

REPORT

HS2 Design Panel Meeting to discuss the Schedule 17 stage designs for Chalfont St Giles Headhouse

13.30 – 16.30 Friday 30 October 2020
Via Microsoft Teams

HS2 Independent Design Panel

Tony Burton (chair)	Vice chair of the HS2 Independent Design Panel
Jonathan McDowell	HS2 Independent Design Panel
Kathryn Moore	HS2 Independent Design Panel
Martin Stockley	Deputy Chair of the HS2 Independent Design Panel

Attendees

Dan Ashmore	Assistant Project Manager, HS2 Ltd
Steve Austin	Town Planning Manager, HS2 Ltd
Mark Clapp	Senior Project Manager, HS2 Ltd
Robert Howard	Landscape Manager, HS2 Ltd
Kevin Roberts	Head of Engineering and Environment, HS2 Ltd
Martin Short	Lead Architect, HS2 Ltd
David Costello	Align JV
Diane Metcalfe	Architect, Align JV
Chris Patience	Architect, Align JV
Alan Price	Design Director, Align JV
Simon Railton	Lead Landscape, Align JV
John Woodhouse	Lead Planner, Align JV
Richard Hannay	Buckinghamshire Council
Saeed Mahmood	Buckinghamshire Council
Catherine Murray	Buckinghamshire Council
Neil Jackson	The Chilterns AONB
Edward Bailey	Frame Projects

Apologies / copied to

Christoph Brintrup	Head of Landscape, HS2 Ltd
James Dearing	Design Manager, HS2 Ltd
James Glynn	Senior Town Planning Manager, HS2 Ltd
Pippa Whittaker	Senior Communications Manager, HS2 Ltd



Leigh Crowhurst	Landscape Architect, Align JV
Ben Northover	Architect, Align JV
Ian Thomas	Project Manager, Align JV
Ifath Nawaz	Buckinghamshire Council
Chelsea Evans	Apprentice Project Manager, HS2 Ltd
Bernadette Hurd	Head of Benefits, HS2 Ltd
Kay Hughes	Design Director, HS2 Ltd
Giles Thomas	Phase One Engineering Director, HS2 Ltd
Nicole Linney	PA to Design Director, HS2 Ltd
Paul Gilfedder	Head of Town Planning, HS2 Ltd
Design Inbox	HS2 Ltd
Lana Elworthy	Frame Projects
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects

Note on Design Panel process

The HS2 Independent Design Panel was established in 2015 at the request of the Department for Transport, to help ensure that, through great design, HS2 delivers real economic, social and environmental benefits for the whole country.

The HS2 Design Vision sets out nine principles grouped around three themes: People; Place; and Time. The design uses this framework to help the HS2 Ltd leadership, project teams and other partners to make the right design choices – and this also informs its advice on designs that are to be submitted under Schedule 17 of the High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Act 2017.

The panel plays an advisory role, providing impartial and objective advice, to support the design process. At a pre-application stage it is for HS2 Ltd to decide what weight to place on the panel's comments balanced with other considerations. Once a Schedule 17 application is submitted, the panel's advice may inform the local planning authority's decision making process.

Further details of panel membership and process are available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hs2-design-panel>

The HS2 Design Vision is available at:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/607020/HS2_Design_Vision_Booklet.pdf

The HS2 Independent Design Panel comments below follow on from two pre-application reviews of the Chalfont St Giles Headhouse.

Timing of Schedule 17 meeting

This meeting took place in advance of a Schedule 17 submission for the Chalfont St Giles Headhouse, which will be submitted around December 2020. This will include 'plans and specifications' and 'site restoration' Schedule 17 submissions. Aspects of the designs that will be submitted for approval include ventilation shaft and headhouse buildings, stairwell buildings, Automated Transformer Station (ATS) buildings, earthworks, and compound fencing. The 'site restoration' submission will be for the area within the confines of the fencing.

The submission will also include supporting information for other aspects of the scheme not being submitted for approval at this stage, including full details of soft landscaping measures. 'Bringing into use' requests will be submitted to the local planning authority, at a later stage.

HS2 Ltd indicates that it is satisfied that the proposal would meet the aspirations of the HS2 Design Vision and the Sustainability Approach.

Post meeting note: HS2 Ltd confirmed that will be no significant design changes, except some minor changes as a result of ongoing design development.

Local planning authority views

Buckinghamshire Council

Buckinghamshire Council has held two pre-application discussions with the applicants and its general response to its working relationship with Align JV and the proposed approach is positive. The Council is in general agreement with the headline aspects of the scheme, including strategy and vision, design intent, and broadly the scale and massing of the buildings. It considers the approach to address the Chilterns AONB Detailed Design Principles and welcomes the intention to submit both the 'plans and specifications' and 'site restoration' Schedule 17 submissions at the same time.

The Council's comments focus on the delivery of the proposed design intent. The presentation of scale drawings as part of a pre-application discussion in October has prompted further questions relating to detailed aspects of the proposals. The Council requests further information on the height of the ATS building and to what extent this is driven by the equipment it will contain. It would also like further information on landform integration, including aspects such water management, fencing and soft works. The Council is supportive of the proposed approach to materiality, subject to the receipt of samples and RAL numbers. The proposed surface treatment to the compound is of concern and would encourage Align JV to explore other potential treatments.

It notes the importance of the Schedule 17 submission containing sufficient information for it able to give a confident view of the acceptability of the proposals. It will be important to consider how clear the information is when accessed online, particularly as this will be how most people will view the information due to the impact of the COVID -

19. The Council would welcome a further pre-application discussion with the team to resolve outstanding issues to help smooth the application process.

The Council also noted its concerns relating to the proposed changes to Bottom House Farm Lane (which will not be used for construction but will be provide the permanent access route to the site). This will not form part of these Schedule 17 submissions.

HS2 Independent Design Panel's views

Summary

The HS2 Independent Design Panel considers that the Schedule 17 stage proposals for the Chalfont St. Giles Headhouse building and structures have the potential to meet the aspirations of the HS2 Design Vision – subject to the quality of its detailed design and landscape (aspects of which will be approved through a separate mechanism at a later date). The panel congratulates the team on the huge amount of work which has been undertaken to date and considers that the architecture of the headhouse building and associated structures promise to deliver a high design quality. The scale of the ATS is challenging, and the panel asks the team to consider whether its design could be developed further to help address this issue. The panel welcomes the significant progress which has been made on the delivery of the HS2 Sustainability Approach, particularly in the re-use of materials. The panel has not seen sufficient detail for it to be able to give a confident view on whether the designs will deliver on the ambitions of the HS2 Sustainability Approach. At the appropriate decision making point, the panel asks the team to ensure the information provided can describe the scheme's response to the broad spectrum of HS2 Ltd's sustainability ambitions. The panel is supportive of the overall landscape approach which seeks to embed the proposals within the landscape, including the intention to wrap the landform around the site. The panel questions whether the right balance has been struck between cut and fill and asks the team to consider this further. The panel believes that further landscape design development can ensure the ambition of embedding the headhouse within the landscape is delivered. The panel also believes that further collaboration between the design team and HS2 Ltd can address constraints imposed by the latter's requirements, in particular the design of the compound security fencing and the requirements for the outer fencing. Further work should also be carried out to reduce the dominance of the site access and the surface treatment to the courtyard. These comments are expanded below.

Headhouse architecture

The panel considers that the overall approach to the headhouse and vent shaft buildings is successful, and that the Schedule 17 stage designs promise to deliver a series of high quality buildings. The concept of series of farm buildings located around a central courtyard, the materiality and massing are all considered to work well.

The panel highlights that its support for the proposals is dependent on the quality promised being maintained through detailed design and construction. It encourages the

inclusion of sufficient detail as part of any Schedule 17 submissions, or other future approval mechanisms, to help provide assurances that the quality promised will be upheld. This could include additional information on for example, material samples and texture, and should be at a sufficient scale to provide assurances on the commitment to design quality in the detailed aspects of the scheme.

ATS building and structure

The additional information presented on the scale of the ATS has highlighted the significant impact the ATS will have on the overall scheme.

The panel is supportive of the attention which has been given to reducing the mass of the plant room building and open-topped transformer structure, including the introduction of larger spaces between the upper louvres of the transformer structure to help reduce its perceived scale.

The designs for the ATS plant room building propose a mono-pitched roof. The panel feels that this could appear to conflict with the intended hierarchy of buildings and structures around the courtyard. While a mono-pitched roof may be the best approach, exploration of other roofing options, such as a gabled roof, were not presented to the panel to enable it to confidently support the chosen approach.

The panel urges the team to carefully describe the designs for the ATS as part of the information submitted alongside the Schedule 17 submission. This should provide robust and clear description of how choices have been made, including the options explored and how the chosen design complements the overall approach.

The panel asks the team to also challenge the required volume for the ATS, reducing this and consequently the building and structure, if at all possible.

Landscape design approach

The proposals involve a significant intervention into the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) landscape. Consequently, the panel supports the focus given to embedding the Chalfont St Giles headhouse buildings and structures within the landscape, including the proposal to wrap newly created landform around the site.

The panel questions whether the right balance has been struck between the amount of cut and fill, and urges the team to carefully interrogate this further. Given the scale of transformation and the sensitivity of the Chilterns AONB, it is important that information submitted alongside the Schedule 17 submission provides robust justification for the chosen approach to the landform. This should include comprehensive information on the chosen level for the headhouse platform and the impact this will have on the surrounding landform.

It suggests that the team also considers whether a retaining wall around the northern edges of the site could be introduced to help soften the gradient requirements for the landform behind.

Hydrology

Drainage is very important to the landscape, and the scale of the proposed changes will undoubtedly have a significant impact on its hydrology. The panel welcomes the confirmation that the intention is to deliver an integrated approach to water management that connects HS2 Ltd water management requirements as part of one hydrological system.

It is important that sufficient supporting information is provided alongside the Schedule 17 submission, or other future approval mechanisms, which can provide assurances that an integrated approach will be delivered. The panel suggests that this includes assurances on how the proposals have been designed to avoid any impact on Bottom House Farm Lane. This is particularly important given the existing flooding this lane experiences and the impact of drainage requirements on the sensitive boundaries of the rural lane.

Courtyard surfacing

The panel considers that the proposed asphalt surface treatment for the courtyard is an incongruous part of the overall farmyard concept. It asks that this aspect of the design is revisited prior to a submission being made and other material options are explored.

Security fencing

The design of the compound security fencing will be important to the overall quality of the site. The panel considers that the proposed use of three strands of barbed wire above a 2.8m mesh fence around the headhouse compound will compromise the design, giving the site a hostile, unpleasant appearance. It was informed that this aspect of the scheme has not changed through the design process despite earlier challenge from the panel.

The panel understands that the requirements for fencing are set by HS2 Ltd. However, it asks the design team to ensure it has taken every possible step to question HS2 Ltd's requirement for barbed wire, and to explore opportunities to soften the impact of the fencing.

The panel also questions the need to provide an additional outer layer of fencing, currently proposed as post and wire. If the function of this fence is purely to identify the ownership boundary, then it asks the team to explore whether this could be expressed in different, less intrusive ways, for example through soft landscaping.

Site access

The panel considers it important that the width of the splayed entrance to the compound access road is reduced if at all possible, to avoid excessive urbanisation of what is a characterful rural lane. While it understands that the width is required for periodic crane access to the headhouse, it suggests that one option could be to introduce a change in materiality for the additional area of splay. This would reduce the visual impact of the road on the character of the lane, whilst still being able to cope with the loads of the occasional vehicles which enter the site.

Bottom House Farm Lane

The site has a symbiotic relationship with Bottom House Farm Lane. The panel understands that the proposed permanent changes are outside of the scope of the Schedule 17 submissions due to be made later this year. It is also uncertain which approval mechanisms will ensure these changes are thoroughly scrutinised.

The panel highlights the importance of avoiding any unnecessary changes to the lane which may compromise its existing character and function, including loss of hedges. In particular, the proposed drainage channels along Bottom House Farm Lane will need careful consideration ensure the character of the lane is maintained.

Sustainability

The panel appreciates the design team's explanation of the way the proposed designs respond to the HS2 Sustainability Approach and welcomes the efforts to maximise the re-use of materials and to reduce carbon.

The panel has not seen sufficient detail for it to be able to give a confident view on whether the designs will deliver on the ambitions of the HS2 Sustainability Approach. At the appropriate decision making point, the panel asks the team to ensure the information provided can describe the scheme's response to the broad spectrum of HS2 Ltd's sustainability ambitions.

Management and maintenance

The panel welcomes the commitment from the team that all landscaping proposals within the site's ownership boundary, including elements such as bat boxes, will be delivered and maintained by HS2 Ltd.

Views and communication

The panel welcomes the variety of visualisations the team has developed to help show the schemes impact in views from the south. These will perform an important role in helping to convey how the build will sit in the landscape to those viewing and assessing the proposals, once a submission is made.

The panel appreciates that the proposals may only be visible from limited viewpoints. However, it suggests that there would be value in including additional visualisations from different viewpoints, such as from the north, and different perspectives, such as from a

vehicle using Bottom House Farm Lane, as part of the supporting information submitted alongside the Schedule 17 submissions. This would help provide a sense of the scale of the proposed buildings and structures, particularly for those who are not used to examining such complex proposals, and assurances that the entire scheme is of a high quality design.

Next steps

The panel feels that the Chalfont St. Giles Headhouse buildings and structures have the potential to meet the aspirations of the HS2 Design Vision at Schedule 17 stage - subject to the detail of landscape design and the design quality presented being maintained through detailed design and construction.

It asks that the designs for the ATS are revisited, to interrogate the volume requirements for the plantroom and transformer.

The panel supports the team's intention to submit a 'site restoration' Schedule 17 alongside the 'plans and specifications' Schedule 17 application. It also supports the intention to include indicative information for the aspects of the landscape not being approved at this stage, as part of the Schedule 17 submission.

The landscape design will play an important role in the success of these proposals. It therefore asks that more design development is carried out in areas discussed, including the balance of cut and fill in the proposed landform, the site access and the proposed materiality of the courtyard surfacing. The panel would welcome an opportunity to be involved in commenting on the proposals further at 'bringing into use' stage, once the 'plans and specifications' and 'site restoration' Schedule 17 decisions have been made. It also asks that this opportunity includes consideration of the detailed proposals for the future of Bottom House Farm Lane.