

Denham Against HS2

Time for Some Answers, Mr Grieve

If the government spin-doctor who came up with the phrase 'HS2 will be an engine for growth' earned a pound for every time the phrase was uttered on TV and radio on 28th January, he is a rich man indeed.

That was the day when the government announced the northern extension of the high-speed line, in a Y-shape from the West Midlands to Leeds and Manchester, with work scheduled to begin in the middle of the next decade.

"HS2 will be an engine for growth" said the Chancellor, George Osborne, in his Cheshire constituency – through which the line will pass, albeit swerving well clear of the affluent communities where footballers and their lady friends reside.

"HS2 will be an engine for growth" trumpeted David Cameron on a visit to Leeds, where the city fathers think the high-speed line will bring jobs and investment to an economically struggling region.

And back in London, the Transport Secretary, Patrick McLoughlin, said ... well, you can guess what he said. By the time the 10pm TV news bulletins came on, the catchphrase was sounding distinctly tired, and no politician had managed to explain *why* so many people, businesses and investors will suddenly feel the urge to relocate to the north of England if and when the line is built. If there is to be an exodus between one part of the country and another, experience of other high-speed railways around the world tells us that the population shift will happen in the opposite direction, with the richer pastures of London and the south-east more accessible than ever before to ambitious folk from the regions.

The second phase of HS2's construction may or may not include two connecting 'spurs' to Heathrow, depending on the findings of the Davies Commission, which is due to report on the future of UK aviation in 2015. One of the spurs would be tunnelled underneath Denham, branching off the mainline at a complicated junction in some rolling fields near Tilehouse Lane. If Heathrow is to remain the country's principal hub airport, a third and possibly *fourth* runway will be needed, with implications for South Bucks and other areas beneath the new flightpaths too horrible to contemplate. We fervently hope it never comes to that, but while Sir Howard Davies and his team consider the options, Denham and Harefield face two more years of uncertainty and property blight. And whatever the Commission decides, we still have the apparent *fait accompli* of the main high-speed line careering through our Country Park, with only a smattering of home-owners, farmers and businesses eligible for any kind of compensation under the present arrangements.

So we're still in the mire. We need every friend we can get. As it happens, Denham's MP, Dominic Grieve, is also the Attorney General, and has the ear of the PM and the Cabinet. But have we heard him champion our cause by speaking out against HS2? What has he done to convey our concerns to a government hell-bent on driving this £33bn project forward, parroting clichés like "engine for growth" whenever a microphone hoves into view?

Recently I went to Mr Grieve's weekly surgery in Beaconsfield to ask him about this, and he assured me that he has recently had talks with the PM, the Transport Secretary and HS2 Ltd, the government quango whose website depicts a sexy-looking, soundless train swishing through Constable-like countryside on a futuristic viaduct.

HS2 is not going to be anything like that, especially for people like us, who will have to live with ten years or more of substantial disturbance. One morning in the not-too-distant future we could wake up to discover that our favourite walking route has been blocked off, the birds of Broadwater Lake have flown, the sailing and water ski clubs have had to relocate, and we can't get to work on time because the A412 is off-limits for a few months.

So if you'd like to hear what Dominic Grieve has to say about all this, please come along to the public meeting at the Memorial Hall in Denham Village on **Saturday 9th March (11am-1:30pm)** and put *your* question about HS2, and what the future might hold for this corner of his constituency. Appearing alongside him will be Martin Tett, Leader of Bucks County Council, who has been an impressive figurehead in the national campaign against HS2. They may be fellow Conservatives, but they have responded to the threat of HS2 in entirely different ways. It should be a lively debate. Don't miss it.

Frank Partridge – Denham Against HS2