

Draft meeting note - Pan-Chilterns HS2 Community Forum

Held on Thursday, 25th October 2012, 6pm to 8pm

At Amersham Town Hall

Chairman:

Mike Fox, Chairman of the Chilterns Conservation Board

Present:

Representatives of:

Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB)

Cholesbury-cum-St. Leonards Parish Council

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society

Dunsmore Stop HS2

Ellesborough Parish Council

Cholesbury Action Group

Chiltern Ridges Action Group (CRAG)

Speen Area Action Group

Chalfonts No to HS2

AGAHST

The Lee Parish Council

The Chesham Society

Office of Rt. Hon. David Lidington M.P.

Office of Rt. Hon. Cheryl Gillan M.P.

The Amersham Society

HS2 Amersham Action Group

South Heath Action Group

The Chiltern Society

Wendover Parish Council

Chesham Town Council

Little Missenden Action Group

Bucks Local Access Forum

Little Missenden Parish Council

South Heath Action Group

Chiltern Countryside Group

Misbourne River Action

Wycombe District Council

HS2 Action Alliance

Cavendish Communications

Great Missenden Parish Revitalisation Group

and Chiltern residents Mr R Passant and Sir J Johnson

Representatives of HS2 Ltd.:

Martin Wells, Country South Area Stakeholder Manager

Neil Cowie, Country South Area Manager

Simon White, Country South Environment Manager

Charlotte Brewster, Country South Community & Stakeholder Advisor

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1. **Welcome** by Steve Rodrick, Chief Officer of the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB).

Introduction by the Chairman (appointed to the CCB by the Secretary of State). The meeting would take the form of a short presentation by forum members on each of the nine agenda items followed by discussion. The compensation consultation announced today would not be discussed.

2. **Significance of the AONB**: presenter Shirley Judges (CCB) The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a statutory entity designated by Parliament. It is a protected landscape with outstanding qualities and of national interest, not just for the benefit of residents. It was emphasised that AONBs are equal in beauty and importance to National Parks. The duties of the CCB are:

- To conserve and enhance the AONB
- To promote awareness and enjoyment of the Chilterns for all
- To promote the economic and social well-being of those who live in the Chilterns.

HS2 will slice through the centre of the AONB. As custodians of the AONB the CCB and Chiltern residents expect the best possible mitigation, i.e. a bored tunnel for the whole length of HS2 which passes through the Chilterns (not the current partial bored tunnel).

3. **Tunnelling options**: presenter Barnaby Usborne (CRAG Engineering Group)

A group of experienced engineers in the Chiltern Ridges Action Group has concluded that the only viable mitigation is a full bored tunnel. Two options identified by this group were discussed at a meeting with HS2 engineers in August 2012. HS2 had promised a response by the end of 2012. This delay was unacceptable. In response to a parliamentary question by Cheryl Gillan MP the Transport Minister, Simon Burns, said that a full tunnel option had been considered by HS2 Ltd prior to the January 2012 decision to proceed with HS2. But the HS2 January report does not mention a full tunnel.

HS2 response: The detailed report by the engineers' group had recently been received and was with the HS2 design consultants for consideration. HS2 needs to do more investigation on the environmental impacts of the two options before they can be compared with the existing proposal. A full appraisal will take time but the HS2 response will be detailed. The DfT response to the Parliamentary question was made without reference to the HS2 Area Stakeholder Manager.

Q. The forum raised another apparent difference between HS2 Ltd and politicians in light of the Secretary of State's recent comment about "cracking on" with the project. The role of the environment manager was queried and the question of cost versus environmental mitigation on the basis that the best environmental outcome must involve a tunnel, an option dismissed on grounds of cost by the previous Secretary of State.

HS2 response: Options are evaluated on the basis of environmental impact, cost and operational requirements.

Q. Forum members raised questions about whether any monetary value was attributed to the AONB, and it appeared not. Steve Rodrick criticised the lack of any attempt to balance the cost of the loss of beauty against the cost of tunnelling.

HS2 response: the special AONB status had been recognised by the extension of the tunnel in January 2012.

Comment: This response was disputed by forum members with a comment that having the line in the open for 9km in an AONB was an unprecedented drastic step which would make other AONBs and National Parks vulnerable.

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4. Location and design of visible structures: presenter Steve Rodrick (CCB)

Government should be subject to the same obligations for good design that applied to others in the AONB. Brunel's dictum that his railway structures should be "an adornment to the landscape" should apply to HS2. We expected something of as good quality as Brunel's bridge at Goring. Frequent comparisons with HS1 were not helpful. The disastrous outcome for the environment was clear from photographs taken in Kent showing HS1 concrete structures, ugly noise barriers, ancillary clutter, scrubby tree-belts and construction sites (expected to last some 10 years in the Chilterns). Where were HS2's design principles?

HS2 response: Rights of way over bridges would be combined to minimise the number of crossings so as to reduce visual impact.

As to design principles, the Hybrid Bill would secure land-take sufficient for the HS2 project, backed by the Environmental Statement. It would not have detail such as design for bridges. The detailed design stage would follow the enactment of the Bill.

HS2 would aim for consistency but bridges had to fit into the landscape. HS2 recognise, for example, that the Wendover viaduct has to be "right for the area." There had to be a balance between fitness for purpose and "looking right." They were thinking about the viaduct in terms of the sequence of spans required. The landscape consultants do work with the engineers. Photo-montages will be prepared but things could change.

Q. How could people get involved in this process since engagement was fundamental and HS2 were not talking about interaction?

HS2 response: this was a matter for the Community Forums. When the forums began HS2 did not have the requisite topographical information but this was now coming through and the next round of Forums should enable HS2 to bring in more detail.

Q. David Lidington's representative asked when the photomontages would be ready.

HS2 response: It was not useful to discuss design which would come later. It would be better to discuss, for example, preferences for right of way diversions and road alignments. This is what HS2 is working on as part of the Hybrid Bill preparation. It was repeated that design is not part of the Bill. People have differing ideas about the meaning of good design and quality.

Comment from the forum that the Wendover viaduct design must provide for noise mitigation, i.e. be suitable for that particular location and not a standard design.

HS2 response: HS2 had received representations from local people that they did not want to see or hear the trains; in practice that would mean a concrete box on stilts. A balance must be achieved.

Q. Why won't HS2 accept offers to discuss design with local people and the CCB?

The final **comment** on this topic was from Steve Rodrick that HS2 should be thinking about design **principles** not specifics. The CCB was created by Parliament and answerable to the Secretary of State. It was reasonable to expect that HS2 should accept the CCB's offer to discuss design guidelines at this stage.

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5. Location and impact of Construction Sites: Presenter Steve Rodrick

With construction due to last some 8-10 years the impact on the Chilterns is expected to be massive. A pan-Chiltern perspective is needed. We need an idea of:

- the scale of construction camps
- how many people will work/live in them
- which will be used for manufacture
- traffic management.

Q. What facilities are required for a tunnel so that tunnelling can be compared with other options?

HS2 response: HS2 will be looking at this.

Q. Forum members wanted to be involved at an early stage of formulating alternatives. Has the restoration of construction works been costed?

HS2 response: HS2 recognises the frustration in the Community Forums that HS2 are not able to share updated plans. They try to share emerging thinking so as to get views. HS2 want a conversation **before** putting something on a plan.

Comment: Steve Rodrick said there was a need to discuss work camps now.

HS2 response: There will be a **construction compound** (note correct term) close to each constructed feature, e.g. bridge or tunnel. Some will be satellite compounds and so not large. 10-11 large construction compounds may have residential provision but this has not been decided. Materials come into and the labour force goes out from these large compounds. The smaller compounds are moved off when that particular structure has been finished. There will be more information at the next round of Community Forums. There is a risk in telling people earlier since plans are changing. HS2 are trying to strike a balance in the Community Forums.

Comment from the forum that partnership was lacking and a confrontational approach made matters worse and was not in HS2's interest. A change of thinking was needed on HS2's part.

Another forum member commented that it sounded like HS2 would tell the forums **after** a decision was made.

HS2 response that there was a conversation about camp locations at the last Community Forums.

Q. Because of the hilly Chiltern terrain where HS2 was nowhere "at grade" it was assumed that more equipment and people would be involved. Would this involve bigger camps than areas where the line is "at grade"? If so the AONB could expect greater disruption than other areas. This was all the more reason for a fully bored tunnel through the Chilterns.

HS2 response that cuttings had been designed for long-term mitigation.

Q. How many large construction camps would there be in the AONB?

HS2 response: Probably just one at Wendover.

Q. What is a large construction compound?

HS2 response: There is no definite answer but say 200m x 100m – a tentative figure not to be quoted. Experts need to decide depending on the quantity of materials coming in and out. We should expect a main compound near Wendover which would feed smaller compounds.

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Q. Have HS2 figures included the cost of restoring compounds to AONB standard?

HS2 response: All construction compounds will be discussed in the Environmental Statement (ES) which will include a statement that they will be restored.

Comment from the forum that surely visitors will be deterred from coming to the Chilterns. How would it be possible for the Chilterns' AONB status to be preserved during construction?

Q. In view of the change in HS2 terminology could they define a construction compound?

HS2 response: It comprises offices and plant-storage and is the place where deliveries are made. Workers may be housed in them but only in the larger compounds; this was under consideration.

Q. Will the environs of the compound be affected?

HS2 response: Sites would be kept as narrow as possible and extra bits would be handed back duly restored to the owners afterwards.

Comment from a forum member that there are caravans on work sites on motorways so surely the HS2 builders would have to live on-site or close by.

Items 6 & 7 were combined: Impacts on the roads network and Traffic Management;
presenters Steve Rodrick (CCB) and Marilyn Fletcher (Chiltern Countryside Group)

The main Chilterns road network, including small feeder roads, will be crossed or otherwise affected by HS2. How will HS2 avoid disturbance so that the network can be used as before? Engagement is needed on this matter; the Community Forums are not making any headway on this. The Board and Forum invite HS2 to work together on this problem.

Q. With the line involving the building of tunnels, cuttings, bridges etc. (nothing will be at grade in the Chilterns) it was assumed by the Forum that work would be starting at different times increasing the spread of disruption. Presumably small rural roads would be affected with potential for damage to ecology – hedges etc, as well as traffic disruption. Access between places will be disrupted, for example for people on the Chesham/South Heath side of the line who depend on access to Great Missenden. How will HS2 manage this? In particular will HS2 be built from roads (i.e. rather than via a haul road) and how will HS2 minimise social disruption?

HS2 response: The A413 will be a major route for bringing in materials. There will be discussions with local authorities and the Highway Agency. Deliveries will be timed to help avoid traffic disruption; HS2 want to avoid delays too. The local environment plans in the Code of Construction Practice (CoCP) will cover this aspect. There will be a need for traffic management at times. The method of building the Wendover Dean bridge has to be included in the ES. It seems inevitable that there will be some disruption.

HS2 assume that most of the route will be accessed following a “trace” up hill. Frith Hill will be used but they will also be using the trace. They are trying to minimise the impacts on small local roads. There will be construction methodology work to see how access roads can be maintained. Disruption is not in HS2's interest. Work will be phased to avoid disruption.

Comment: A representative of Chesham Town council pointed out how Church Street in Chesham is a narrow street lined with historic buildings. Traffic is frequently brought to a standstill and so this road is totally unsuitable for construction traffic.

Q. Since it is impossible for lorries to pass under the bridge on the road between Amersham and Wendover will a feeder road be necessary?

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HS2 response: HS2 is trying to achieve a workable solution.

Q. Will rail be used to transport materials?

HS2 response: This is being investigated. Ballast and the rail track are expected to be brought in to the railhead at Calvert and then moved down the trace. Smaller quantities for individual structures will probably come in by road. The detail has yet to be worked out.

Q. Will there be a haul road along the trace?

HS2 response: Yes – equipment will move along the trace as the track is built.

Q. A question about construction methods at a Community Forum resulted in the answer that the contractors would decide so the CoCP was fluid; the contract price will depend on a contractor's chosen methods. Will the CoCP be kept fluid or will there be a strict regime?

HS2 response: The Environmental Statement identifies impacts and sets a benchmark for the project. Any change must stay within that minimal environmental performance. There will be some flexibility on how to achieve standards.

The Hybrid bill deals with land-take. The ES sets constraints. Otherwise HS2 need planning permission to do something else.

Comment: There was some concern from the forum over the comment about “fluidity” – this was worrying.

8. Impacts on the rights of way network: presenter John Elfes (Bucks Local Access Forum)

HS2 have little understanding of rights of way and their proposed solution made matters worse. They underestimate the importance of rights of way in the Chiltern and the economic and health consequences. The earlier HS2 response about combining rights of way to minimise the number of bridges is worrying and shows this lack of understanding. The network should not be impaired, so bridges and/or underpasses are expected. The network is important to both locals and visitors. It provided choices of different routes and that choice must be maintained. Pinch-points only diminish the value of the right of way network. There is an urgent need to sit down with maps and discuss this. The maps already exist.

HS2 response: They are about to start discussions with Bucks County Council (BCC) (who had now agreed to speak to HS2 Ltd) and HS2 want a meeting with the Local Access Forum and BCC – this would be a formal forum. Agenda items on rights of way at Community Forums have not been successful but HS2 will try again. As to the earlier HS2 response in this meeting about combining rights of way over bridges, they wanted to clarify that this would not mean cutting off long lengths of any right of way but would only apply where rights of way were very close together. Local realignment was only to mitigate the number of bridges.

Q. Who will attend the HS2-BCC meetings?

HS2 response: There will be two forums; planning forums for all local authorities (members and officers) and specific meetings with officers on technical issues, e.g. rights of way or traffic. They will not be public meetings. HS2 will talk to Local Access Forums and Community Forums about rights of way.

Steve Rodrick commented that HS2 need to talk to other people too.

HS2 response: HS2 has had detailed discussions with other local authorities, even some 51 members, but things have been different with Buckinghamshire. HS2 are happy to include rights of way in technical discussions with the CCB.

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When asked, HS2 confirmed that they could offer a Rights of Way workshop.

9. Noise impacts and mitigation options: presenter Simon Hook (South Heath HS2 Action Group)

The highest standards are required to preserve the tranquillity of the AONB. Construction and operational noise levels should not have a significant impact on the environment. The aspiration was that we should not see, hear or feel HS2. Some construction impact was inevitable so the CoCP must have restrictions on working at nights, weekends and Bank Holidays.

As for operation, the exits and portals of tunnels must be designed to absorb shock-waves. With cuttings, depth was important to reduce noise levels, and noise barriers must be at the right height, fully landscaped and reduce the amount of land-take where possible.

The baseline noise-measurement is fundamental. Who chooses the locations? What is the model being tested? Will noise contours be based on models or real measurements? There were many questions and a sheet of these would be emailed to the HS2 Stakeholder Advisor.

HS2 response: Noise contour maps show the predicted level of noise, not the difference between current noise and predicted noise.

Comment from the forum about the noise from pantographs. Experts say it cannot be predicted at 200mph. We needed to know the baseline levels.

HS2 response: Surveys have measured current noise levels and the locations have been provided to local authorities. Some flexibility was needed because of access problems (landowner's consent was needed). Surveys feed into the models of noise levels.

Comment by Marilyn Fletcher (Chilterns Countryside Group) that she is happy to share information she has been given about noise levels from trains in other places.

Q. What noise standard is HS2 aiming for?

HS2 response: No target decibel level will be stated in the ES.

As to the CoCP, many local authorities had given feedback on the draft and the consultation draft would be published towards the end of November.

10. Tourism and the local economy

There was insufficient time for a presentation on this subject but the forum requested an update on how these aspects were being dealt with in the ES.

HS2 response: the EIA includes a socio-economic assessment which involves surveys of businesses. Suggestions were welcome for particular businesses to be consulted as well as Chambers of Commerce.

Q. The Chilterns Tourism Network includes about 140 businesses which have not been consulted. Could HS2 do so as a priority?

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Comment from the forum that very little research seemed to have been done on the socio-economic impact. There had been nothing about this in the Appraisal of Sustainability on the Chilterns – only Birmingham and London. The consultation on the EIA scoping had tourism in the agriculture topic, not under socio-economic impacts. Government tourism policy recognises the importance of AONBs. A long view is required; tourism needs to be considered over a 60 year period.

HS2 response: Agree that the impact needs to be looked at and can't say why it has not been done at this stage.

Comment: A forum member will send a copy of a recent Bucks Examiner article on local tourism to the HS2 Stakeholder Adviser.

Q. The HS2 business plan has a figure for the wider economic impact. Why can HS2 do this but not work out a figure for reputational damage? The reputation of the whole of the Chilterns will suffer in the eyes of potential visitors so a net figure is required. Since a full bored tunnel would largely avoid this impact HS2 are expected to make this calculation. The CCB can do this if HS2 cannot.

11. Making Community Forum Meetings more effective: presenter Isobel Darby (Chalfonts No to HS2)

The participants have differing goals; the community wants to minimise disruption whilst HS2 want cost-effectiveness. The Community Forums are frustrating. Grievances about them include the placing of security guards on the door at the first round and the appearance of unapproved minutes on the HS2 website. With the 4th round of forums looming there was a need for trust, confidence and mutual respect.

The forum agendas are also “HS2 Ltd heavy” and focus on theoretical issues. Questions about practicalities elicit the response that HS2 don't know or can't tell the forum. There is too little time to discuss concerns. New information is “thrown in” as if a side issue. The forum members need to know so HS2 should not wait to divulge information.

Forum members need to understand what things mean – all this is new to them.

Residents naturally have expectations that their community leaders know what is happening, e.g. about surveys, letters to landowners, property purchases. Without information from HS2 community leaders can't give feedback to their communities.

The time for the forums is limited so there is a need to have meaningful discussions about local issues to achieve the best outcome for all. There should be trust, openness and honesty.

HS2 response: At the first forums an undertaking was given not to have security guards on the door. An apology was given about the minutes being published without agreement. This was owing to team problems and should not have happened. Community Forums have differing requirements with some wanting them published as soon as possible whilst others wait until final agreement.

HS2 have Community Forums because they want to not because they have to and they want them to be useful. It is in HS2's interests to know what aspects may drive petitions during the course of the Hybrid Bill so as to avoid problems. It was stressed that the forums are for mutual benefit.

HS2 recognise that forum members want information in advance but some of it is very sensitive and they have to strike a balance as to when to share information. They will try to improve but it is difficult. There is a danger of delaying things until HS2 is comfortable that something should go public.

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Comment from the forum that HS2 should trust them not to share sensitive information.

HS2 response: this has happened but constraints need to be understood by forum members. On the point about HS2-heavy agendas it was appreciated that e.g. the noise presentation took a long time making the agenda too packed.

HS2 offered to take up only half the time of the meeting in giving out information but it was up to the Community Forums to decide on this.

The Stakeholder Manager offered a repeat of the engineering update and discussion on the safeguarding consultation for future forum meetings.

Comment from the forum that principles, rather than details, should be discussed. HS2's principles of engagement were read out. These include discussing possible remedies so there should be no further delay. The forum needed to hear about solutions and options.

HS2 response: They want to offer solutions and ideas and ask for forum comments. They accept that they haven't done this with maps/plans but this does not mean that HS2 is not trying to engage.

Q. How do the requests made in the Community Forumss get implemented?

HS2 response: As an example everyone wants a tunnel but HS2 can't offer a vote on a tunnel. That is a request they can't action. But, say, for a road realignment it is useful for HS2 to receive ideas and one idea for a realignment has come from a Community Forum. So comments at forums can make a difference.

The final **Comment** from the forum was that nothing said during the meeting demonstrated that HS2 recognised the essence or "specialness" of the AONB.

The meeting concluded with the Chairman thanking everyone for their attendance.