



# Report to TECC Select Committee

**Date:** 30 March 2023

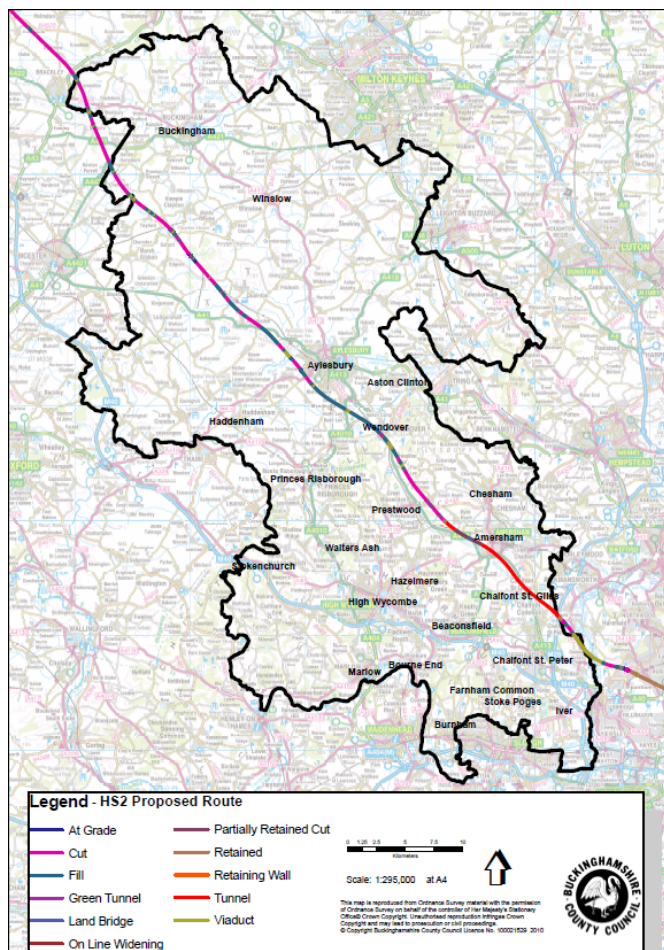
**Title:** HS2 Update

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## 1. 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 a 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 (QA), which means that some of HS2's proposals need to come to the Council for "approval" (as per the definition in the Act) which gives the Council a small degree of influence over the details of the proposals. As a QA, 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 for planning and 4 weeks for highways). 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 both temporary and permanent 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 first of three years of peak HS2 civils related activities and associated temporary traffic arrangements.
- 1.7 HS2 Ltd and their main works contractors attended the Communities & Localism Select Committee on 17 January 2022 and were scrutinised by Members on their engagement and communications approach with Buckinghamshire local communities, residents and businesses.

## **2. Progress update**

- 2.1 An update of the progress / construction of the project will be given by HS2 Ltd and their Main Works Civil Contractors (EKFB and Align) during their presentation to the TECC Select Committee on the 30 March 2023.

## **3. Current issues**

- 3.1 Buckinghamshire Council has taken steps throughout 2022 and into 2023 to assist and support local communities with mitigating the impacts of disruption caused by the HS2 line being constructed through the county, by ensuring HS2 Ltd is being held to account.



- 3.2 Key current issues include road closures and associated traffic management, coordination with other activities on the network, damage caused by construction traffic and associated road repairs, mud on the road, surface water runoff to the highway from construction sites, HS2 interface with EWR, the environmental impact and biodiversity.

## **Transport**

### **Traffic management & road repairs**

- 3.3 *Impact on our communities* – HS2 road closures and temporary traffic lights impacting traffic flow and our communities' ability to go about their daily lives to get to/from work, the school run, doctors' appointments etc. These impacts on the community are magnified where HS2 and EWR are constructing works in the same area.
- 3.4 *Emergency Services access* – there are concerns as to whether the HS2 and EWR national infrastructure projects road closure planning is considering properly the essential requirement for maintaining access for emergency services. There have been occasions where it has been clear this hasn't been fully considered and discussions have taken place to rework plans to allow access, which EKFB has then actioned
- 3.5 *Diversions Routes* – diversion routes have been put in place by HS2 Ltd's contractors for construction works and closed bridges. This has led to a number of complaints from residents regarding increased traffic through villages, increased journey times for commuters, and increased costs to residents and businesses following lengthy diversions. Where the diversion routes are lengthy there is an increased tendency for motorists to use 'rat runs' on unsuitable routes and in such situations HS2 is encouraged to provide appropriate signing to discourage such use or introduce temporary traffic calming in sensitive locations.
- 3.6 *Diversions Routes* – similar concerns have been expressed from residents affected by HS2 works which is further compounded where EWRA works are being undertaken in the same area.
- 3.7 *S17 Lorry Routes* – there have been many instances where HS2 construction vehicles have been observed on routes that are not approved lorry routes. HS contractors are required to install HS2 vehicle identifiers in the windscreens but in order to take action the registration numbers of individual vehicles are required before HS2 will take action.
- 3.8 *Damage to roads from construction traffic* - while funds are being made available by EWRA and HS2 Ltd to carry repairs to roads where the damage has been caused by the associated construction traffic, these funds are neither sufficient nor being

allocated in a timely manner to address the resulting damage. In some cases, roads have failed resulting in closure to repair the damage and further disruption to the local communities.

- 3.9 *HS2 damage* – While there is an established process for HS2 Ltd to reimburse the Council for damage caused by construction traffic, there are long delays between the claims submitted and award of funds. While the Pothole Fund was introduced by HS2 Ltd to partially compensate these delays, the level of funding is well below that required to address the damage being incurred. In addition, there is currently no opportunity to claim funds for preventative treatment which would avoid having to wait until the damage materialises or at the end of the construction period in accordance with HS2 Ltd's methodology.
- 3.10 *HS2 methodology* – HS2's methodology for calculating damage to the roads being used by their construction traffic has never been accepted and an alternative methodology has been submitted to HS2 Ltd for which discussions are now taking place after several months of delay. The principal concern is that HS2 Ltd's compensation will largely be deferred until the end of the construction period during which time roads will continue to be damaged leading in some cases to closure to allow extensive repairs to be undertaken resulting in further impacts on the local communities affected.
- 3.11 *Sustainable travel* – While the challenges of promoting sustainable travel to/from construction sites in a largely rural setting are recognised, there are concerns at the delays in introducing robust Workplace Travel Plans along with the lack of robust travel data at the sites. As a result, there are fewer opportunities to monitor activity and introduce measures to improve sustainable travel. HS2 has been challenged on this point and further surveys are to be undertaken.
- 3.12 *Recommended action* – in light of these problems, the council is in discussion with HS2 to secure additional funds to allow some preventative treatment to key routes that are vulnerable to significant levels of HGV traffic as well as seeking an increase in the Pothole Fund. In parallel, discussions are taking place with HS2 Ltd on an alternative methodology put forward by the Council for calculating the overall level of deterioration since HS2's methodology has never been accepted and has been challenged. HS2 Ltd's methodology also fails to recognise that damage is occurring to the 'A' road network, although funding has already been given by HS2 Ltd in response to a claim for repairs at the A40/A412 junction.
- 3.13 *Deployment of three mobile CCTV cameras*; whilst the cost of the cameras was funded by HS2 Ltd, there is an overhead in the region of £50k pa 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 and safety impacted by HS2 construction and to identify construction traffic using routes in contravention of agreed lorry routes. The deployment has proved to be a deterrent for repeated activity, e.g. Little Missenden on the A413 where 'U' turning lorries accessing the vent sat site were creating a safety hazard.

## Environment

- 3.14 The BC HS2 Planning Team has issued 45 Decision Notices since January 2022. Amendments to improve the design and reduce impacts were achieved on all applications. Eight (one in part) of these applications were refused, necessitating comprehensive review and resubmission. These consents agree the detailed design, appearance and function for structures and elements of the railway infrastructure and associated work. The table below provides a more detailed breakdown of applications processed in the last twelve months.

	number received	Number refused	Number approved	withdrawn / invalid	part refused part approved	awaiting decision
2022/2023	48	7	25	2	1	13
submitted 2021, processed 22 / 23	10	0	8	2	0	0
Total	58	7	33	4	1	13

- 3.15 The size and form of structures and elements varies and includes viaducts; road and pedestrian bridges (more than 30 along the Buckinghamshire section of the route); Amersham Headhouse and ventilation shaft; cuttings and embankments; tunnel openings; drainage systems; noise barriers; road re-alignment; associated earthworks; and associated buildings. Part of Stoke Mandeville Relief Road has been granted consent within the proposals for the line south west of Aylesbury.
- 3.16 The full scope of work covers fences, walls, substations, transformers, telecommunications masts and pedestrian accesses to railway lines, minor works to

Listed Buildings, relocation of farm buildings / farm access, relocation / reprovision of utility infrastructure, and changes to footpaths.

- 3.17 A related matter in this respect is 'new burdens' – assets that will become the responsibility of the Council. This may include substations and verge maintenance. The Council continues to seek confirmation from the DfT with respect to the scope and costs; and the financial support that will be provided by the Government.
- 3.18 The team is currently processing applications for major structures including an overbridge at Addison Road, and the Infrastructure Maintenance Depot at Calvert / Steeple Claydon. Smaller scale applications include land restoration at Bishopstone, Turweston and alongside the River Colne; and the installation of movement / vibration monitoring equipment at Ash Grove House (Shardeloes Park and Garden).
- 3.19 The team is engaged in pre-application discussion with respect to future submissions including the bat mitigation / protection structure at Sheephouse Wood; the details of earthworks, landscaping and drainage management associated with the intersection with the Princess Risborough / Aylesbury rail line (PRA); and detailed design of earthworks South West of Aylesbury adjacent to the Aylesbury Garden Town 2 site (AGT2).
- 3.20 The majority of works benefit from outline consent courtesy of the HS2 Act. Matters that fall within the scope of consideration for the detailed submission include design and appearance, impact on the local environment, impact on local amenity, and road safety.
- 3.21 The BC HS2 Planning Team interrogates, reviews and seeks appropriate amendment to proposals within this context. Key matters that have been / are scrutinised and discussed with the applicant (HS2 contractors) are most frequently landscape, ecology, drainage and amenity (including noise). Combined Officer time (Planning Officers, Highways Officers and specialist advisors) spent on an application, including pre-application discussion, typically vary between a minimum of ten days to a maximum of 40 days.
- 3.22 Many structures will be prominent in the landscape, notably tunnel openings / vent shafts and bridges. Planning Officers and landscape specialists representing Buckinghamshire Council have influenced the design such that where visible the structures are less intrusive and less dominant; and that all details, have been considered in the local landscape context.
- 3.23 Located south of Wendover the 450m-long Wendover Dean viaduct will be the first major railway bridge in the UK to be built with a 'double composite' structure, using significantly less carbon-intensive concrete and steel in comparison to a more traditional design. The design has been influenced by Council Officers with the



objective of minimising its visual / landscape impact through the incorporation of design features that give the appearance of a light and narrow structure.

- 3.24 The physical construction phase will result in significant disruption to traffic flows due to the need to re-align the A413 on two occasions.
- 3.25 The Council has placed a standard condition on more than 20 overbridges such that further design will need to be presented that demonstrates contextually appropriate treatment with respect to matters including carriageway width, the provision of green verges reflecting the immediate surroundings either end of the bridge; and parapet heights and their surface finish.
- 3.26 Council Officers continue to scrutinise the detailed design of the Calvert IMD, paying particular attention to the need to create earthworks with planting to minimise the impact on the neighbouring villages and individual properties; the impact of lighting on residential properties and wildlife, notably bats; and to ensure drainage modelling is comprehensive and accurate and has informed an appropriate water management system.
- 3.27 In scrutinising and influencing the design Council Officers work with HS2 Ltd's contractors to consider not only the inherent landscape impact, but also the experience of the road user, walker, horse rider and in the context of a 120 year life of the structure / element being considered.
- 3.28 The HS2 Act for the stretch of railway running through Buckinghamshire requires 'no net loss' to biodiversity. The Council requires HS2 to report on and demonstrate species protection (in accordance with line wide licences for protecting bats and other species); and seeks to ensure that opportunities are taken to improve / re-establish connectivity and to engage on advanced planting. The Council seeks enhancement where possible and engages the principle of evidence based decisions that optimise avoidance, mitigation and / or compensation. At Sheephouse Wood, for example, the Council has requested detailed information from HS2 with respect to the impact on the Ancient Woodland and Site of Special Scientific Interest of the proposed bat mitigation / protection structure.
- 3.29 In terms of amenity a key matter that has recently been discussed is flood risk South West of Aylesbury. The HS2 contractor has provided details of modelling water flows in the Stock Brook post construction. The Council is satisfied that sufficient details have been provided to date, but the final design has yet to be presented to the Council, meaning that further scrutiny of modelling and proposals for water management will be undertaken. The Council's interest will primarily be to ensure all measures have been utilised to prevent any increase in flood risk to properties. The Council works collaboratively with the Environment Agency, which scrutinises water modelling and proposals to manage water with respect to main rivers and water quality. The discharge permits issued by the EA provide further assurance that

appropriate measures are in place; and the Council remains vigilant in ensuring the overlapping regimes for approving work are co-ordinated.

- 3.30 Elsewhere along the route, south of Sheephouse Wood the Council is reviewing proposals by HS2 to create an underpass for a footpath (CAG/2) which links to the Greenway project. Complexities at the location include proposals, that have yet to be finalised, in association with the landfill operations to the west of the line for the re-instatement of Muxwell Brook.

### **EWR/HS2 interface**

- 3.31 The Council is keen that the handover of civils works in the Calvert area to EWRA from HS2 Ltd and their contractor EKFB happens on time. These East West Rail civils works are being undertaken by EKFB on behalf of EWRA which presents a programme risk.
- 3.32 The Council has requested from both HS2 Ltd and their contractor EKFB on a number of occasions for a copy of the interface and handover documentation in order to understand the risks associated with the handover and mitigate any risk linked to the Council, to facilitate the process to ensure EWR programme timings do not slip resulting in on-going community impact. This documentation has yet to be provided by HS2 Ltd.

### **Climate change**

- 3.33 The impact of the construction phase will be significant with respect to climate change. Again, this is a complex scenario since a key premise of the project is to reduce carbon emissions overall with rail representing a better option than flying or driving.
- 3.34 For all proposals HS2 seeks to minimise carbon emissions whilst ensuring high quality design. At Wendover Dean viaduct, for example, instead of using solid pre-stressed concrete beams to form the bridge spans, the viaduct will use two steel girders sandwiched between two layers of reinforced concrete to create a lightweight and super strong hollow span. According to HS2 Ltd this approach is set to save an estimated 7,433 tonnes of embodied carbon within materials – the equivalent of someone taking 20,500 return flights from London to Edinburgh.
- 3.35 Other initiatives include the creation of a railhead near Quainton to facilitate the removal and delivery of construction materials by rail instead of HGVs.
- 3.36 As referenced above, Council Officers scrutinise flooding and drainage proposals; and this includes a consideration of climate change rainfall scenarios.



- 3.37 The creation of substantial new woodland is a not only necessary for landscape mitigation, but also acts as a carbon sequestration measure. The Council encourages advanced tree planting wherever this is possible.
- 3.38 The Council is keen to understand HS2 Ltd's response to the Wildlife Trusts' evidence review of "no net loss" of carbon published in February 2023.

#### **4. Actions taken by Buckinghamshire Council to support residents in the construction of the line**

- 4.1 Over the course of the year Buckinghamshire Council has continued to assist residents, communities, and businesses with mitigating the impact of the construction of HS2 to support communities to address the issues set out above.
- 4.2 The Council is working with HS2 Ltd to secure the necessary remuneration from the statutory undertaker for both temporary and permanent road repairs to be completed to align with their on-going construction activities and their demobilisation programme.
- 4.3 The Council is also working hard to require HS2 Ltd to provide more transparency in terms of the forward programme of construction activity, particularly in sensitive locations and strategic routes which are most affected by the works.
- 4.4 The Cabinet Member for Transport had to announce at Full Council EKFB's plans for Christmas A413 closures because they just email and mail out a notice. The Council has additionally had to advertise these road closures on social media because they refuse to use such platforms to inform the public of their impact.

#### **5. Your questions and views**

- 5.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please get in touch with the author of this report. This can be done by telephone: 07506011434 or email: [laura.leeche@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:laura.leeche@buckinghamshire.gov.uk).

