

Birchanger Parish Council

**Response to Highways Agency's Proposals for
Stansted Generation2 Access from M11 and A120**

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26th June 2008

Introduction

Birchanger Parish Council has reviewed the Highway Agency's plans for access to Stansted Generation 2 from the M11 and A120. We expressed our opposition to proposals that were substantially the same as those now proposed in our response to the G2 Surface Access consultation last year. Our position has not changed, and we have set out some of the reasons for our opposition within this document.

Birchanger

Birchanger is a village of around 340 houses which borders the airport perimeter on the South West side of the airport. Once entirely rural in aspect the advent of the motorway along Birchanger's eastern flank brought additional traffic noise to the village. Over the years the airport has developed, but the actual character of the village has not changed.

There are 128 listed buildings within a one mile radius of the airport and some of them are in Birchanger. Uttlesford has the second highest number of listed buildings in the country, coming second only to London. Birchanger is mentioned in the Domesday Book as a small hamlet surrounded by woodland, and boasts a church which dates from Saxon times. Its name is derived from two Saxon words, meaning a beech tree and a place. It still remains rural in nature.

Birchanger is a settled community, with many families who have lived in the village through generations. The names you see on the War memorial for the First World War are still the ones among the residents of today. There is a sense of community, and although there is no village shop, there is an active sports and social club, a popular pub, church, primary school and numerous voluntary groups for all ages. These build and maintain the strong sense of community in the village.

Birchanger Parish Council represents all sections of the community, and is not political. With the co-operation of residents in Birchanger the parish Council produced a Parish Plan which has been recognised by the District Council. At every Annual Parish Meeting the residents vote to fight further expansion of the airport, and to protect the Green Belt which surrounds the village. Birchanger has suffered more than enough development in recent years, and residents are determined to protect their village from the additional noise, pollution, urbanisation, lighting over looking and traffic problems further expansion will inevitably bring. The role of the Parish Council is to follow the clear mandate given by those who live here.

Our overall position

We are strongly opposed to the creation of the proposed J8/8a/8b superjunction. Our main concern relates to the northbound link road that is planned to connect the existing junction 8 with the new junction 8b and with the M11 to the north of J8b, as this will be very close indeed to established properties within the village. We have expanded these objections later in our response.

We have no comments to make on the proposals for access to the airport from the A120 as they have no immediate or direct effect on Birchanger.

Surface Access Strategy

We question the entire BAA Surface Access Strategy, of which this scheme forms an important part. BAA has made much of its green credentials, even if they haven't really stood up to scrutiny. It is true, however, that a relatively high proportion of Stansted Airport users arrive by train compared with other airports. This is clearly desirable but the percentage figure is declining as user numbers rise. BAA seems content to let the relative modal share of rail decrease at a time when green issues are high on the political and public agenda and when they are, as part of the G2 planning process, in a position to influence users' transport choices.

We wish to see BAA (with other agencies and Government, if necessary) put forward realistic proposals to minimise private car and taxi use of Stansted. Until this is forthcoming we will oppose the current surface access proposals.

The Northbound Link Road

How it affects us

The proposals allow for alterations to the link road running north from junction 8. At present this passes to the west of the flyover carrying northbound traffic from j8a to the airport and joins the M11 about 500m north of j8. It runs fairly close to Birchanger Lane but does not pass very near to dwellings.

The proposals change the alignment of this slip road so that, instead of curving to the right after about 300m it continues to run parallel to the motorway until some 650m from j8, where it splits into two. The right fork continues to the new j8b; the left fork bypasses j8b and joins the M11 about 1.5km north of junction 8.

This new alignment passes very close to residential properties in Birchanger. The properties in Duck End will be less than 200m from the link road at a point very close to the fork. Duck End Farmhouse is even closer, at about 100m from the link road.

There is at present bunding between the village and the M11. This is to be removed under the proposals and replaced with a lower embankment between Hallingbury Brook and the link road. Despite the planned provision of a 2.5m environmental barrier and some mature trees it is clear from your Landscape Cross Section C that the upper parts of high-sided vehicles, sign gantries and, worst of all, the top two-thirds of lighting standards will be clearly visible.

Our Main Objection

Even though it has been a close neighbour to Stansted Airport for over 60 years the airport made no impact on the village for most of its existence. It remained a tranquil small Essex village.

The arrival of the M11 up to j8 and then to j9a in the mid-70s caused some disruption during the construction, but, despite being quite close to the village it was soon accepted, even though the noise was frequently distracting.

This was to change with the construction of j8a to serve Stansted Airport in the early part of this decade. The elevated flyovers and their associated lighting were, and remain, visually intrusive. Also the proximity to the

village meant that the construction process had a negative effect on the village with traffic, noise and dust day and night.

The construction of j8b and its associated link roads would be in some ways a repeat of what happened when j8a was built, but far, far worse as the new works lie even closer to the village. The construction of this scheme will cause intolerable inconvenience to the same people that suffered when j8a was constructed. And when the new roads open the existing problems - loss of visual amenity, light pollution, poor air quality and noise - will, despite what is said in the ES, get much worse for these people.

It is, quite simply, unreasonable to expect the people of Birchanger to put up with it.

Other Objections to the Proposal

As we have stated, we are fundamentally opposed to this entire project, which is in any case a dependent component of the greater Stansted G2 project, to which we have even greater objections. Even so, there are some lesser concerns we have over these proposals and about some parts of the documentation associated with them.

Possible Congestion south of J8b

The M11 is only two lanes in each direction north of j8a and already suffers from slow traffic for much of the day due to there being a high volume of traffic, much of it HGVs. We are concerned that the high volume of traffic that would be expected to join at j8b if the Stansted G2 project goes ahead, coupled with confused drivers arriving at the j8/8a/8b complex from the south, will lead to slow-moving traffic on the northbound M11 through junction 8b, backing up to j8 and beyond. This will cause a further reduction of the air quality in Birchanger.

Construction Access

We object strongly to Birchanger Lane being used as an initial construction access route. The proposed widening of the Lane to enable construction vehicles to use it will enhance the feeling of living in a building site. Furthermore, the visible presence of heavy vehicles in Birchanger Lane will do nothing to discourage the drivers of other heavy vehicles from trying to use Birchanger Lane as a cut-through. Despite 'unsuitable for HGVs' signs at each end of the Lane this is already a problem, leading to stuck lorries, backed-up residents and damage to verges and footways.

Environmental Ecology Studies

These were done as desk studies, and appear to underestimate the diversity of wildlife in the Village. While we can understand the desire to reduce the costs of these studies, we don't really understand why the residents of the village were not asked what they saw in their gardens and the surrounding fields. A very rapid straw poll has shown that the following species are found in the village.

Mammals: Badger, fox, stoat, bat (unknown species)

Birds: house sparrow, dunnock, song thrush; jay; fieldfare, redwing, skylark, greater spotted woodpecker; green woodpecker; tree-creeper; nuthatch; kingfisher; grey heron; sparrowhawk; greenfinch; bullfinch; goldfinch

The Birchanger Townscape

You seem to have chosen to present pictures of Birchanger that are designed to create a negative impression. For instance, you have included a picture taken at the junction of Birchwood and Birchanger Lane that is cluttered with poorly-sited street furniture. Had your photographer taken pictures from the same spot in other directions the impressions would have been much more favourable. More importantly, it would have also been more representative of the village, which has many attractive dwellings amid colourful gardens and fields lined with ancient hedgerows and mature oaks.

Like in the Ecological Study mentioned in the last section, you seem to be deliberately downplaying the positive aspects of the village, presumably to present any loss of amenity as being relatively unimportant.

Cycle Track E

You state that this will form part of the airport cycleway linking Birchanger Lane with the airport. The route of this is still undecided. Birchanger Parish Council has opposed the suggested routing through the village which is through a dangerous part of the Lane with a double bend, and we believe that sustrans agrees with our assessment. We are concerned that if you provide the cycle path you are suggesting then the route through our village will become a fait accompli.

Conclusion

This is a short document. We realise that this is not the place to argue against the G2 project itself, so we have restricted our comments to the current Highways Agency proposals.

We are fundamentally opposed to the construction of junction 8b and its associated link roads because of the severely detrimental impact it will have on some members of the village.

We fervently hope that the second runway is never built, making the provisions in the current proposals redundant.