**Response to East West Rail Traction Unit Proposal – Mill Lane - DRAFT**

Islip Parish Council responds to the East West Rail (EWR) consultation regarding the proposed traction power compound at Mill Lane. Recent guidance from SLCC (January 2025) confirms major infrastructure projects must comply with conservation regulations, with a statutory duty to preserve or enhance such areas' character. We must note serious concerns about the inadequate consultation process, with limited disclosure at the Bicester meeting and many village residents remaining unaware of these plans.

**1. Conservation Area and Heritage Impact**

The site lies within the "River Valley and Islip Mill Character Area" of Islip's designated Conservation Area and Green Belt. Under the Planning Act 1990, developments must preserve or enhance Conservation Areas' character. The proposed structure (15m long, 4m wide, 4m high) **would dominate existing structures, including 1.5m fences and single-story barn conversions which, though taller with their roofs, sit on lower ground**, creating an industrial intrusion into this protected landscape characterised by 17th/18th century vernacular architecture. The development would require the removal of a landmark sycamore tree in the conservation area to facilitate access and would particularly impact single-story barn conversions which would be dwarfed by the structure.

**2. Community Impact**

Our concerns are informed by specific experience.

Previous EWR works in Islip resulted in:

- Documented damage to village infrastructure remains unrepaired

- Promised improvements for impact mitigation were not delivered

- Poor communication with residents and Council

These experiences necessitate binding commitments and robust oversight for any new developments**.**

Additional impacts include:

- Potential relocation of a family with a disabled child

- Compulsory purchase near the donkey field

- Construction disruption through narrow village roads

- Impact on property values

- Ongoing maintenance access through residential areas

- Impact on peaceful enjoyment of outdoor spaces

**3. Environmental Impact**

a) Flood Risk

- Documented village flooding issues

- Impact on surface water drainage

- Flood plain relationship with River Ray

- Risk to surrounding properties

b) Wildlife and Biodiversity

- Threat to existing habitats

- Disruption to local ecosystems

- Impact on historic infrastructure including stone pitching

c) Light and Noise Impact

- Light pollution in currently unlit rural area

- Noise from cooling units affecting nearby properties

- Ongoing operational noise concerns

**4. Technical Considerations**

* Impact on conservation-appropriate infrastructure (compressed gravel footways)
* Construction access through narrow roads with existing parking constraints

Specific access constraints requiring either:

* + Construction access directly from railway line, or
  + Access via level crossing from Kidlington Road
* Safety concerns regarding power transformer location and possibility of explosion.
* Power supply routing questions
* Embankment and footbridge replacement implications
* Site selection based on incorrect assumption of Network Rail land ownership
* Opportunity for positive enhancement through cycle and pedestrian route alongside railway to encourage sustainable station access

**5. Alternative Sites**

We strongly urge EWR to conduct a comprehensive assessment of alternative locations:

* Consider sites outside the Conservation Area within the specified 1km radius
* Evaluate locations on the opposite side of the track
* Assess all potential sites within the required distance parameters
* Provide transparent criteria for site selection and rejection
* Demonstrate why alternative locations within the 1km radius were rejected

**One specific alternative site that warrants serious consideration is the land at the end of the station car park. This Network Rail-owned site is adjacent to the track and platform end, where lighting infrastructure already exists. It is well-separated from residential properties, with the nearest (Station House) protected by a long garden and tree screening. The site offers straightforward vehicle access and is in an already partly urbanised setting with existing rail infrastructure including the metal pedestrian overbridge, raised platform, and metal railings. We request specific justification if this site is deemed unsuitable.**

These alternatives should better balance operational needs with conservation and community interests.

**6. Information Requests**

- Physical marking of structure dimensions

- Environmental Impact Assessment

- Visual impact studies/photomontages

- Flood risk assessment

- Construction management plans

- Heritage impact assessment

- Alternative site assessment

- Detailed technical specifications including noise and light impacts

- Clarification of operational requirements and maintenance schedules

**7. Recommendations**

1. Prioritise documented alternative locations

2. Conduct impact assessments

3. Address historical maintenance failures

4. Consider less intrusive designs

5. Provide binding mitigation commitments

6. Demonstrate Conservation Area enhancement

7. Improve consultation process and information provision

**Conclusion**

While supporting rail connectivity improvements, we cannot support this proposal given its impact on our Conservation Area and community. We urge prioritisation of identified alternatives that better serve operational and community needs.