

Newsletter**Introduction and Judicial Reviews**

For the whole of February we have been waiting for the result of the Judicial Reviews that were expected to be announced by the end of January. We understand the judge has been ill and so the result has been delayed. The latest rumour is that it will be announced at the end of next week. I understand that the respective Counsels for the Government and the plaintiffs are notified first and they have to obtain permission to advise their clients. 24 hours later the decision is published.

Once released, my email traffic will explode and from this I will prepare an updated newsletter.

Announcement of the Y route

This has been the most important HS2 event in the last month or so. The government announced their current proposal right at the end of January. It does not follow a straight line (unlike the requirement for phase 1 to justify the route going through the heart of the Chilterns as speed was essential for the business case) so it avoids impacting on any National Parks or AONB's, (almost of the Secretary of State for Transport and George Osborne's constituencies). The route has been calculated as being 26% longer than a straight line but the cost has remained the same overall!

Other interesting nuggets to be revealed are that stations for Sheffield and Nottingham/Derby are not in the costs and local authorities with stations will be expected to contribute towards their costs.

Already some 10 action groups against HS2 have been reported as being formed along the Y section. These will grow as the reality of the nonsense of HS2 is realised. As an aside an interesting aspect of the latest argument of helping the north south divide is that Doncaster has one of the best and fastest train services but is nevertheless one of the poorest places in the country.

Bucks County Council ("BCC") Blueprint for HS2

BCC held a mini summit on HS2 last week at which they launched the County's Mitigation Blueprint for HS2 ("Seeking the best if it comes to the worst"). It is designed as being a comprehensive statement of cross county mitigation that is required and expected. As such it has been endorsed by all district councils in the county, the National Trust, the CPRE, the National Farmers Union, the Ramblers Association, Bucks Business First, the Chilterns Conservation Board and the BB&O Wildlife Trust amongst others. The key is for it to be the legacy of the route. Drafts had been circulated to action groups and parish councils inter alia, and it is being continuously updated after more local consultations.

It is divided into thematic issues and local issues, construction and the route legacy. The thematic issues are landscape and visual; ecology and wildlife; sound, noise and vibration; traffic and transport; socio-economic; cultural and heritage; community and amenity (rights of way and green infrastructure, water resources and flood risk and mineral resources and waste); with the local issues are divided into the HS2 community forum areas.

I understand copies have been sent to the Secretary of State and the Minister for Transport, HS2 Ltd, all MP's and members of the House of Lords. In the forward Martin Tett, the leader of the BCC, sums HS2 up by saying "were the business case robust, had all the alternatives been examined and found inadequate and had the project formed part of a clear Transport Strategy, they might have accepted the project." So might we and many others.

Copies to inspect are at CDC offices and the Amersham Anti HS2 shop in Hill Avenue.

Political update

The Government intends to introduce a Paving Bill on HS2 after the Queens Speech in May. This is a very rare parliamentary event and will enable the Government to spend a further £150 million on HS2 before it receives Parliamentary approval. The need for this bill also may well have been because HS2 are behind with their progressing of the work for the environmental statement and other aspects for the hybrid bill, and to enable HS2 to get access to land to progress the project.

It has also been reported that the environmental statement of the effect of HS2 on the environment will comprise 50,000 pages and weigh half a ton in written form!

Compensation

HS2Action Alliance have achieved an important success on an appeal on a freedom of information request on HS2 data on blight. A judge, in ordering HS2 to disclose the furthest distance from the proposed route where a compensation claim has been paid, determined blight caused is market perception and not actual adverse effects. The consequence of the data now released is that the vast majority of blight is not covered by the 60/120 meters of the purchase zone.

Community Forums

The latest round of these have just been concluded with HS2 announcing that they will not be holding the next round until late summer, after the Environmental Consultation scheduled for late spring/early summer. With this in mind HS2 were challenged to say how they intend to carry out their programme of consultation outlined at the beginning of the Forums and when they would reply to numerous questions posed to them. On failing to respond to these requests, their decision and excuses for not holding Forums on a regular basis was described as scandalous.

The local forums have been even more frustrating with changes in staff and inexperienced engineers unable or unwilling to answer basic questions on their latest thinking on the route design. These local frustrations, especially the indifference of HS2 staff to the impact of HS2, the conduct of the community forums and the presentation of the changes to the route for engineering, (due to the aquifers), and cost (shallower cuttings), being announced as improvement for the benefit of the AONB were all tabled at meetings and will be minuted for lobbying at the hybrid bill stage.

More Tunnelling through the Chilterns

As the Y route does not materially affect National Parks or AONB's, a letter to the Secretary of State has been sent insisting he considers further tunnelling through the Chilterns now.

The CRAG alternative proposals for tunnelling through the Chilterns AONB with gaps of 700 meters at either Mantles Wood or Durham Farm (by Wendover Dene) have been dismissed by HS2 on grounds of cost. HS2 have refused to disclose their own costings on grounds of commercial confidentiality, even though these are admitted to include a 40% contingency. However we understand that this alternative proposal will have to be included in the environmental statement in the hybrid bill to be presented to Parliament.

Amesham Information Centre

This was opened by Cheryl Gillan at the beginning of February and is open from 10-4 on weekdays and Saturdays. It has detailed updated maps of the route, explanations of the Judicial review arguments, the Chiltern Society DVD of the effect of the route from Euston to Wendover playing continuously. Tea and coffee (and a play area for kids) are available.

Do make sure you call in and get updated on the horrors of HS2 to the area.

Mark Ladd