HS2 Amersham Action Group



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TO Dr Elaine King, Simon Kearey
CC Tom Beeston, John Gladwin, Neil Jackson

RESTORATION OF THE AONB

Dear Elaine & Simon

I believe that it is time to start serious discussions with HS2, regarding the restoration of the AONB after the construction phase is completed. There are several reasons for this –

1. Study of the plans & biodiversity claims indicate that over half the area in CFA9 will require restoration[1]
2. A walk along the route suggests that the actual situation is worse than this. Most of the area within the act limits has been covered in spoil dumps. This is probably due to the time taked to complete the Smalldean conveyor, and the delays to the Wendover cut and cover tunnel (which is to be backfilled with spoil from the South Heath cuttings)
3. Current Schedule 17 applications include plans for landscaping, although these are 'for information', not for approval[2]. Engagement with the planners before the plans are submitted is essential, since HS2 are extremely reluctant to make any changes afterwards.
4. HS2 are not providing information on current plans, even in response to FoI requests.[3]
5. While the line itself will not open for many years (if ever), this is in part due to the gap between completion of the civil

[1] Biodiversity-Net Loss report , https://chilternsociety.org.uk/hs2-biodiversity-claims/

[2] http://www.hs2amersham.org.uk/Resources/Construction/SH_cutting/Sched17_1/HS2-SOUTH_HEATH_CUTTING_PROFORMA-4461174.pdf (section 7)

[3] http://www.hs2amersham.org.uk/Resources/FOI/23-5125/index.htm

engineering, and installation of the railway. Restoration can commence once the 'Civils' are complete.

At this stage it is not clear what sort of environment HS2 plan to create – will it be a typical Chiltern landscape (as far as possible), or something more exotic, for which a higher biodiversity can be claimed ? How is the restoration to be managed, and by whom ? An independent report on the state of mitigation planting already undertaken should be requested, since appearances suggest that this has not generally been a success.[4]

One example of the problems which will arise is provided by Leather Lane, where the conservation group have made progress in persuading the new contractor (Align) of the need for improved mitigation for the wildlife corridor used by bats. Planning the management of the site post construction is difficult, while the site limits and future ownership are uncertain. There may well be other small pockets of land which cannot be returned to their original use – what will happen to them ?

Unless action is taken soon, the restoration of the AONB will be left to HS2, whose record in managing environmental matters does not inspire confidence. A first step would be to arrange a high level meeting between HS2, Bucks and the environmental organisations; I believe that Bucks would back such a move (following discussions at the meeting held last week about Leather Lane). The first objective should be to obtain a commitment (from HS2) to undertake real consultation and community involvement in the restoration program – rather than them telling us what they plan to do next, which what happens at most meetings.

Regards,

Dr Jim Conboy
(HS2 Amersham Action Group,
Leather Lane Conservation Group)

[4] https://flic.kr/p/2pmBFSW