

Chesham representatives meet with HS2 Ltd

The Chesham Society and Chesham Town Council organised a meeting with HS2 Ltd at the Chesham Town Hall on Tuesday 24 July 2012 to highlight the impact that the new high speed line will have on Chesham. The Chesham Society and most Town Councillors do not support HS2. Although the line will run just two and a half miles from the town it appeared that Chesham organisations were being excluded from the Local Community Forums with HS2 Ltd at Wendover, Great Missenden, Amersham and The Chalfonts because Chesham was not directly on the proposed route. This implies that there will be little or no impact on communities outside the immediate track corridor, which is far from the truth.

The meeting was chaired by Tony Molesworth, Chairman of the Chesham Society and supported by Cllr Patricia Cherrill, Chairman of the town council Development Control Committee, Jim Conboy, Chesham Society Committee Member, Cllr Colette Littley, Town Mayor and seven other councillors and society members. HS2 Ltd was represented by Martin Wells, Country South-East Stakeholder Manager and Charlotte Brewster, the Community and Stakeholder Adviser.

At this first bilateral meeting the local town representatives highlighted the adverse impact that increased traffic, especially during the construction phase, will have on the residents, and the long term impact once the line is operational. The potential impact on the environment, especially water supply and pollution levels, were emphasised as well as the negative effect on businesses, services and amenities if transport links are disrupted. The meeting focussed on the local impact on Chesham and avoided discussing the broader effect on the Chilterns AONB, the county and nationally, all of which are being covered by other broader based organisations and voluntary groups, including Bucks County Council, Amersham HS2 Action Group and the Chiltern Society to name but three examples.

HS2 Ltd outlined the current status of the project which is "work in progress" on the Hybrid Bill (<http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/bills/hybrid/>) that will go to parliament at the end of 2013. No information in any detail is available now, nor is likely to be for some time. Land requirements are still being assessed, the Environment Impact Assessment and consideration of mitigation measures are ongoing, construction issues (location of camps and stores) are being progressed and more importantly the Construction Code of Practice has not been prepared, nor the methods by which it will be enforced.

It rapidly became apparent that HS2 Ltd has limited knowledge of the factors that will impact on Chesham. The Chesham Society and Town Council agreed to supply detailed information on specific matters and HS2 Ltd will in turn supply documentation on matters that affect Chesham for review as soon as these are available.

There was specific discussion about roads (both increased construction and commuter traffic on the B485/Church Street, A413, A416 and Chartridge Lane), possible disruption to local rail links (London Underground and Chiltern railways), environment issues (damage to aquifers feeding the water supply, increased air pollution, extra load on services if a construction site is placed close to Chesham), the impact on businesses (severing of transport links and less tourism) and essential services (hospitals, schools, emergency services).

The general concern that arises from this meeting is that although HS2 Ltd must complete all their documentation by the autumn of 2013 so that the Hybrid Bill can be tabled in parliament by the end of the year, they cannot currently supply any documentation for review and comment, nor give a time when it will become available. A follow-up meeting will be held in September, by which time the draft Code of Construction Practice should be available.

In summary the meeting served a useful purpose by making HS2 Ltd aware of our concerns but for their part HS2 Ltd were unable or unwilling to give us any detailed information. Time is fast running out for Chesham to have its say and be able to influence aspects of the project that will have an adverse effect on our town.