

Why are people in the Chilterns still so angry? – supporting statement

This paper arose from comments made at the close of the last Central Chilterns Community Forum. Mr Wells essentially remarked 'We don't have to do this – why should we bother?' It was felt from this that HS2 Ltd staff did not understand the strength of feeling in this area. This paper is an attempt to explain.

Many people who responded to my request for comments said 'I am angry because...' or 'This is why I am so angry...' so the use of the word 'angry' is accurate. There are four over-arching reasons for this anger

1. The inadequacy of the case for HS2;
2. The sense that the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a nationally protected landscape whose statutory designation should be respected but is not;
3. The failure of Government and officials to recognise the very real distress being caused to people now by the HS2 proposals and to respond adequately to the problems it is causing
4. The documented short-comings of the Community Forums.

The inadequacy of the case for HS2

It is well established that the Business Case for HS2 is feeble to non-existent and the majority of benefits will accrue to London rather than the regions. Proponents of HS2 have repeatedly fallen back on the capacity argument to justify it. But even this has been demolished by the revelation that on average long-distance trains leaving Euston at peak times are only 52% full and that the number of business journeys has declining for several years. It is obvious that the growth area for rail is commuters. £500 million spent on grade separation at Ledburn would enable a doubling of commuter capacity on the WCML in five years, thereby alleviating commuter over-crowding, stimulating growth and making available sums, that would otherwise be squandered on HS2, available to tackle the much worse problem of over-crowding on trains into Paddington and Waterloo. HS2 is extravagant and unnecessary and if as a nation we have £33 billion to spend there are much better things we should be doing with it.

The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be respected but is not

There is a strong sense that the Government is breaking the law by its failure to respect the statutory protection of the Chilterns. AONBs are for everyone, not just the people who live in them. The Chilterns is the most visited AONB in the country and local people place a high value on the beauty and accessibility of the local

landscape. Numerous government statements and policies, especially relating to health, sustainability and tourism, refer to the beauty and importance of the English landscape, particularly National Parks and AONBs. The Government's obstinate refusal to recognise the significance of the Chilterns AONB in relation to their own policies seems illogical and inexplicable.

The failure to recognise and respond to the distress being caused by HS2

Property prices are blighted across the whole area. For some people the amount is what the Government would consider insignificant, but £30,000 or £40,000 is a substantial amount to most people. Others find themselves trapped in homes that are unsalable with their major life investment rendered effectively worthless. People are apprehensive about the future and the stress and uncertainty is causing family tensions and illness. But all this is being downplayed and ignored by the Government and HS2 Ltd, who display a complete lack of empathy with the distressed being caused.

The documented short-comings of the Community Forums.

People had the impression that the Community Forums would provide an opportunity to secure changes to the HS2 proposals which would reduce its impact on the local area. They were swiftly disabused of that notion by the statement that the role of HS2 Ltd was to implement the proposals as they stand. Representatives have stuck with the process in order to leave no stone unturned in terms of attempting to secure mitigation but they have found the process thoroughly frustrating and discouraging.

Hence the continuing anger of people in the Chilterns about HS2 and the way it is being implemented.