

## **GMStopHS2    Newsletter**

### **Progress on Petitioning on the Hybrid Bill**

Since my last newsletter there has been some progress on petitioning with the Select Committee now hearing cases in the New Year sitting. The chair of the Select Committee has confirmed that the Chilterns area petitions will not be heard until well after the General election. However they are sometimes reducing the notice period to petitioners, e.g. giving some petitioners in Boddington only 12 days notice.

The timetable for hearing petitions over the next 3 months is that the Select Committee expect to hold the last hearings in the week commencing 23 March, giving the Select Committee little time to wrap matters up and make decisions on evidence heard so far before Parliament is dissolved on 30 March for the election.

The Select Committee are prompting HS2 to do deals with petitioners and, in the Birmingham area, have told HS2 to reduce their landtake at Washford Heath and to work with petitioners to create jobs.

As part of their first set of decisions announced by the Select Committee HS2 have been told, after many representations, to review their plans for compulsory buying of farmland they require for temporary use in the construction period. They should lease it for their required period of occupation and then hand it back.

The Select Committee visited the Colne Valley and Hillingdon area on 15 January, leaping over Bucks and the Chilterns as, prior to this visit, they have visited the route down as far as Oxfordshire. Bucks CC and local protesters considered, too little time was spent on Denham and Harefield areas, bearing in mind only 10 minutes was spent on the proposed construction site, the biggest such site in the country. Bucks CC are lobbying for a return visit.

Considerable media coverage was obtained (BBC, ITV, Sky, Daily Telegraph and Guardian) when Alex Rukin, (the son of Joe the major StopHS2 campaigner) appeared before the Select Committee. He was reckoned to be the youngest petitioner to Parliament. His petitioning points included HS2 are poor at maths as their figures do not add up and they cannot read maps as there were errors on their presented mappings.

### **Compensation News**

The offer from HS2 to produce a paper on the Property Bond for the Select committee outlining why they considered the bond was too expensive was produced on 13 January, three days before the Government announced their long term compensation proposals. This contains a host of misinformation that HS2AA will be including in their response to the Select Committee.

The compensation scheme now published (failing McLoughlin's promise to do so before the end of the year), is a rebranding of the unpopular hardship based scheme based on certain criteria. The proposal still ignores the advice on the extent of the losses due to HS2 identified by their report received from PriceWaterhouseCoopers. Basically it is the same scheme that was in the consultation. The Government have wasted time consulting and just ignored the results, breaking their promise to help most of those unable to sell their house due to HS2.

### **Political Developments**

The Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons has issued its report on HS2. It has concluded that HS2 is unlikely to provide value for money and attacked the Department of Transport's disjointed planning, asking why other big rail proposals, such as "HS3" linking

northern cities and Crossrail 2 between north and south London, had not been considered by the department earlier.

They said they were “sceptical” about whether HS2 would deliver value for money for the taxpayer and doubtful whether the project would stay within its forecast costs because of the complexity of the project and the uncertainty around construction inflation.

They also concluded the DfT had not provided “a clear explanation for why an assessment of a high speed rail line between cities in the north of England (so-called HS3) was not carried out before High Speed 2 to test whether improving connectivity in the north was a greater priority,”

Sir David Higgins, chairman of HS2, in his evidence believes that HS2 and HS3 could be built at the same time. However the committee’s report found that it is unlikely that either industry or the government has the skills for this, Furthermore, the economic case is yet to be proven, with the Channel tunnel high-speed rail link failing to deliver expected regeneration benefits in Kent. The new £16bn London Crossrail 1 train line was partly funded by a supplement to business rates, so why was a similar measure for HS2, reducing the cost to taxpayers was not considered?

The Daily Mirror reported this as “The controversial HS2 scheme could swallow an extra £7.5 billion” picking up that the contingency fund will mask overspending rather than valid calls for contingency. . The article is on <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/news-uk/controversial-rail-scheme-49875290> and there is a poll to vote on HS2. Please look up and VOTE on their poll (when I voted on its poll showed 86% of voters were against HS2)

Boris Johnson has stated he is opposed to HS2 unless the route changes, scraps the Heathrow link, includes a link to HS1 and extends the Ruislip tunnel. Pure electioneering.

## **Network Rail Problems**

The disastrous overrunning of repair work at Kings Cross has focussed on the total inefficiency of Network Rail. Press reports identified multiple layers of management, maintenance teams unable to start work as order forms were incomplete and the new station at Northampton opened 5 months late. So how will HS2’s track be maintained if it is given to Network Rail to carry out?

## **Bucks CC**

One important observation from the Select Committee is that they appreciate pictures and maps to assist their appreciation of petitioners cases. So BCC are planning drop in sessions in county Hall for 23, 27 Jan and 15 Feb to help petitioners plan their appearances, see/use hard copy maps, help with power point presentations of cases and deal with specific queries. To attend contact Sarah at [HS2Blueprint@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:HS2Blueprint@buckscc.gov.uk)

They are also building up their case for no sustainable placement (spoil to us) in the County, including finding other uses for the spoil, either at Hunts Green or in the Steeple Claydon / Calvert area.

## **Tunnelling**

An interesting decision appears to be that, following petitions from Hints, the Select Committee recommended tunnelling of the line near such villages. This may be a precedent of use to us in this area.

Earlier HS2 had outlined their criteria about tunnelling as being

- a) where track alignment is not possible without tunnelling;
- b) the line would sever a community; and
- c) it would be cost effective, mainly due to disruption that would be caused.

## **Legal Cases**

The Court of Appeal decided that no Strategic Environmental Assessment was required before the safeguarding directions for the route were made, thereby dismissing Hillingdon Council and HS2AA case.

## **Conclusion**

During the House of Lords Economic Committee hearing about HS2, Lord May stated “the more I have heard about HS2 and learned from many people involved in, I would not trust them to mow my lawn, let alone build a big thing like HS2”

**Mark Ladd**