

**Motion to Council on 25 April, to be proposed by Cllr Charlie Clare**

*'This Council proposes that the Leader should write to Government to request that all enabling works for HS2 in Buckinghamshire should be paused until the Notice to Proceed to main works contractors has been approved. As required by the Department of Transport, Notice to Proceed should not be given until management capability, affordability of contracts and robustness of revised business case have all been proven. We see no reason why the County should suffer significant disruption and long term environmental destruction until detailed design and cost has been approved. We also ask that HS2 Ltd significantly improves the effectiveness of its community engagement with those impacted by the line'.*

HS2 is not a done deal. The plans that have been made public so far - and that were used to gain Parliamentary Assent for the scheme in 2013 - are little more than educated guesses.

But although HS2 doesn't not have permission to be built, our County is already being irreversibly damaged and that I hope that destruction can be stopped.

For three years, Effiage Kier, the designated contractors for the line through Buckinghamshire, have been working on detailed designs and – most importantly costings – for the actual building of HS2 through our county.

Before HS2 has permission to build anything, they have to take these designs to the Government, along with

- Affordability of contracts i.e. The Cost
- Proof of Management Capability
- And a Revised Business Case.

This process is known as 'Notice to Proceed' and until it has been granted the HS2 scheme is no more than a Government proposal, for which they have asked for a quote. There are no costs, there is no accepted design, there is no proof of a viable business case. HS2 does not have permission to be built.

Day by day more and more doubt is thrown onto the affordability and the business case for HS2. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Liz Truss has made it very clear that there are significant doubts about this project.

HS2 have postponed providing the information required for Notice to Proceed – one can only assume because the numbers don't add up yet - until the end of the year and I think that is fair to summarise that currently the project's

costs are escalating out of control and they are desperate to find a way to make it affordable.

So HS2 is far from being a done deal. Yet, Buckinghamshire is already suffering huge environmental damage and massive disruption for residents.

Although HS2 does not have permission to start building the line, they do have permission for 'enabling works' under the HS2 Bill. Enabling works allow contractors to clear the way for future construction...but HS2 is pushing the boundaries of this remit, into destroying our countryside.

Currently from the very south to the very north of the country there is disruption and damage being caused by HS2 under 'Enabling Works'. A quick tally of works listed on the HS2 community website indicates that there are around 80 such schemes throughout Buckinghamshire.

Many of these works bring irreversible damage to our environment and will leave the Country scarred for generations. There are many examples, but perhaps the most severe is at Steeple Claydon.

This 'de-veg' plans to remove 500 acres of historic Countryside, kilometres of hedgerow, over 75 acres of woodlands and more than 100 mature Oak Trees. The Oaks are generations old, some surely over a century old and as such irreplaceable. HS2 plan to rip out our rural heritage, despite not having shown the community or the government what they plan to build in their place. Nor have they shown the treasury how much it will cost.

These irreplaceable Oak trees could be removed at any point – indeed new machinery has moved onto the site since Easter – and with just a few hours work – HS2 will change our countryside irreversibly.

HS2 is cutting a swathe through Buckinghamshire, right now, for an infrastructure project which might well never be built.

This motion seeks to defend our county, our countryside and our residents from the devastation which HS2 will inflict on us...Damage done, before the Government has even seen what it is buying and how much it will cost!

Before I finish I would just like to say a quick word about HS2's community engagement and why this motion calls for it to be improved.

At Steeple Claydon in late February this year, HS2 gave Landowners only three weeks' notice that contractors were coming on their land to sterilise it from any wildlife.

That this is being done in Nesting Season is unforgivable, but just as awful is the way the news was broken to landowners and the community.

That community made its feelings clear in a petition calling for the CEO Mark Thurston to engage with the community and mitigate the de-veg. 2500 people signed hard copies in just three working days. Over 4 weeks later residents have had no response! Indeed, I can share with you that had I not pointed out – last week - that they should, HS2 had no plan to respond to that petition at all.

In the Community Engagement Statement, Mark Thurston, says that

“The legacy of HS2 will be judged on how the communities up and down the route feel they have been treated by us and our contractors. For me as Chief Executive this legacy is as important as our ability to deliver the railway safely, on time and to budget”

... he goes on to say...

“and where we make mistakes, learning from these will help us to constantly improve our engagement approach.”

Mark Thurston's callous disregard of our residents and his complete lack of response to residents' petition give us just a glimpse of how HS2 plans to treat Buckinghamshire.

We cannot expect our residents to put up with this treatment for a project that has not yet been costed, designed or justified in anyway.

This motion calls for our Government to halt all engagement works until they have granted Notice to Proceed. HS2 have postponed making their business case until December 2019. It is simply wrong that they should continue to destroy our County and disrupt our residents' lives when this project has proven future at all.