

## Central Chilterns Forum

At the recent meeting of the Central Chilterns Forum we referred to a key HS2 Ltd document entitled "HS2 Consultation and Engagement Programme". The Introduction to this document stated:

*"Nearly 55,000 responses were submitted to the consultation, which were essential in helping the Transport Secretary arrive at her decision. As a direct result of the consultation several important changes have been made to the London to West Midlands route, all designed to lessen its impacts on local communities and the environment."*

We went on to refer to the adverse changes resulting from the January 2012 announcement to the section of the proposed line running through the Chilterns AONB from the north end of the Amersham bored tunnel to the south end of the Wendover green tunnel. These changes were largely caused by shallower cuttings necessary to reduce the amount of spoil which had been seriously underestimated in the consultation documents. The changes are said to result in cost savings of £300m compared with the proposals submitted for consultation.

At the Forum meeting Simon White of HS2 Ltd expressed surprise that it was considered that there were any adverse changes. Given that he is the Environment Manager, and therefore presumably conscious of the environmental effects of HS2 on the AONB, the members expressed great surprise that he and HS2 Ltd had not appreciated that these changes would result in a significantly more adverse effect to this section of the line than the deeper cuttings originally envisaged. In this respect, the fact that there is to be an extended bored tunnel at the Amersham and Chalfont end does not detract from or in any way justify the serious adverse effect of the changes between South Heath and Wendover, the section covered by the Central Chilterns and Wendover/Dunsmore Forums.

It is these changes which the meeting referred to. They are:

1. The cutting between South Heath and Leather Lane has been made shallower by 7-8 metres compared with the February 2011 Consultation design. In places the cutting is now planned to be only 2-3 metres deep.
2. The effect of this and the viaduct changes has been to raise the line and therefore also the line of the gantries for the 5 miles between South Heath and Wendover by 7 metres (23 feet) at Leather Lane and 3 metres (10 feet) at Rocky Lane and Wendover Dean.
3. In addition, the shallower cutting has resulted in Leather Lane – a historic landscape feature of the Chilterns AONB – being diverted from its ancient pathway. Instead of being sunken it will be raised on an embankment. In addition, the grubbing up of hedgerows along the lane will result in a severe local loss in biodiversity.
4. Nearer Wendover, the horizontal alignment has been moved 35m closer to the houses in Bacombe Lane, but with no benefit to other houses.
5. HS2 Ltd plans to construct false 'bund' cuttings where the total depth of the 'Deep Cutting' will be 8 metres (FOI11-375). Although the Government has said the bunds would be constructed so as they would be blended into the landscape, we believe that - in practice - this may be very difficult to achieve without marked deterioration of the landscape and additional land purchase. This is a serious consideration in an area which has been designated in law as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

These changes will directly affect the visual impact of the line and the gantries, as well as impacting seriously on the noise interference. To even attempt seriously to mitigate these, as required within the AONB statutory protection guidelines, will cause a major increase in mitigation costs.

Given the above, it is untrue to say that the changes that have been made to the London to West Midlands route “have **all** been designed to **lessen** impacts on local communities and the environment”; indeed, in relation to this section of the AONB just the opposite is the case. In the heart of the AONB, which should be given special protection and where the changes will be much more noticeable, the visual and environmental impacts will be worse as a result of the Consultation and these will have a severe impact on this section of the Chilterns AONB.

We again emphasise that the only acceptable mitigation is to continue the bored tunnel throughout the AONB area to beyond Wendover. We have presented to you proposal in this regard by which this could certainly be achieved at a cost well within the original budget, and we believe this is still feasible even within the now arbitrarily reduced budget announced after the Consultation.

We request that this letter be recorded as part of the minutes and records of the Central Chilterns Forum.