

IPC Examination: Heysham M6 link
Impact on the local area of the Green Belt, Halton
Presented by Michael Jacob for the Halton Residents' Group
Unique Ref No. xxxx

1. Importance of local Green Belt as expressed in the Halton with Aughton Parish Plan 2003.

The Parish Plan was published by the local community with the support of the Parish Council, with Grant Aid from the Countryside Agency. The Parish Plan was drawn up after extensive consultation over two years with the community through exhibitions and questionnaires.

The role of and importance of the local Green Belt is best and officially expressed in the Plan.

The headline wish of residents expressed on the first page of the Parish Plan is that Halton remain a village separate from the urban expansion and ribbon development: "Local people are concerned about the danger of urban sprawl from Lancaster leading to the amalgamation of Halton village with the city."

This quote from a villager – "being a village separate from Lancaster and not just a suburb" – is chosen by the compilers as a typical one.

This shared and central understanding of local people is expressed thus: "Local people value and wish to conserve their rural setting with its beauty and tranquility. Parishioners greatly appreciate the broad views across and along the Lune Valley of fells, woodland and open fields. The green undulating hills give parishioners a strong feeling of living in a rural landscape, whilst the motte and bailey on Castle Hill and the surrounding Conservation Area are a focus for local peoples' appreciation of the history of Halton " (p.1).

The scheme proposed by LCC removes the area of Green Belt between Lancaster's urban edge and the village of Halton and is a precursor of future development along its length. No current undertaking to preserve the remnants of Green Belt would constrain future pressure to develop.

The official and strongly expressed understanding of the nature of the village and of the importance in peoples' lives of the landscape surrounding it cannot be set at nothing by any responsible developer.

2. Segmentation of the Green Belt

The pressure to develop will be increased by the fact that this proposal would leave narrow segments of green. Such residual strips of field would be degraded in terms of availability to many species, especially to mammals such as otters (which move great distances overland and whose most common reason for early

mortality is road-kill), badgers, hares, deer and foxes and to all species of amphibians.

The value, as agricultural land, of the remaining narrow segments of Green Belt (presently prime pasture) would collapse (especially with farms opting for amalgamation). In this case the destruction of part of the Green Belt also affects other areas of Green Belt in terms of biodiversity and of economic value to agriculture.

3. The local Green Belt as described in Lancashire County Council's "A Landscape Strategy for Lancashire" (2002)

The above comprehensive study describes the landscape through which the proposed road would pass as "low coastal drumlins" or rounded hills of glacial till with their alignment showing the direction of movement of glacial ice sheets (Section 13, p.75). The Strategy describes how the drumlin pattern gives strong field patterns and alignment to hedgerows and walls reflecting the underlying solid geography. The pattern gives rise to dispersed villages and historic houses.

Halton fits perfectly into these ancient patterns. The western edge of the village with its motte and bailey and feudal manor, Saxon cross with a Viking saga carving and church (there has been a church on this site for some 1000 years) is certainly one of the historic villages referred to above. If however the present scheme were to be realised, Halton would no longer be one of "the dispersed villages" referred to in Lancashire County Council's Landscape Strategy.

4. Drumlin Alignment and Communication Routes.

The drumlins lie like halved pears somewhat overlapping each other reflecting successive periods of glaciation during the Pleistocene (last 2million years). They lie with a distinctive north-east south-west direction. The major communication routes A6,M6, railway, and canal are each aligned in sympathy with the lie of the land. Minor roads between villages are all in sympathy with the land following through its natural contours and so remaining comparatively inconspicuous within the Green Belt.

In stark contrast this proposal for a dual carriage-way road bears no relationship with the nature of the distinctive landscape. It would be constructed in an east to west direction (here other east-west roads lie in the Lune valley). It must therefore cut through hillsides and build bridges with abutments over the old routes viz. the A6, railway and canal. Unlike older routes it would not be inconspicuous but stand out against the natural contours of the special landscape of this part of the Green Belt.

5. The importance of local Green Belt to the lives of local people.

In considering the "value" of Green Belt in relation to alleged economic benefits developers typically consider it only in the abstract omitting consideration of its

local, and particular characteristics which form the distinctiveness of places. The benefits, aesthetic, spiritual and physical (health giving) to people of particular areas of the Green Belt countryside are easily relegated as unimportant. In this instance we can rightfully expect that Lancashire County Council protects, rather than permanently mars, all that is so distinctive of this landscape.

We ask that LCC follow government planning guidelines and demonstrate to all those who have expressed the value of the Green Belt in their lives that it has examined all reasonable alternative solutions to identified transport problems in the Lancaster area rather than degrade the countryside in a permanent way and so alter for ever the quality of peoples ' lives.

Michael Jacob, in collaboration with members of the Halton Residents' Group. April 2012