

Richard Fuller MP
MP for North Bedfordshire

Sent by email

The Quadrant
Elder Gate
Milton Keynes
MK9 1EN

5 December 2024

Dear Richard,

Cleat Hill Explosion: Proposed Actions by East West Rail in Ravensden

Thank you for writing to me and for raising the extremely important matter of ground investigations in light of the recent tragic events at Cleat Hill. We take the health and safety of the communities we operate in, as well as that of our team members, very seriously. We understand that local residents and landowners are concerned about the risk of a similar incident occurring and acknowledge the important work you are undertaking with government to protect your constituents following the incident.

I would like to assure you that the risk of our ground investigations encountering methane or other ground gases is very low. The boreholes that we need to drill as part of our first phase of ground investigation works will be much shallower than the 100m deep borehole at Cleat Hill. The majority of the boreholes for East West Rail between Bedford and Tempsford will be just 10m or 20m deep and our current plans for the smaller number of deeper boreholes do not exceed depths of 40m.

Whilst this risk is very low, we recognise the local concerns, and therefore we have decided to revise our survey programme so that no boreholes are drilled in Bedford borough until March 2025, instead of January as originally planned.

We will use this period to engage with geotechnical experts, Bedford Borough Council and other local stakeholders to demonstrate that we have implemented robust and safe methods of operation, so that these ground investigations can commence without concern.

We will continue to work particularly closely with local landowners. Our specialist survey management team will answer any questions landowners have to make sure they have all the information they need before entering into an access agreement with us. We would encourage any landowners with questions about the ground investigations planned on their land to contact our team on land@eastwestrail.co.uk or by calling 0330 838 7583.

Please rest assured, we would not proceed with any drilling if it were to be unsafe and hope the three months pause provides some reassurance on that. I look forward to discussing this further when we meet on 11 December.

Yours sincerely,

David

David Hughes
CEO, East West Railway Company