

**Chris Farrell - Proof of Evidence to Public Inquiry ref
NATTRANS/SE/S247/3254**

Summary: In this statement the likely impact of the road stopping up order of Princes Parade and adjacent Royal Military Canal is considered. The additional noise, pollution and destruction of the tranquillity and setting of the Royal Military Canal is, in my opinion, potentially so devastating that the stopping up order should be refused.

Sir,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I am a local resident and live a few minutes' walk from the RMC in Seabrook. I was medically discharged from Her Majesty's Forces in 1999. I served my country for over twenty years. I have acquired brain damage and physical and mental injuries as a result of my service. I am here as a representative of the local community. I do not have any specialist qualifications other than I love the area being discussed at this Public Inquiry.

In my opinion the stopping up of Princes Parade which requires the need for a realigned road will have the following consequences:

1. Negative visual impact

There are no detailed plans to my knowledge of how the road will be constructed other than it will need a bund or embankment of some description to raise it above the height of the canal path. This will be a substantial structure in its own right. The structure will need considerable safety features to prevent vehicles toppling onto the canal bank or even into the canal itself. I understand the Environment Agency are requesting a buffer zone of 20 metres from the canal to prevent the road encroaching on the watercourse, the

Council intend to locate it a lot nearer, 13.19 metres in places, the bund or embankment will bring the whole structure even nearer to the canal bank. The road will sit just 3 metres higher than the canal bank. That's just 1.2 metres higher than me. In my opinion, its presence will be overbearing and completely out of keeping with this beautiful tranquil area (see Appendix 1). The Council's Open Space Strategy (CD115) identifies the canal as a high quality Green Corridor and Para 3.27 describes the RMC as 'a popular and attractive area designated as a local wildlife site offering visitor amenities, heritage and wildlife value and good access. Para 4.31 states that sites such as the RMC 'are considered to be the best open spaces within the District offering the greatest value and quality for the surrounding communities'.

The Green Flag Award Scheme flag currently flies proudly between the seafront and the canal in Seabrook.

2. Noise.

The TRICS data submitted with the planning application identifies that the total flow on the realigned road will increase significantly, I understand evidence on this will be given by other specialist witnesses. In my opinion, there will be a lot of noise and vibration. There will be extra vehicles; online shopping vans, tradesmen, cars, motorbikes, large trucks serving commercial outlets - all that noise will be coming from just above head height of the people on the canal bank. The noise will occur along the whole length of the new road and will be heard on the canal bank and across the other side of the canal and beyond, totally desecrating the tranquillity of this beautiful place. I believe the Council's environmental health officer has stated that the noise from the road will not affect residents living in the new flats, but there is no data on it's impact along the canal and beyond. The canal is a haven for anglers, they will

be tempted to find other places to fish, put off by the noise. Seabrook Primary School is on the north bank of the canal, and in my opinion, the noise from the road will carry across to the classrooms and playground.

Contrast that to the calming, quietness you experience today when you stand along the south bank of the canal. Compare that to the sound of the birds and animals, the insects buzzing and fluttering around you and the grasses and wildflowers blowing in the wind.

3. Litter

In my opinion, the litter from the road is going to end up in the canal and along the canal bank, probably fly tipping too as it will be easy to discard waste from a vehicle down onto the embankment. There will be fast food cartons, dirty nappies and all sorts of detritus defiling this beautiful place.

4. Pollution

In my opinion the dirt and filth associated with the road is going to fall down onto the canal bank, the heavier pollution particulates are going to fall onto the bank and filter into the canal or into the lungs of walkers below. The lighter pollutants will travel further.

Where will the immediate surface water run-off go? Not all of it will swim into drains along the road, climate change is bringing heavier and longer periods of rain. I am concerned that surface water will swamp the road and end up cascading onto the canal bank and then into the canal, polluting the water and the wildlife within.

5. Light pollution

Prince's Parade is unlit. It means that animals can go about their nocturnal lives – bats can hunt, foxes and badgers can forage, a multitude of others carry

out their nocturnal lives in the natural darkness. The night sky will become invisible to humans because of street lighting and the blaze of headlights.

6. Light and shade

I am concerned the road embankment will throw the canal bank into shade, the sun may not reach it at all. It will become a muddy, dark, uninviting place.

7. Disabled access The RMC offers the only 'free to use' level green space in Seabrook. The distance between the seafront and the canal here is the narrowest along the whole 28 miles of the canal. Cars can currently park along the seafront road. From here the canal is easily accessible using wheelchair friendly footpaths. The lack of parking spaces along the new road will deprive the disabled of activities they were previously able to participate in. I am very concerned the disabled will, in my opinion, be unable to access the canal bank from the road because any paths will be very steep, thus disenfranchising them from enjoying the activities and sights available to the able-bodied.

8. Destruction of the tranquillity and setting of the RMC

Sir, as I said earlier, I am disabled from my military service and I'd like to explain how the tranquillity and setting of the RMC in Seabrook enriches my life.

WH Davies wrote, 'What is this life if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare.' That's truer today, than ever. The canal along Prince's Parade is an oasis of calm in a mad, bad world. For me, to be able to walk along the canal in Seabrook, anytime of the year, is to walk in paradise. The way the weather changes the colours and shadows from minute to minute - and how the character and atmosphere alter as the sun moves round in the sky, never fails to touch my soul.

It has always been a popular place of free recreation but during the lockdowns it became a mental health lifeline to thousands of people who craved green open space. It's a very sociable place with many dog walkers, runners and joggers, walking groups, anglers, cyclists, babies in prams, families, horse riders and so on. Then there are the kayakers, canoeists and paddle-boarders who use the water. Its attraction is that it is traffic free, it is safe and it is peaceful. It is a green corridor of nature.

On a clear night, the Milky Way seen from the first bridge looks like you could just reach out and touch it. Best of all is a big storm. The lightning lights up the Channel in what would otherwise be complete darkness and the noise of the thunder rolls off the hills behind. The whole natural drama is played out in front of you.

... And when it snows, that's just magical.

It can be blowing a storm along the seafront, waves and stones coming over the sea wall, so windy that even I can barely remain standing but then if you walk down the path to the canal, you are in a different world. You are immediately out of the wind, sheltered by the green bank in a totally different weather system. The difference in sound is incredible; the brute force of wind and rain roaring in your ears and deadening your senses along the seafront but within 50 metres or so, the calmness of the canal.

In the evening, just standing on the first or second bridge and watching the colours of the canal as the sun sets below the horizon is amazing. Then the bats come out, just missing your head, as they weave in the air to catch the insects. When it's completely dark, the bats are still around and you can hear the sound of animals screeching from the canal bank. It's just unique, it's perfect.

I am a keen photographer. I'm a BBC Weather Watcher and my photos of Princes Parade are often shown on the local or national weather forecast and it beggars belief that the BBC can see the beauty of the canal in Seabrook but others choose to be blind to it.

It's a place of tranquillity, but it is never quiet. There's always movement in nature and there's always sound. Whether it be the sound of the water or the wildflowers or reeds in the wind or whether it's a kingfisher sounding like a referee's whistle or a carp rising from the water, a rare damsel or dragonfly, a swan hissing at a passing duck, bumble and honey bees buzzing or the busy chirping of all sorts of birds during the nesting season. I like nothing better than just to rest my arms on the railings of the first bridge and just be... just to do nothing; just to watch and to listen, to use my senses to be with and in nature.

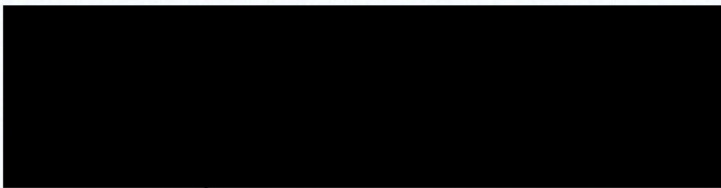
Every day, I see amazing birds, a kestrel is a regular along the fringe of Prince's Parade, looking for prey in the undergrowth. A family of swans nest on an island made from plant material. Kingfishers fly like an arrow parallel to the canal bank. Cormorants swim and dive and also sit in an alder tree on the south canal bank, herons stand motionless at the water's edge and various little birds including the Cetti's Warbler, nest in the reeds or the undergrowth. Swifts and swallows spend the summer chasing insects and it is always a sadness when they leave as summer ends.

For the past four years I have produced a calendar of photographs along this stretch of Princes Parade, I have sold them all. If this area was in any other part of the UK, it would be heralded as the 'go to' attraction but if the road is constructed, the town will just look like everywhere else along the south coast.

Hythe is an old Cinque Port, it cannot be compared to modern, urban Folkestone. Hythe has a proud sense of its heritage and unique identity. The setting of the RMC is intrinsic to Hythe, the character of Seabrook and Hythe is based around it. In my opinion, this will be gone when the road comes.

Sir, I hope I have done the local community justice in my statement to you. WH Davies poem ends, 'A poor life this if, full of care, We have no time to stand and stare.'

On the basis of my evidence, together with that given by other SPP witnesses, I urge the Secretary of State to conclude that he should decline to confirm the Order because the harm that would be caused by making it outweighs the benefits.



5th October 2021.