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Dear Paul

I am writing to raise concerns — communicated to me by a number of my constituents — about the closure of the A134 at weekends to accommodate construction works by Hopkins Homes on a roundabout for the new Abbot Vale housing scheme.

As you know, the closure is set to last throughout each weekend, starting from last Friday (21 February) and running until Monday 5 May. To accommodate the disruption, a 43-mile diversion route via Long Melford and Haverhill has been put in place. This, when used, will add an hour and fifteen minutes to journey times.

I will summarise a number of my constituents' concerns below:

- There are also strong concerns about the ability of emergency vehicles and care workers to access and help patients during the period of road closure. What arrangements are in place to accommodate access, and what is your assessment of how they operated during the first weekend of closure?
- Google Maps, Waze and AA Route Planner are not clearly showing that the A134 is closed during weekends, so heavy goods vehicles are still being sent in the direction of that road. For example, Google Maps is currently showing road works but no road closure, while the AA Route Planner does not show the road being closed. This incorrect traffic information is likely to compound the problems. Is it possible to address this with all due speed?
- There are considerable safety concerns about the narrowness of rural roads being used by drivers avoiding the official diversion route. This extra traffic is a considerable disturbance for residents living on alternative routes. This past weekend many motorists turned to using smaller rural roads which are not suitable, many of which are single track roads for long sections without pavements for pedestrians or passing places. For example, lorries have used **Rushbrooke Lane**, part of which has apparently collapsed. Another byway that experienced heavy congestion was **Hawstead Lane**, which has an average width of 2.8m. These roads are simply too narrow to accommodate two-way traffic for most vehicles, let alone heavy goods vehicles.
- In light of the above, some residents have suggested that **Hawstead Lane** should become an access-only Route. I would be grateful for your view as to whether this is possible? Would Suffolk Highways also re-inspect the suitability of the following roads to ensure they are safe for the extra traffic that will inevitably use them during this period of disruption: Water Lane, Linkwood and Bells Lane?
- Residents have pointed to shortcomings in the communications effort by Suffolk Highways and Hopkins Homes in advance of the road closure. I note that Suffolk Highways has said,



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in response to concerns that were put to them by residents, that a media release about the closure and accompanying arrangements was issued — and businesses notified — on 17 January, that Hopkins Homes met parish councils on 21 January to discuss roadworks and that there was a public engagement event on 5 February. However, my understanding from residents and parish councillors is that only **Nowton Parish Council** and **Bury St Edmunds Town Council** were consulted on 21 January. What is the reason that other parish councils — including **Great Whelnetham** and **Hawstead** — were not included in the consultation? Why was a longer period of notice and consultation not undertaken before the road closure and diversion were put into effect?

- Also on communications, some residents have noted that the closure of **Low Green**, which has an average width of 4.2 m, has led to rat runs down a number of other country lanes which are also too narrow. What is the answer from Suffolk Highways to this complaint?
- There is frustration that Suffolk Highways failed to attend a public meeting in **Nowton Village Hall** on Wednesday 19 February, and advance notice of their absence was provided only provided a few hours before the start of the meeting. What was the reason for this?
- A number of constituents are concerned about the period of time during which the road will be closed, along with the added costs for residents that will result from extra fuel expended on longer trips. What is your understanding of the amount of night work which is happening on the roundabout during the period of road closure? Do you agree that night working on this site should be maximised in order to ensure that the public disruption from the road closure is kept to a minimum?
- I would also be grateful if Suffolk Highways could explain what alternatives were considered, in consultation with Hopkins Homes, in advance of this road closure scheme being decided upon? If alternative schemes were considered, would you be able to expand on why they were rejected?

As I am sure you can appreciate, many residents are deeply and understandably frustrated by the considerable disruption that this road closure will cause. I would be grateful to hear your thoughts on the points listed above.

Yours sincerely

Nick Timothy
Member of Parliament for West Suffolk