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By Email

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Dear Cllr Allen,

Thank you for your letter of 4 October about the questions posed at the July Community Forum and the information we provided at the last forum about tunnel shafts.

Firstly I am sorry if you felt that the questions you raised previously had been ignored. This was certainly not the case. They have been given careful consideration and they informed our preparation for the recent community forum meeting where we provided our emerging thinking on the scheme design. For example, we were able to anticipate the forum's desire to know more about the likely size of the shaft's head house, as well as describing the functions of the shaft itself.

We have worked through each of the 23 questions and I attach a detailed response to both these, and the additional questions raised in your letter.

Turning to your comments about the shaft in Amersham, as part of our engineering update at the September meeting we informed forum members that we were considering moving this approximately 80 metres to the other side of Whielden Lane. As we made clear at the forums, this is an example of our latest thinking and could be subject to change. We shared this information in the interest of keeping local people informed and giving them a chance to comment in the spirit of engagement.

We have noted your comments about both the heavy use of the Amersham Bypass, and your preference for the location of the shaft to remain unaltered. However, in respect of the latter, I would not wish to leave you with the impression that this change was being considered simply to make it easier for HS2 Ltd during construction.

While there is a practical element to the proposal, we consider that there are merits for the community in making such a change. We also believe that we can address any issues relating to the footpath to the Crematorium both during and after construction. There are no current plans to close roads during construction, and there would be a traffic management in place for this period.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this in more detail at the next forum.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wells', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Martin Wells
Area Stakeholder Manager – Country South

HS2 Proposed Access Shaft at Junction of Whielden Street & Southbound A404

1. Is the route indicative only, or a true line of proposal?

The current route is what we have been asked to progress by the Secretary of State, and on which we will base our Environmental Statement and land requirements in preparation for applying for the necessary legislative powers to build and operate the railway.

2. Could the site of the Access Shaft be relocated? The consensus of the residents was that the junction of the A413 and the A404 here is already very busy and entry onto the Southbound A404 is currently difficult for cars exiting Whielden Street. The current proposal would bring another road junction onto an already busy and dangerous junction.

Shaft locations could be moved along the line of route, but only relatively small distances. Regarding impact on the junction, our consultants will use local input and traffic data to design the most appropriate access to the site.

3. Assuming the current proposed siting of the Access Shaft, would the approach roads to the Access Shaft necessitate changes to the existing road layout?

There are currently no plans for large scale changes to the road layout, regardless of whether the shaft is moved in the way described at the September forum meeting.

4. What is the purpose of the shaft?

Intervention shafts would perform two main functions:

- To provide emergency intervention access facilities with protected stairs and lifts as appropriate
- To provide mechanical ventilation to assist in controlling the tunnel environment, including control of smoke and hot gases in an emergency

5. Are all shafts the same specification? If not, is this a “major” or “minor” construction site (e.g. Air pressure ventilation shaft or maintenance or access for emergency services in event of accident?)

At present all shafts are planned to be the same specification

6. What are the approximate dimensions of the shaft?

The size of the shafts is part of our ongoing engineering development and is subject to change. Our current thinking is that the shaft (hole in the ground) size would be approximately 32m by 15m.

7. What are the approximate dimensions of the access area to be occupied by the (a) site while being constructed and (b) the finished shaft and surroundings?

(a) The size of construction sites is part of our developing engineering work, and it is not possible to give an answer yet.

(b) The current thinking is that the shaft (hole in the ground) size would be approximately 32m by 15m. The head house size would be approximately 25 by 25m. Please note that the size of the shafts and head houses is ongoing engineering development and is subject to change.

8. Can we view detailed plans of an Access Shaft with measurements?

It is not possible to answer this at this point. Intervention shafts sizes and layouts are still the subject of developing engineering work.

9. Where will the work camps be sited and what provision will be made for work encampments for construction workers and plant? Adequate parking and storage facilities for materials need to be provided away from the Old Town.

Each shaft locations would be a construction site. We note the comment about parking and other facilities being away from Old Town.

10. What is the time frame from start of project to completion and making good the surrounding area?

It is not possible to answer yet as construction planning is still developing work.

11. All site traffic should be directed along the Amersham bypass and not be permitted to enter the Old Town.

Comment noted.

12. Will Whielden Street be closed to traffic at the bridge, i.e. where the A413 Amersham bypass flies over Whielden Street, in the vicinity of the Hospital? (Normally, Whielden Street is a main route for emergency services and buses)

There are no current plans to close roads during construction. A defined site would be established with access from the public highway. There would be traffic management plans in place to minimise any localised disruption during construction.

13. Concerns about construction works taking up the limited parking available near the hospital or worse still, in Whielden Street.

Comment noted.

14. How will the hospital and crematorium be accessed by foot and by car?

By foot: An alternative route would be proposed for the construction period, and provision avoiding the shaft site would be part of the permanent arrangement. By car: We don't expect routes to be affected.

15. Will the work carry on overnight?

There are currently no plans to work on shafts at night.

16. Are there any figures available for pollution by dust, light and noise for construction areas of this nature?

The nature of any impact will be predicted through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) which is currently being undertaken. Consequently there are no figures available at this time. If required, mitigation measures will be identified through the EIA. General measures to control dust, noise and light will be detailed in the CoCP which we discussed at the last Community Forum meeting and which we expect to provide further information on in future.

17. We want to ensure the protection of listed buildings (without foundations in some cases) in Gilbert Scott Court and Whielden Street from vibration caused by excavation of the tunnel and/or regular usage of the tunnel.

Comment noted.

18. Is there somewhere on the route of HS1 that we can go to view an access shaft of a similar scale?

HS1 has shafts on London tunnels so their head house appearance is designed to be urban rather than rural. HS2 Ltd can investigate and report back with locations.

19. Will the power be generated from Mop End? If so, will more pylons need to be constructed? If not Mop End, where will the power come from?

There are currently no plans to generate power at Mop End. Power will be supplied by National Grid.

20. What will be visible above ground after construction?

The shaft head house, the hard standing area, and the access from the public highway.

21. What measures will be taken to obscure/landscape any construction visible above ground?

We will take opportunities to landscape or use screens.

22. What is the time frame for making good the countryside after work is completed?

Making good would be part of the construction programme and no timescales are known at this stage. If planting was required as part of the reinstatement this would require a period of time to establish properly, the duration of this period depends on the size of the plants which are planted.

23. If there are no definitive answers to any of the above questions, when can HS2 Ltd respond with definite answers?

We have provided definite answers where possible, and will continue to update the forum with our thinking and decisions.

Questions from the letter of 4 October:

“What would be the minimum or maximum size [of the shaft]?”

Current thinking is that at this stage the shaft head house (the building on top of shaft in the ground) would be approximately 25 x 25m. Please note that the size of the shafts and head houses is subject to ongoing engineering development and is subject to change. At this stage it is not possible to give minimum or maximum shaft dimensions.

What is the likely usage?

See answer to question 4 above.

What area will the access roads occupy?

Both during construction and permanent operation, road access to the site would be via an access on Whielden Lane.

What will the sound levels be?

At this stage it is not possible to answer this question. However, it should be noted that such shafts are already located in central London with residential properties in much closer proximity than any of the shafts proposed on the HS2 Chilterns tunnel with no significant effects for residents.