

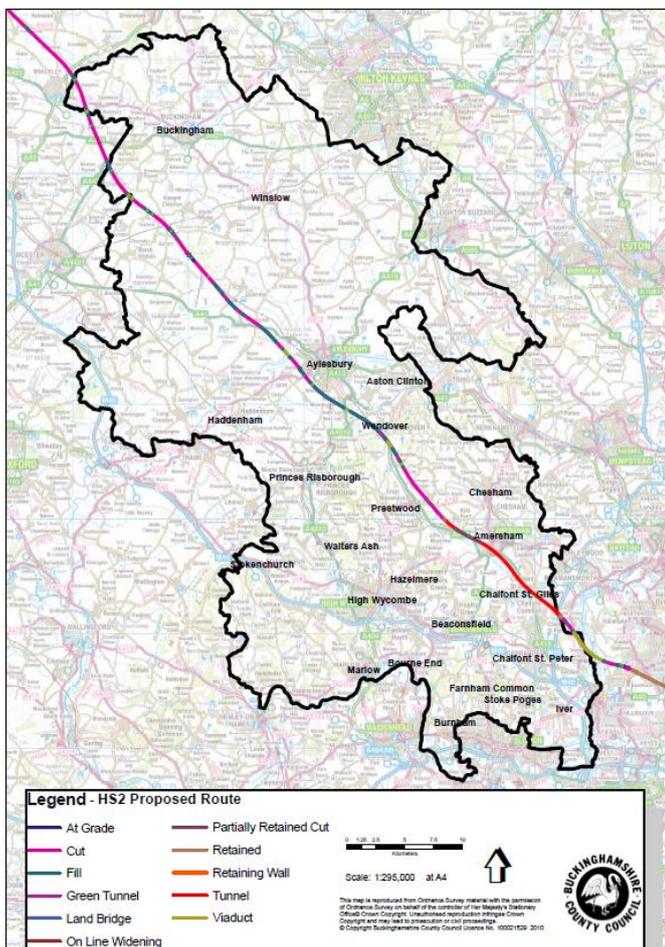


# Report to TECC Select Committee

**Date:** 10 March 2022  
**Title:** HS2 Update  
**Author:** Laura Leech, Head of Major Projects

## 1 Background

- 1.1 In February 2017 the HS2 hybrid (Phase 1) Act received Royal Assent. This provided HS2 Ltd with an Act of Parliament (equivalent to deemed planning permission) to construct high speed railway between London and Birmingham.
- 1.2 One third (approx. 60km) of Phase One dissects Buckinghamshire (approx. 16km of which is in tunnel).



- 1.3 The High Speed Rail Act grants deemed planning permission for HS2 Phase One of the route, but some of the detailed design and construction are subject to further approval.
- 1.4 Buckinghamshire Council is a Qualifying Authority, which means that some of HS2's proposals need to come to the Council for approval which give the Council a small degree of influence over the details of the proposals. As a Qualifying Authority, Buckinghamshire Council has signed up to the Planning Memorandum which commits the authority to having appropriate staffing levels and use reasonable endeavours in its decision-making processes to meet the timescales for decisions (within 8 weeks). It also commits the authority to not making unreasonable or onerous requests on HS2 Ltd which would lead to increases in cost or delays to the programme. The Planning Memorandum also places obligations and responsibilities onto HS2 Ltd.
- 1.5 Within Buckinghamshire Council, the HS2 Team has responsibility for processing all approvals for HS2 infrastructure and transportation arrangements as well as stakeholder engagement. The team is responsible for ensuring that HS2 Ltd and its contractors work within the HS2 Act and agreed consents and fulfil their obligations in terms of engagement with directly affected parties, the wider community, and those with an interest in the scheme.
- 1.6 The last 12 months has seen the completion of early/enabling works and an increase in the overall level of HS2 related activities.

## **2 HS2 engagement & Buckinghamshire Council support & intervention on behalf of residents**

- 2.1 HS2 Ltd has an obligation to engage with directly affected parties. In October 2021, HS2 Ltd relaunched their refreshed Engagement Strategy including 10 commitments on which they will measure their success. The Strategy can be viewed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hs2-ltds-community-engagement-strategy>
- 2.2 A workshop was hosted by Buckinghamshire Council in November 2021, with HS2 Ltd and several Parish Councils, which explored how effective engagement was felt to be and whether local people felt they could influence outcomes.
- 2.3 The Council is repeatedly told that the project has its own Engagement Teams who are resourced to undertake adequate engagement and that any engagement undertaken by local authorities is at their own expense.

- 2.4 Despite this, the Council is increasingly being asked to intervene on behalf of frustrated residents and organisations, which presents a number of challenges for the HS2 Team:
- a) Our experience is that many engagement activities are undertaken too late to enable stakeholders time to challenge or influence decisions that affect them, or proposals are presented as a fait-accompli. A recent example of this is the plan to construct a conveyor over the A413 to move earth from the east side of the road to Small Dean Road. This is a major departure from the plan which was first communicated in early February with work on site clearance scheduled to commence the same month.
  - b) HS2 is a catalyst used by residents to raise an additional range of road/transport related issues with the Council, so many 'HS2' branded enquiries which are received by the HS2 Team are complex and responses require co-ordination across transport disciplines (for example road safety, road repairs, speed limits, increased traffic volumes and traffic management).
  - c) An increasing number of community groups and forums have been formed and officer presence is requested in addition to attendance by HS2 Ltd and/or relevant contractors. Whilst placing added pressure on already stretched council resources, this has proved useful in terms of consistency of messages being received.

### **3 Buckinghamshire Council response to challenges and what we have achieved**

- 3.1 The Council has responded to the increasing challenges. These include recruiting three new members of staff over the last 12 months, directly in relation to stakeholder engagement, including two marshals. The two new marshals support residents with the construction of both HS2 and EWR by undertaking investigations into enquiries and complaints. The marshals work proactively and are on hand to undertake site visits, investigate issues, meet face to face with residents and liaise with contractors to resolve concerns.
- 3.2 Deployment of three mobile CCTV cameras; whilst the cost of the cameras was funded by HS2, there is an overhead in the region of £50k per annum being absorbed by Buckinghamshire Council. This covers co-ordination of redeployments, site assessments, review of CCTV footage, query resolution with contractors, compliance with regulatory requirements and stakeholder communications. The cameras are primarily being used to monitor congestion impacted by HS2 construction and to identify construction traffic using routes in contravention of agreed lorry routes.

- 3.3 The cumulative impact of lorries going to/from different compounds but using the same routes (all approved on an individual basis by compound) has been challenged on behalf of residents and will be going to judicial review.
- 3.4 The Council is pressing HS2 Ltd to ensure that the rural nature (both inside and outside the AONB) of the county including roads and lanes is retained and associated infrastructure is sympathetic to the local environment.

## **4 Trend & Expectations**

- 4.1 The scale of construction activity will be increasing over the next couple of years.
- 4.2 The volumes of complaints and enquiries has increased as activity on the ground has escalated and this trajectory is likely to continue as the project proceeds.
- 4.3 HS2 Ltd recorded volumes of enquiries and complaints relating to operations in Buckinghamshire both show an upward trend, with 172 enquiries in January 22 (monthly average of 140 in 2021) and 46 complaints (monthly average of 37 in 2021). Of the 418 complaints received in the 12 months to the end of January 2022, 78% of enquiries related to: traffic and transport (46%), site operations (18%) and noise and vibration (14%).

## **5 Next Steps**

- 5.1 The Council is developing a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to better manage and analyse queries and complaints relating to HS2 construction.
- 5.2 Continue to challenge approvals where these are outside the letter and spirit of the HS2 Act
- 5.3 Review and pursue all agreed mitigations to ensure that these are delivered.

