

To the Inspector -

I attach a full transcript of the traffic video "B1456- A Road on Overload" which is submitted as evidence on behalf of the Shotley Parishes Alliance. The film was shot and scripted by me with information from the Buchanan Report, Suffolk County Council and the Shotley parishes. The film was shot in December and January mainly during the morning and evening rush hours.

I am chairman of the Woolverstone Residents' Association and a Woolverstone parish councillor.

My contact details are - Laurie Mayer, The Holt, Woolverstone, nr. Ipswich, Suffolk IP9 1AR.
telephone: 01473 780168

B1456 – A Road on Overload
(Traffic Evidence from Shotley Parishes Alliance to Ganges Public Inquiry)

(DVD- 10)

Sunrise on the Shotley peninsula and the dawn of another rush hour.

This Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is also one of the longest cul-de-sacs in Suffolk.

The character and appearance of the whole area is being eroded by a rising tide of traffic.

The B1456 - the only route in and out - is already on overload.

At peak times – on this stretch by the River Orwell - the road is at or above its official capacity of 1500 cars per hour.

(DVD-25)

The morning rush down Freston hill is like Le Mans – a relentless stream of cars pushing the road to its limit. The Ganges plan would put it significantly over. The developers own traffic experts predict flows of 1649 cars an hour on this stretch – that's 10% over capacity.

(Aerials Tape D 11.33)

Most of the traffic starts here - the remote and isolated community of Shotley.

(Aerials Tape D 14. 37-47)

Located at the tip of the peninsula its ten miles from the nearest town – Ipswich. That's why Shotley is officially classified as unsustainable.

For its 2000 residents this narrow, winding main road is the only link to jobs, shops and services. Access is vital and in the absence of viable alternatives the only realistic mode of travel is the private car.

(DVD– 20/22/23)

Sometimes getting into town can be a bit of a problem. The road has always been prone to seasonal flooding.

The Orwell flooded in November and again in December. The most recent high tide led to chaotic scenes as motorists battled their way through the rising waters.

Many seemed determined to press on regardless. But then this is the only way to town.

There is no other way round.

Even side roads were inundated/

Some drivers took fright and turned back.

The peninsula was effectively cut off.

(DVD- 24)

Traffic was totally disrupted and soon ground to a halt. It was gridlock under the bridge and all the way back to Ipswich.

(DVD- 23)

Police came to the rescue - escorting small convoys of cars which chugged slowly towards dry land and safety. But for an hour or two Shotley was marooned – more island than peninsula.

FADE

(DVD- 5)

Recent years have seen a big increase in the number of people who live on the peninsula but travel to work elsewhere.

More and more of them are rail commuters who drive to Manningtree. to catch the faster train service to London.

(DVD- 39)

This has led to narrow lanes off the main road being used as rat runs to join the A137 at Brantham. Ruth Longhurst lives on one of them – New Lane in Harkstead.

“What’s the problem..?”

(DVD–start of 39 and towards end of 41)

The intensity of traffic has left its mark on these cross country lanes – the edges have been churned into mud and deep ruts.

The lanes look ravaged - barely wide enough to contain the flow of vehicles. Banks and verges are worn away - scarred by tyre tracks and skids - the sudden braking of vehicles forced into the side to let others pass. Constant erosion has cratered the road leaving strings of potholes, muddy puddles and a treacherous road surface.

(DVD – 42)

Significant stretches of the B1456 are just as rough round the edges.

It’s the wear and tear of 10,000 vehicle trips a day up and down the peninsula.

Three years ago the highways authority highlighted the damage and dangers inherent in loading more traffic on an infrastructure not built to cope with current demands.

On the likely impact of the Ganges development its view was clear:

“The increase in traffic through the peninsula as the result of additional housing and proposed commercial development would have a detrimental effect upon the communities along several routes leading from Shotley Gate. It would increase the pressure on a road network not designed to take the flows which have resulted from the build up of development in the area thereby increasing the risk of accidents.”

(Suffolk County Council, 7 September, 2003)

(DVD-2)

Is it realistic to expect a road network not designed for the existing number of cars to take so many more? The projected increases are massive - up to 150% on some stretches of the main road according to the Buchanan report for the Shotley parishes.

(DVD- 44)

The 325 new houses proposed for the now derelict site of HMS Ganges won't be the only source of traffic. Backing on to Ganges is / this site at Shotley Marina where another 150 homes have also been granted planning permission.

(Aerials Tape D 12.23-30)

These developments would make Shotley – miles from anywhere - one the largest villages in Suffolk.

(Aerials Tape D -10.40)

The full traffic impact would be felt every bit as much by villages down the road as in Shotley itself.

(DVD-6)

For the conservation village of Woolverstone it would mean an extra 1000 cars a day past the front door.

At peak times that's one car every two and a half seconds.

And the so called rush hour now goes on for about five hours a day.

Can the local authority in all conscience put an estimated 60% more traffic through one of its own conservation areas? Can this be reconciled with its duty to preserve and enhance these special areas?

Woolverstone has already been subjected to a huge growth in traffic in recent years.

In 1992

(Aerials - Tape D 20.03)

Woolverstone House became the new home for Ipswich High School for Girls. It used to be a boys boarding school but the girls – 650 of them – commute daily.

(DVD-8)

Many are bussed but a great number are taken and fetched by car.

At going home time it's nose to tail. This traffic sequence runs unedited for over a minute to give you an idea of just how much is pouring on to the main road.

In just over 5 minutes at least a dozen buses and coaches and more than fifty cars turn out of the school to drive through Woolverstone. It's forcing a quart into a pint pot.

Traffic on this scale not only impairs the quality of village life it also threatens the very fabric of people's homes.

(DVD – 33)

Many village cottages are built on sand with no proper foundations. They are vulnerable to vibration from heavy vehicles only a few feet away.

Garden walls tell the story - their soft Suffolk brick eaten away by road spray and shaken loose by the weight of passing traffic.

Developing the Ganges site would make a bad situation much worse. It would mean four years of construction vehicles with more danger, noise, congestion and pollution.

The developer's claim that the environmental impact would be negligible defies commonsense.

(DVD- 4)

Woolverstone has a 30 mph limit. But it's largely ignored. The latest County speed check found eight out of ten motorists exceeding the limit. It makes it dangerous to walk through the village which has no continuous footpath nor any safe crossing places.

(DVD – 44)

The neighbouring village of Chelmondiston – another conservation area – has been offered an elaborate array of traffic calming measures - coloured road surfaces, controlled crossing places and warning lights.

Nothing has been offered to mitigate the impact on Woolverstone - although it is hard to see what could.

(DVD-43)

Speed's not the only hazard – congestion adds to driver frustration.

(DVD-28)

This slow moving tractor is carrying out routine hedge cutting. Like any obstruction in the village it very quickly creates large tailbacks.

In places this road narrows to little more than 5 metres. Coaches or farm vehicles can only pass each other by pulling in their wing mirrors or mounting the pavement.

(DVD-11/12)

Rush hour traffic built up in record time when this low loader stopped to drop off a digger to a local building site. Within a couple of minutes traffic was banked up in both directions the entire length of the village.

The impact on a small rural community of such heavy traffic for prolonged periods is totally overwhelming. It is oppressive and invasive. Again we let this sequence run to give you an idea of just what it's like.

(Aerial Tape D 20.38)

The future of Freston cross roads where the B1080 joins the main road is another major concern.

It's already an accident black spot - there was a double fatality here in 2003.

(DVD-27)

The county council say the original Ganges plan would have led to traffic movements here that "exceeded the theoretical maximum capacity during the morning rush."

It calls the junction –

"a location with a poor accident record where an increase in traffic and congestion is likely to result in drivers taking greater risks with a corresponding increase in accidents."

More traffic is guaranteed this year. The Royal Hospital School in Holbrook starts taking day pupils in September and new business units are ready to open in Freston.

Current flows are close to the limit without any further development in Shotley or elsewhere. Ongoing talks about moving the Holbrook surgery to a more central location could put even more traffic through this junction.

The only obvious solution – a roundabout – would require 24 hour lighting and would be environmentally unacceptable.

(DVD-29)

From every approach this cross roads is potentially lethal. Traffic from Shotley is accelerating in the quarter mile up to the blind bend having left Woolverstone's 30 mph limit and entered a derestricted zone.

(DVD-34)

Going the other way - driving north and then trying to turn right to Holbrook is to take your life in your hands.

Oncoming traffic is travelling at 30- 40 mph but because of the bend you can't see vehicles approaching until the last moment - when they're just a few hundred feet away. That allows only a few seconds to make the turn from a standing start.

The latest plan for Freston cross roads incorporates two bus stops only a hundred yards north of the junction. But there will be no safe crossing place for passengers. It's an accident waiting to happen.

(Aerials Tape D- 17.25-35)

The peninsula's main road has claimed ninety casualties in the past five years.

But ambulance response times here are about the worst in Suffolk.

Only one in five of the most serious calls is met within the target time.

All the emergency services have faced the same problem for years. One the three councillors to vote against the Ganges development was a retired police officer. He said the road was overloaded 15 years ago and things have only got worse since. FADE

(DVD-31)

This is Oyster reach where the B1456 meets the main A137 into Ipswich. It's another junction where congestion is a big problem.

(DVD-30)

We're negotiating the roundabout early in the rush hour. Traffic to the left on the A137 is stacking back towards the A14. The road into Ipswich is already jammed solid and there's plenty more traffic pouring off the peninsula.

The plan is to replace the roundabout with traffic lights. We believe this will only ease traffic into Ipswich by creating longer tailbacks by the Orwell. FADE

(Aerials Tape D 22.35)

Our greatest concern is to protect the special nature of our environment. The County council has warned that the Ganges plan could alter it to an unacceptable degree. We mustn't allow it.

(DVD -44)

Quiet enjoyment of the countryside is a very precious commodity.

The Shotley peninsula is a rare haven for recreation – for those who sail, cycle, walk or birdwatch.

We will guard it jealously for future generations.

ENDS

