we don't have one.

We have a set of bland generalities about how East West Rail will unlock growth. This is not the way to make decisions, substantial decisions about the use of taxpayer's money. I am extremely disappointed and I will be writing to the chief executive of East West Rail asking to meet with her so that she can present to me her business case.

Now, it might surprise you that initially I supported East West Rail, but that support

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has eroded as I have sought answers to some of my questions. First of all, I wanted to know what was the original justification for East West Rail? Because nothing comes without strings attached when it comes to government spending.

Secondly, why was this particular route chosen? It surprised many people. Thirdly, as I've talked to local residents, they have told me they have been kept in the dark at key stages. And I want to understand why.

I wanted to understand why the proposed railway pays so little regard to our environment. And finally and most importantly, the business case. Does that mean it is good value for taxpayers.

Now, the original justification, to find that, you have to go back to 2017 and a report that was put together by a group called the National Infrastructure Commission. They created a report called Partnering for Prosperity. And that report purported to say that it was about economic growth.

But in reality, if you read through the document, what that is, is a plan for housing in the so called OxCam Arc: the area for Oxford and Cambridge, which undoubtedly has a tremendous potential for growth. But what the Infrastructure Commission was trying to do was find a rationale for one million homes to be built in the four counties between now and 2050.

Not one million homes for local residents only, but for local residents, all the growth that might be achieved, but also 3000 homes for London overspill.

And you know what? I thought I was cautious. I did not feel that represented a good plan for our area. Not when you



● **These properties on the Wilden-Ravensden border will be affected by the East West Railway as it will pass only a few metres from them.**

consider the pressure we are already under in terms of pressure to school places, getting an appointment with a GP, getting access to a NHS dentist.

And the numbers speak for themselves. If you look at the numbers from the census in 2011 to the census in 2021, for the number of households across the UK as a whole, the number of households has gone up by 6%. But in our area, my constituency, that number is 21%, three and a half times faster than the national average in terms of housing growth.

And I did not feel it was right for East West Rail to go ahead if that meant there was going to be even more pressure on those local services because of undue housing growth.

Then I came to the route decision. Well in 2020, this was the biggest surprise to me. Why had East West Rail chosen a longer hillier route? And why was Bedford the one town centre where the railway was diverted to go

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in and through? So I went back to the 2019 submission put in by the previous mayor to the National Infrastructure Commission and East West Rail in their consultation.

And I looked to see what the economic benefits would be for the town I was born in, one I care passionately about, one I want to see grow well, and the borough as a whole.

And the answer was that the benefits were marginal at best, even as in the submission from the Council. And when that route was compared to other routes, those benefits became vanishingly small indeed. Now, there was an argument we would attract government funding, national government funding, but there are plenty of other ways for councils to attract funding from governments.

It does not require a railway with all the strings attached in terms of additional housing for councils and towns to get that funding. So I have been concerned that the business case as put forward by the previous mayor, the previous council, does not stack up for local residents in terms of growth that is expected or anticipated to generate.

Now when I spoke to councillors, your borough councillors, they said that the council back in 2019 did not even tell them about the submission they were putting in. When I spoke to parish councils all across the affected areas, they said they had not been fully involved in the consultation by East West Rail. They had been kept in the dark.

Councillors, parish councils, kept in the dark. But you were kept in the dark too. East West Rail put that consultation out in 2019 and halfway through they decided to spin all the numbers around in terms of the costs and



● **The East West Railway will run close to this section of Wilden High Street.**

the benefits. And so if you looked at the consultation documents, you would have anticipated a very different route from the one East West Rail then decided to move forward with. And I believe, it's that lack of transparency that has severely eroded support from residents in affected areas and that has significant political and community consequences.

And then the environmental damage. This railway, this proposed route will go through some of the most rural parts of Bedfordshire. As I said, it is a hillier, longer route. So we asked, I asked the chief executive of East West Rail to come and see the route implications.

There was even a section at one time where the railway would go for 2000 metres, but it would only touch the actual ground for 200 of those 2000 metres.

Loads of viaducts, loads of embankments, loads of disruption in our communities while that railway is built. And as we know, this vision that is supposed to be galvanising 21<sup>st</sup>

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century economy will be based on diesel and not on electric. A 19<sup>th</sup> century railway trying to solve a 21<sup>st</sup> century problem.

Now, with all of this, ultimately my role, one of the most important roles I have on your behalf is to act as a defender of your interest as taxpayers, to make sure that your tax money is put to good use, that it will actually achieve the objectives and that projects come in on time.

I have to say when I went through the business case, the original business case of East West Rail I could not see how it would add up. Travel patterns subsequently have changed particularly after Covid. Who is going to use this railway?

There is a question whether the real justification was for freight rather than for passenger traffic. My view is that there is a better, greener alternative to East West Rail.

And let me outline some of those principles. First of all, unlike East West Rail, the real solution to unlock growth in this area is to attract is a transportation system that is centred on our net-zero goals and is focused on sustainable growth.

That means a transport system that is based on electric vehicles and gives a lot more scope to the role for buses and for active travel. The second principle, unlike East West Rail, the alternative must meet the needs of the modern workforce and particularly the workforces that tend to get attracted to science parks and universities.

These are areas where knowledge capital rather than financial capital is so important. And my judgement says that the best way to unlock that talent, to unleash that capital



● **This is the North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail footpath that runs from Wilden High Street to the fields where the East West Railway will cross.**

is to focus on the clusters of communities around the academic institutions so that the people working for company A and company B can meet easily and regularly to come up with new ideas and potentially start new businesses. Networking is key to unlocking growth in this modern economy.

Third principle and this is where the East West Rail proposals and the whole OxCam Arc initiative falls down. If you want to do something significant to unlock growth, it always pays to look at other parts of the world to see what have they done so you can learn from the best international examples and also avoid their mistakes.

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And one of the tragedies about the OxCam Arc proposals is that they have a go it alone strategy, a ribbon across four counties, based on a 19<sup>th</sup> century railway as a way to compete for the global tech centres in Silicon Valley, in Guangzhou, in Japan, Australia and others. And I don't believe that is best practice and frankly I don't think it's going to work.

And fourthly, the alternative must galvanise and not run roughshod over local decision makers. One of the things that I have learned in politics is that when bureaucracies try and do things to communities, they get pushback.

But when ideas bubble up from communities, from your local representatives, you are much more likely to get a solution that can be

grounded, can work and can make progress. And a solution must fix pressures on our public services before we add additional pressure as a result of anything that comes along with the strings attached to this railway. And of course, it's got to make sense for taxpayers.

Now, this announcement does not end the discussion on a greener, better alternative, but it does make it more important, in my view, support for East West Rail, this poorly implemented project, is still in question. There are better answers for the government, better answers for our environment, better answers for sustainable growth and better answers for my residents.

And as your Member of Parliament, I am going to be working with all local authorities that are interested in a greener, better alternative.

**Thank you**

**Richard Fuller**



● The Public Footpath sign, above left, which will lead you to the East West Railway, which will cross the field, above right, in the direction of Colmworth Road Wilden.



# NO TO EAST WEST RAILWAY



The above picture is where the East West Railway will cross the North Bedfordshire Heritage Trail in Wilden.

The Trail was created around the year 2000 aiming to attract walkers to discover the underrated area of north Bedfordshire and its heritage.

The East West Railway would be a disaster for the Wilden section of the Trail, which starts and finishes at St Paul's Square, Bedford.

## EAST WEST RAILWAY PUBLIC MEETINGS

Tuesday 13th June .....	Bedford Heights
Tuesday 20th June .....	Ravensden Village Hall
Thursday 22nd June.....	Eversden Village Hall
Monday 26th June .....	Harston Village Hall
Friday 30th June .....	Summerlin Centre, Woburn Sands
Tuesday 4th July.....	Lidlington Village Hall
Friday 7th July .....	Tempsford Stuart Memorial Village Hall
Tuesday 11th July.....	Cambridge Belfry Hotel
Wednesday 12th July .....	John Paul II Centre, Bicester
Thursday 20th July.....	Love's Farm, St Neots

*Events will take place from 2pm-8pm*