

**Lancashire County Council Planning Application
Reference: 11/05/1584
Completion of the Heysham to M6 Link**

**Planning Inspectorate Reference:
APP/Q2371/V/07/1200928 &
APP/Q2371/V/07/1200929**

**Proof of evidence:
Landscape & Green Belt**

**Submitted by:
Alan James, BSc, MA, MLI
Snade Mill Cottage
Dunscore
Dumfries
DG2 0XA**

Evidence prepared for:

**The Environmental and Sustainable Transport
Alliance (ESTA)**

**Consisting of:
The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)
Lancashire Branch and NW Regional Group
Friends of the Earth (FOE) North West
North West Transport Activists Roundtable (NW TAR)
Sustrans
Transport 2000**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 My name is Alan James. I have a Bsc (Hons) in geography, and MA in Landscape Architecture. I am a fully qualified landscape architect with over 30 years experience and a Member of the Landscape Institute (MLI). I have also worked as a transport consultant specialising in sustainable transport, as an Associate of Eco-Logica. I grew up in the Lancaster area, and lived in Lancaster for 12 years through the 1980s, so am very familiar with the development context.

1.2 I have worked both in the field of environmental assessment and landscape design for highways and for traffic management. My interest in landscape issues and rural highways dates back to a course dissertation on "Motorways and rural landscapes" for my geography degree (1970). I was assistant project manager for one of the largest early environmental assessment projects in Britain, investigating future reservoir and supply route options for the North West Water Authority (1978). I have undertaken several landscape and ecological appraisals of highway schemes. I have represented organisations at Public Inquiries into roads and other transport projects, both as a landscape and a transport witness. including the Broughton Bypass (Lancashire), Kirkby Stephen Bypass (Cumbria), Barnstaple Western Bypass (Devon), Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western Bypass (Buckinghamshire), A30 Bodmin-Indian Queens (Cornwall), A27 Southerham-Beddingham (East Sussex).

1.3 This proof of evidence and witness appearance for the public inquiry into the Heysham-M6 Link Road (HM6L) is on behalf of the Environmental and Sustainable Transport Alliance (ESTA). I am also appearing as a transport witness on behalf of Transport Solutions for Lancaster and Morecambe (TSLM), covering options, alternatives, and national guidance and local economic impacts in two further separate proofs.

1.4 This proof of evidence will primarily address the Secretary of State's matters d) and e) in the call-in letter of 8 February 2007:

d) Whether the development proposed accords with the provisions of Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 Green Belts and in particular whether very special circumstances can be demonstrated to justify planning permission being granted.

e) Whether the development proposed accords with Planning Policy Guidance Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas particularly in respect of the need to protect the character of the countryside and the diversity of its landscape.

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 Lancashire County Council (LCC) acknowledges that, in the case of the Heysham-M6 Link (HM6L):

- The landscape impact of the scheme is “moderate to large adverse” (Appraisal Summary Table [AST])
- The scheme, as a road, would normally be regarded as inappropriate development in the North Lancashire Green Belt (Statement of Case 4.1.d)

Although LCC accepts the latter in the SoC, the Council does not appear to have regarded Green Belt as a policy issue in 2005, at the time of the planning application, a surprising and serious omission.

2.2 There are slight problems with LCC's wording in both these statements. WebTAG, as the overarching guidance document, does not provide for combination categories such as “moderate to large”, and it is stated by LCC in the Environmental Statement paragraph 10.4.21 that an overall appraisal should be based on the most negative category. The overall landscape assessment should therefore be “Large adverse impact”, although in any case the differences between ‘moderate’ and ‘large’ adverse impact in WebTAG are incremental rather than fundamentally different.

2.3 In terms of the green belt, LCC's SoC could be read as implying that the special circumstances have the effect of rendering the development ‘appropriate’, whereas it is clear from PPG 2 that special circumstances might justify inappropriate development by outweighing the harm done to the green belt, but this would not make the development any less inappropriate:

“Very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.” (PPG 2 para 3.2: see also 3.13)

2.4 Subject to these clarifications, there appears to be a degree of consensus that the HM6L has a significant adverse landscape impact - whether “moderate to large” or “large” -, and that it would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The major disagreement lies in LCC's contention that the benefits of the scheme outweigh its adverse impacts. This is implicit in terms of landscape impact - a decision has been made to proceed in spite of the high level of impact: and is explicit for the Green Belt, in that special circumstances have to be demonstrated to satisfy the conditions of PPG 2.

2.5 The central theme of this proof of evidence is that whilst the level of impact has been recorded the true severity of impact has not been fully expressed. I would not disagree with the landscape appraisal as “large adverse”, but in my view the scheme documentation does not do enough to consider what this actually means. There is always a danger in NATA landscape appraisals that, in breaking down impact into component parts the sum of the parts is not fully expressed in the AST, which is one of the reasons for having a “qualitative comments” section (see TAG unit 3.3.7, para 1.2.19).

In the case of the Green Belt, the starting point for LCC is now - though it appears not always to have been - that the HM6L is inappropriate development, but this masks just how detrimental the impact of the road would be on the purposes, functions, and qualities of the Green Belt, not least because its corridor of impact occupies such a large proportion of what is a very constrained green belt area.

- 2.6 At the same as this proof demonstrates that the level of impact has been underplayed by LCC, other proofs by ESTA and TSLM will demonstrate that the degree of benefit attributable to the scheme has been overstated or is at best unproven. As a result, it is our contention that scheme benefits cannot be claimed to outweigh impacts, and that special circumstances cannot be demonstrated to justify the degree of damage to the green belt brought about by this particular inappropriate development.
- 2.7 The proof will examine landscape impacts and green belt issues in turn, though there are clearly overlaps between them. Reference will be made to the following documents:
- WebTAG unit 3.3.7
 - Major Scheme Business Case (MSBC) Annex A (NATA ASTs and worksheets)
 - Environmental Statement 2005 (ES), in particular chapter 10
 - PPG 2
 - PPS 7

3.0 LANDSCAPE IMPACTS

3.1 As discussed in the previous section, the intention of this section is to express the full extent of landscape impact underlying the appraisal of “moderate to large adverse”. There are three aspects:

- The meaning of the NATA ‘moderate’ and ‘large’ adverse categories of impact, and the reason why the HM6L appraisal should be “large adverse”
- Landscape impacts which have been understated in the appraisal
- Qualitative comments to express the true extent of impact

Appraisal categories

3.2 TAG Unit 3.3.7 sets out in Table 2 the descriptive criteria for each of the ‘7+1’ categories of landscape impact (slight/ moderate/ large adverse or beneficial, neutral, and a separate “very serious adverse” category). The criteria for ‘moderate’ and ‘large’ adverse impact are as follows:

Moderate adverse (negative) effect

The proposals are:

- ❖ *out of scale with the landscape, or at odds with the local pattern and landform.*
- ❖ *are visually intrusive and will adversely impact on the landscape*
- ❖ *not possible to fully mitigate for, that is, mitigation will not prevent the scheme from scarring the landscape in the longer term as some features of interest will be partly destroyed or their setting reduced or removed.*
- ❖ *will have an adverse impact on a landscape of recognised quality or on vulnerable and important characteristic features or elements.*
- ❖ *in conflict with local and national policies to protect open land and nationally recognised countryside as set out in PPG7 and PPG2.*

Large adverse (negative) effect

The proposals are very damaging to the landscape in that they:

- ❖ *are at considerable variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape.*
- ❖ *are visually intrusive and would disrupt fine and valued views of the area.*
- ❖ *are likely to degrade, diminish or even destroy the integrity of a range of characteristic features and elements and their setting.*
- ❖ *will be substantially damaging to a high quality or highly vulnerable landscape, causing it to change and be considerably diminished in quality.*
- ❖ *cannot be adequately mitigated for.*
- ❖ *are in serious conflict with government policy for the protection of nationally recognised countryside as set out in PPG7.*

The appraisal guidance states that there is some flexibility in the definitions to allow judgement at a local level in switching from one category to another (TAG 3.3.7 para 1.2.17), but *“For a proposal to qualify for a particular score, most of the statements relating to that score must apply.”* (TAG 3.3.7,1.2.18)

- 3.3 It can be seen that under almost all criteria there is incremental step change between moderate and large adverse impact, but “moderate” adverse impact represents significant degradation of landscape with valuable characteristics. Arguably, ‘moderate’ is something of a misnomer for impact which is *“out of scale with the landscape ... at odds with local pattern ... visually intrusive ... (adversely affects) landscape of recognised quality or vulnerable and important characteristic features, ... (where) mitigation will not prevent the scheme from scarring of the landscape in the longer term.”* (TAG 3.3.7 Table 2 as quoted above)! Even at an assessed “moderate adverse” impact, the consequences of the development cannot be dismissed lightly.
- 3.4 The HM6L overall assessment score for landscape was “moderate to large adverse” impact, which presumably seeks to place the level of impact somewhere between the two. TAG Unit 3.3.7 makes no provision for such an overall assessment: para 1.2.16 states that *“The overall impact on the landscape is summarised using the AST standard seven point scale”* (plus the one-off “very large” category), which does not suggest that intermediate assessments are allowable - it would then become a 15 point scale. In any case, there is not much room between moderate and large adverse impact for an intermediate set of criteria.
- 3.5 The “moderate to large adverse” assessment would be understandable in terms of a view that in some respects the impact is moderate, but in others it is large. However, the ES makes the case that:
“Whilst the impact of the preferred route is not considered as high in all extents the Transport Analysis Guidance requires the most adverse category of impact (or beneficial) to be used to prevent the result from being diluted. For example, if there was an impact rating of Large Adverse against ten Slight Adverse the overall assessment would be Large Adverse impact on the receptor” (ES 10.4.21)
- 3.6 It is not clear why LCC, having stated this rule, have not followed it and concluded that the overall assessment is “large adverse”. There would seem to be little doubt that the overall landscape assessment should under these rules be **Large Adverse**, though given the limited differences between ‘moderate’ and ‘large’, an assessment of “moderate to large adverse” is already a very significant degree of impact.

Understated landscape impacts

- 3.7 There are some instances in the NATA worksheets (MSBC Annex A) where it is not clear how the description of impact led to the appraisal ‘score’. The most important of these is in relation to tranquillity. This is a complex subject area, since tranquillity is affected by context - the middle of Russell Square in London is a haven of tranquillity with traffic thundering around it, but similar traffic noise levels in the New Forest would be deemed very untranquil.

The countryside area through which the HM6L is proposed scores at most middlingly on an absolute scale of tranquillity - it is less tranquil than the Bowland Fells - but in context it develops and maintains its quiet rural character remarkably strongly for an area sandwiched between urban edges and with other disruptive elements such as the M6.

- 3.8 The NATA worksheets express the impacts on tranquillity quite well, e.g:
- Area 3b: *“The new route will have high impact on the tranquillity of area adjacent to Lancaster Canal as it crosses over”*
 - Area 5: *“Proposed route will significantly alter the tranquil character of the area and visually intrude on views from the south.”*

All tranquillity impacts are assessed as ‘moderate adverse’. It appears that this has been done because the impact was always deemed of local importance (see worksheets), which is scarcely the case for the Lancaster Canal as an important at least regional recreation asset, and arguably not the case for an area with green belt designation (see next section). Whatever the reason, the message that a surprisingly tranquil area of countryside, all the more important for where it is, would be severely disrupted, is somewhat lost in the dry assessment of “moderate impact”

- 3.9 There is also some possible internal inconsistency in the landscape appraisal. For area 3a, the worksheets give “moderate adverse” impacts on most counts, then in the area summary it is stated that the cumulative effect of all the moderate impacts raises the overall impact to “large adverse”. The worksheets then find much the same for areas 3b, 4, 5 on individual criteria, but there is no raised cumulative effect in the area summary. Then for area 6 the worksheet advises a “large adverse” impact on “Pattern” (with which I would agree, though why not for the other areas?), but the summary is only “moderate to large adverse” impact in spite of the ‘most negative outcome’ rule quoted from ES 10.4.21 above.

- 3.10 The more the individual appraisal scores are revised upwards, the clearer it becomes that the overall assessment of “large adverse” landscape impact would be fully justified.

- 3.11 There are also some detailed aspects of landscape impact which have been understated or omitted in the worksheets, as follows (generally west to east):

- ❖ The impact on the view from Torrisholme Barrow should be seen in the context of the 360 degree viewpoint: the almost uninterrupted flow of open countryside from the East right to the foot of the drumlin is part of the essential quality of this view, which would instead largely be occupied by the road should the HM6L scheme go ahead.
- ❖ The massive scale of the WCML overbridge, which completely dwarfs an electrified railway line itself on an embankment, is only really grasped by looking at the elevation (ES Vol 1 Part B Fig 4.3.8): note the 2.58m thick bridge deck plus 1.5m parapet
- ❖ The multiple impact on the Lancaster Canal, both at the HM6L crossing point (landscape area 3b), further east where it runs parallel to the HM6L (area 5), and in the view from the aqueduct, add up to a large cumulative impact on an important cultural feature which is also a well used walking route and leisure asset.

- ❖ The A6 crossing appears very uncomfortable in landform terms, as the A6 is in a shallow valley yet the HM6L would pass under it, with the A6 partly on embankment and partly cut into the rising ground to the East (see ES Vol 1 part A, photo 4.3.14)
- ❖ The Green Lane overbridge is on or close to the prominent ridgeline South of Beaumont Grange, so could be very prominent (see ES Vol Part A photo 4.3.18)
- ❖ The Shefferlands retaining wall is up to 14.8m high and around 200m long, in an area of otherwise attractive open parkland, which in spite of being so close to the M6 is at present relatively little affected by it as the motorway is in cutting with vegetated banks: the retaining wall would be a literal scar on the landscape.
- ❖ The Foundry Lane bridge would become all the more prominent because of its greater size (see ES Vol 1 Part B Fig 4.3.13) and because of the clearance of so much of the area to the South of it for the new slip road.
- ❖ The route causes considerable damage to an area of significant tree cover immediately North of the River Lune (see ES Vol 1 Part A Photo 4.3.29), which appears not to have been appraised because it is in an area considered under Townscape.
- ❖ The impact on the setting of the existing M6 Lune bridge is seriously understated. This bridge is one of the most elegant structures on the British motorway network, reminiscent of the early pioneering concrete bridges of Maillart and Freysinnet and amongst the best example of its type in Britain. Views from well used routes, including the canal, the riverside cycleway, and the A683, would be affected: a sense of the extent of disruption can be gained from Fig 4.3.14 of ES Vol 1 Part B, although the new bridge has been redesigned since then.

- 3.12 A further area of landscape impact on which no comment has been seen is the effect on views from the urban area of Lancaster. Since one of the stated purposes of Green Belts is “to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns” (PPG 2 Para 1.5), this would be a surprising and serious omission. There are at least two accessible, well used viewpoints in Lancaster at places of very high historic and cultural significance:

Castle Hill/ Priory Church and Williamson Park/ Ashton Memorial

At both locations an essential characteristic of the view is the compactness of the urban area and presence of open countryside so close, due to the open land of the Green Belt to the north which is clearly visible from both viewpoints. Since the HM6L visually occupies so much of the rural envelope of Lancaster, especially to the West of the A6, this impact on the historic townscape of Lancaster is severe, and of at least regional significance.

Qualitative assessment

- 3.13 The qualitative comments in the HM6L landscape worksheets, which form the basis of the AST summary on landscape impact, do not really capture the essence of the effect the road will have on the area through which it passes: to borrow a phrase from E.M. Forster, “*it was all true, but how false as a summary of the man: the essential life of him had been slain*” (A Passage to India Ch 3). The “essential life” of the appraisal is that:

- The East-West road is in constant conflict with the North-South grain of the land: this is well captured in ES Vol 1 part B Fig 10.1.1, which overlays the road on a detailed topographical base.
- This conflict is at its most extreme in area 3a, where the road fills the low ground between two drumlins on embankment up to 13m high: and in areas 5 and 6, where the more pronounced landforms cause the road to alternate between shallow embankment and large cuttings up to 12m deep
- The scale of earthworks needed to make the route work are testimony to the poorness of landscape fit.
- The visual impact corridor of the proposed road almost fully occupies the critical area of open countryside West of the A6, hemmed in by Slyne, Torrisholme, and Skerton yet of surprisingly strong rural character for such a confined area: and in doing so will completely and irrevocably alter that character.
- The visual impact corridor also occupies most of the southern end of the enclave of countryside West of the M6, in the area where the higher ridges fall away to the River Lune: this is another area where the sense of rural tranquillity is strong in spite of the pressures all around it, a character in part created by the parkland landscape which is a feature of much of this area and which is very vulnerable to change.
- The countryside through which the HM6L northern route passes is also vitally important as the rural edge to the North of Lancaster and Morecambe and the buffer between the urban area and the urbanised villages to the north: a fact recognised in its designated Green Belt status.
- This rural hinterland on a quiet urban edge is an important aspect of the quality of life for local residents, and an important component of several spectacular views from well visited viewpoints, both locally and in the historic centre of Lancaster.
- The HM6L would have especially damaging effects on residences alongside the rural edges, and on the historic and highly valued Lancaster Canal.

4.0 GREEN BELT

4.1 I have found no evidence to indicate that the Green Belt was regarded as a policy issue at the time of submission of either the MSBC in July 2005, or the planning application in December 2005. There are two places where it might be expect to be found:

- ES Chapter 17 “Impact of road schemes on policies and plans”, where it is not even listed in 17.1 (relevant policies and plans),
- NATA AST, Integration objective, where under “Land use policy” and “Other government policy” the AST not merely fails to mention the national and local green belt policies but reports that the HM6L “*does not hinder any policies*” (“key” policies in the latter)

4.2 It seems scarcely credible that a planning application would fail to note that the subject of the application was inappropriate development in a green belt, or even that it affected a green belt whether or not it was thought to be inappropriate. It is not known at what stage this point was picked up, but it is clear that the case for special circumstances to justify inappropriate development in a green belt was retro-fitted to the decisions to proceed in July and December 2005. Once those decisions had been taken, LCC had no choice other than to plead the special case or abandon the scheme.

4.3 The Lancaster Local Plan, adopted in 2004, sets out the origin of the North Lancashire Green Belt in 1991, defines purposes largely in the terms of PPG 2, and confirms that it “*should wherever possible be permanent and remain protected for the foreseeable future*” (Local Plan para 5.1.4). The Local Plan goes on to state that:

“5.1.5 Both central Government guidance expressed in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 - Green Belts, and the Lancashire Structure Plan, set out the type of development which can and cannot be allowed in the Green Belt. The City Council will strictly apply Structure Plan Policy 4 - Development in Green Belts when determining planning applications within the North Lancashire Green Belt and resist proposals for inappropriate development.”

This establishes the standard principle that the Local Plan nests within the Structure Plan which in turn nests within the national policy established by PPG 2. It is notable that the Local Plan commits Lancaster City Council to “*resist proposals for inappropriate development*”, without reference to special circumstances, yet the Council to date has supported the HM6L!

4.4 The purpose of green belts to prevent urban sprawl and coalescence of settlements is widely understood, but there is more than this to PPG 2. The five core purposes of green belt designation are:-

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. (PPG 2 para 1.5)

- 4.5 The current (1995) version of PPG 2 also includes a statement of objectives for green belts once they have been established:

The use of land in Green Belts

1.6 Once Green Belts have been defined, the use of land in them has a positive role to play in fulfilling the following objectives:

- ❖ to provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;
- ❖ to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;
- ❖ to retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;
- ❖ to improve damaged and derelict land around towns;
- ❖ to secure nature conservation interest; and
- ❖ to retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

(PPG 2 para 1.6)

PPG 2 makes clear (para 1.7) that these objectives are not the same as purposes of designation, and the latter always take precedence in defining and designating a green belt. However, once a Green Belt has been designated, fulfillment of the above objectives becomes an integral part of their land use management. These objectives make it clear that, as is currently the case for this part of the North Lancashire Green Belt, that Green Belt land should improve our quality of life, foster a sense of place, enable us to enjoy the countryside close to towns and cities, and overall make places better for people.

- 4.6 The presumption against inappropriate development in a green belt is established in paragraph 3.1 of PPG 2, which also lists the paragraphs under which 'inappropriate development' is defined. These are 3.4 (new buildings); 3.8 (existing buildings); 3.11 (mineral workings); 3.12 (other development). Roads fall within the orbit of 3.12, which states that:

"3.12 The statutory definition of development includes engineering and other operations, and the making of any material change in the use of land. The carrying out of such operations and the making of material changes in the use of land are inappropriate development unless they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt."

In the Statement of Case LCC is not arguing the "unless" provisos stated above, and would have difficulty sustaining them; but argues that the scheme benefits amount to special circumstances that would outweigh the harm due to inappropriateness.

- 4.7 PPG 2 para 3.2 states that "In view of the presumption against inappropriate development, the Secretary of State will attach substantial weight to the harm to the Green Belt". It follows that it is essential to identify as accurately as possible just how much harm is done, not only to the purposes but also to the objectives of the green belt as set out in PPG 2 and above.

To date, LCC has not done this, and even in the SoC the emphasis is more on the weight attached to benefits than on the extent of harm to the North Lancashire Green Belt, other than a comment about the relative environmental impact compared with the “unbuildable” western route.

- 4.8 In assessing the degree of harm to the North Lancashire Green Belt, the first aspect is to identify the purposes and objectives most likely to suffer harm as a result of the development. It is suggested that these are:-

Purposes:

- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;

Objectives:

- to provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;
- to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;
- to retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;
- to secure nature conservation interest; and
- to retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

(this covers all objectives apart from improving damaged or derelict land)

- 4.9 The HM6L in itself is an encroachment on the countryside, and potentially promotes infill development between the road and the urban edge. As discussed in 2.12 above, the HM6L does not preserve the setting of the historic town of Lancaster, and by intruding on enclaves of countryside highly visible from important and popular viewpoints it actively damages the special character of the town.

- 4.10 As far as objectives go, the harm done by the HM6L is clear:

- Above all, it does not “retain attractive landscapes, or enhance landscapes, near where people live”. It damages (even at “moderate to large adverse” landscape impact) and significantly alters the character of the landscape through which it passes, and for much of its length is close to where people live.
- It reduces opportunities to access open countryside, and removes a significant chunk of the open countryside to which access might be gained
- It detracts from opportunities for outdoor recreation, in particular along the Lancaster Canal
- It causes some damage to nature conservation interest, especially in the loss of hedgerows, damage to the habitat of a Species of Principal Importance, damage to sites of locally rare plants, and possibly affects protected species of fauna (all detailed in Biodiversity proof of evidence)
- It removes land from agricultural use

- 4.11 The extent of harm to the green belt can be gauged with reference to paras 3.13 and 3.15 of PPG 2:

3.13 When any large-scale development or redevelopment of land occurs in the Green Belt (including ... road and other infrastructure developments ...), it should, so far as possible contribute to the achievement of the objectives for the use of land in Green Belts (see paragraph 1.6). This approach applies to large-scale developments irrespective of whether they are appropriate development, or inappropriate development which is justified by very special circumstances.

3.15 The visual amenities of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals for development within or conspicuous from the Green Belt which, although they would not prejudice the purposes of including land in Green Belts, might be visually detrimental by reason of their siting, materials or design.

It is difficult to see how the HM6L contributes in any way to the objectives for land use in the Green Belt: and it is unarguable, from the landscape appraisal, that the visual amenities of the green belt are injured by the visually detrimental effect of a significant adverse landscape impact (whether “moderate to large” or “large” adverse in terms of NATA).

- 4.12 The final issue is the relative extent of the green belt in relation to the corridor of impact of the road. As discussed in section 2 above:

- To the west of the A6, the corridor of impact more or less completely fills the green belt area. There is little or no green belt land that would not experience a significant character change from relatively quiet, relatively unchanging countryside to an area dominated by a major road, discordant landforms, and continuous traffic impact.
- To the east of the A6, the corridor of impact occupies the whole of the southern end of the Green Belt. Although the green belt continues uninterrupted northwards to Carnforth, the HM6L affects the whole of a distinct landscape tract where the higher and relatively bare ridgelines fall away to the River Lune in a favoured south facing hillside, which is one of the most prominently visible parts of the green belt in views from Lancaster. Possibly because of its aspect, this tract has developed a distinct parkland identity, which would be severely “injured” by the road, and this character as a component of the green belt would be lost. It is probably fair to say that, whilst this section of the route would not greatly damage the overall integrity of this part of the green belt, it would greatly damage the discrete and distinctive landscape tract.

- 4.13 From this analysis it can be seen that the degree of harm to the North Lancashire Green Belt is very significant, and cannot be dismissed lightly in any assessment of the balance between harm and benefit of the development. If a case is to be sustained for “very special circumstances”, in which other considerations “clearly” (PPG 2 para 3.2) outweigh the harm, the circumstances are going to have to be very special indeed.

- 4.14 A further issue in LCC's statement of case is whether the local authority would be able to resist pressures for infill development between the urban edge and the road. There is no denying that pressures will be exerted to develop severed parcels of land, and the planning concept is frequently presented that a bypass creates a 'defensible line' to prevent encroachment into the countryside beyond (as has happened with the M6 past Lancaster. LCC and Lancaster City Council claim that they will be able to prevent infill development by using the green belt status to resist any such applications.
- 4.15 Aside from whether this is the case, and would remain so in perpetuity, there is a question mark over whether it would make sense to preserve relatively small parcels of land severed from the rest of the open countryside and heavily dominated by the presence of the road. It is doubtful whether viable positive uses would be found for some of these areas, and they have little amenity value as isolated fragments of countryside hard up against a major road with high volumes of traffic. It is not difficult to imagine the future scenario in which the local planning authority would devise an argument to say that, notwithstanding the green belt designation, the actual impact of infill housing development alongside the HM6L would be less detrimental than in any of the alternative sites under consideration around Lancaster - and of course the green belt would still be safeguarded North of the road!

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 This proof of evidence set out to demonstrate the real effect of the HM6L on the landscape of the North Lancashire Green Belt and on its status and objectives as a green belt. It argues that the NATA appraisal should be “large adverse” impact, but even as “moderate to large adverse this still represents a very serious level of detriment to the qualities and character of the area. This high level of impact knocks on to the purposes and objectives of a green belt, which are nowadays somewhat wider than the traditional purpose of restraining urban sprawl and the coalescence of settlements. The harm done to the green belt by the inappropriate development of a major road would be intense, and it would take very special circumstances indeed to outweigh the degree of harm.
- 5.2 In response to the Secretary of State’s query whether the development accords with the provisions of PPG 2, it is submitted that the level of harm sets a very high hurdle for the ‘special circumstances’, which the scheme in my view fails to clear, as demonstrated in other ESTA and TSLM proofs.
- 5.3 The second matter of the Secretary of State of relevance to this proof was whether the development accords with PPS 7, in respect of the need to protect the character of the countryside and diversity of its landscape. The proof has not directly addressed PPS 7, as the issues are to a considerable extent subsumed in the discussions on landscape impact and PPG 2. The HM6L, with its at least moderate to large adverse landscape impact, does not protect the character and diversity of the countryside, regardless of the extent to which the scheme seeks to minimise the levels of impact. In this context, It is probably fair to say that the problems of the route are thrown into sharpest focus, not by PPS 7 which is at its strongest for nationally designated landscapes, but by PPG 2 in its very precise statement about development not injuring visual amenity or causing visual detriment.
- 5.4 Unless the HM6L passes what has been shown to be a very stringent test of need because of the extremely adverse effects on landscape and green belt, it should not be allowed to proceed.

Alan James, BSc, MA, MLI
Snade Mill Cottage
Dunscore
Dumfries
DG2 0XA

6 June 2007