

REPORT

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

10.00 – 13.00 Tuesday 23 June 2020
Via Microsoft Teams

HS2 Independent Design Panel

Sadie Morgan (chair)	Chair of the HS2 Independent Design Panel
Tony Burton	Vice chair of the HS2 Independent Design Panel
Kathryn Moore	HS2 Independent Design Panel
Martin Stockley	HS2 Independent Design Panel

Attendees

Mark Clapp	Senior Project Manager Area Central, HS2 Ltd
James Dearing	Design Manager, HS2 Ltd
Kevin Roberts	Lead Senior Project Engineer, HS2 Ltd
Chris Patience	Architect, ALIGN JV
Diane Metcalfe	Architect, ALIGN JV
Simon Railton	Landscape Architect, ALIGN JV
Leigh Crowhurst	Landscape Architect, ALIGN JV
John Woodhouse	Town Planning and Consents, ALIGN JV
Peter Higginbottom	Town Planning, ALIGN JV
Alan Price	Design Director, ALIGN JV
Ian Thomas	Project Manager, ALIGN JV
Matt Hobbs	Ecologist, ALIGN JV
Saeed Mahmood	Buckinghamshire Council
Richard Hannay	Buckinghamshire Council
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects

Apologies / copied to

Kay Hughes	Design Director, HS2 Ltd
David McCann	Senior Project Manager, HS2 Ltd
Steve Austin	Town Planning Manager, HS2 Ltd
Ben Northover	Architect, ALIGN JV
Bernadette Hurd	Head of Benefits, HS2 Ltd
Christopher Brintrup	Head of Landscape, HS2 Ltd

Chelsea Evans	Apprentice Project Manager, HS2 Ltd
Clive Green	Senior Communications Manager, 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
Zoe Stewart	Lead Design Manager, HS2 Ltd
Design Inbox	HS2 Ltd

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. Peter Headhouse.

Timing of Schedule 17 meeting

This meeting took place in advance of a Schedule 17 submission for the Chalfont St. Peter Headhouse - which will be submitted around August 2020. The application will also include supporting information regarding the site restoration proposals, including full details of soft landscaping measures. 'Site restoration' and 'bringing into use' requests will also 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 several pre-application discussions with the applicants and its general response to the proposed design is positive. It is pleased to see that recommendations from the HS2 Independent Design Panel have been addressed since the previous design panel meeting. The headhouse designs have progressed well, and the taller vents proposed do not have an adverse visual impact. The Council considers that the landscape design is not as well progressed as the headhouse architecture in some respects. Despite positive progress, the overall narrative guiding the landscape design approach should be developed further. It will be important for the Schedule 17 submission to explain how the proposals will make a contribution to ecology by delivering net biodiversity gain, and connectivity with the surrounding landform and with other sites, including the ecological mitigation planned at the Chiltern Tunnel south portal. It would like to see further progress on biodiversity enhancement and subsequent management for the site. It also seeks assurance that the minimum number of hedges and trees are removed, and that the Schedule 17 application includes landscape detailing, as well as clarity over the need for two separated drainage systems. Good progress has also been made on community engagement, but it is important that the applicant continues to involve the local community in design development, including presenting visualisations of the views to be created.

HS2 Independent Design Panel's views

Summary

The HS2 Independent Design Panel considers that the Schedule 17 stage proposals for the Chalfont St. Peter Headhouse building meet the aspirations of the HS2 Design Vision – subject to the detail of landscape design (which will be approved through a separate mechanism at a later date) and the design quality presented being maintained through detailed design and construction. The panel considers that the architecture of the headhouse structures has progressed positively, and promises to deliver buildings of a high design quality. The panel also considers that the landscape design has been developed with thoroughness, and has the potential to make a positive contribution to the area. As design development continues, it believes that further work is needed to define and describe the site as part of the surrounding landscape context, with the same level of thought that has been applied to the headhouse architecture. While the site will be seen by relatively few people, it should still be a delightful place, forming part of an extraordinary piece of infrastructure and engineering, and local people should be involved in its development. The panel believes that further landscape design development can ensure these ambitions are delivered, and that further collaboration between the design team and HS2 Ltd can address constraints imposed by the latter's requirements. Issues to address in particular are the inclusion of two separate drainage systems and the design of the compound security fencing. Further work should also be carried out to reduce the dominance of the site access. These comments are expanded below.

Headhouse architecture

The panel considers that the designs for the headhouse and vent shaft structures have developed very positively since the previous design review meeting, and that the approach now succeeds in creating a group of recessive structures that work together around a central space.

Although the brick plinth forms a small part of the visible headhouse structure, the panel suggests that a more traditional, red brickwork could be more appropriate to the Chilterns setting than the engineering brick proposed.

Landscape design approach

The panel is pleased by the work carried out to develop an ecological strategy for the site. The proposals for habitat creation are of a high quality with encouraging and convincing detail, and it encourages delivery of the strategy.

It will be important to ensure that the landscape mosaic approach includes making connections between habitats beyond the site boundary. The calcareous grassland planned at the Chiltern South Tunnel portal could provide opportunities for landscape to the north-west of the site, including ways to involve local people. These opportunities should be investigated further.

The panel considers that the narrative guiding the landscape design approach has developed positively, but that further work is required to ensure strong connections are made between the site and the wider Chilterns landscape. The culture and history of the setting should be expressed as clearly and confidently, to place the site in a rich and varied context.

To ensure the site contributes positively to the area, it should contribute actively wherever possible. The panel encourages the design team to develop an equivalent level of landscape design detail as already produced for the headhouse architecture, considering how the site and areas with and beyond the site boundary can contribute in areas such as water security and food provision.

The panel suggests that the tree canopy is particularly significant, especially in views of the site. Attention should be given to the way trees can contribute to views, for example using plantations of tree such as hornbeam, beach, or orchard planting.

Security fencing

The design of the compound security fencing will be important to the overall quality of the site. The panel asks that fences are drawn and specified in greater detail, addressing factors such as the spacing of stanchions, to ensure they will have the elegance to befit their setting.

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. The panel also questions the evidence supporting its effectiveness in protecting against intruders. It asks whether a material other than barbed wire can be used for the compound fence. The design team should ensure it has taken every possible step to question HS2 Ltd's requirement for barbed wire. If it must be retained, the panel suggests concealing it behind a raised fence line to reduce visual impact.

Access route

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. While it understands that the width is required for periodic crane access to the headhouse, it suggests that a narrower permanent entrance could be designed using a material other than traditional roadway surfacing to support the weight of a crane. The panel asks that more attention is given to the landscape design of the entrance corners, and more sympathetic material options are explored.

Hydrology

The panel considers that the inclusion of two separate drainage systems creates tension in the landscape design. Despite plans to conceal it with planting, the planned retention pond remains deep. Drainage is very important to the landscape, and the systems should be integrated if at all possible. The panel questions whether HS2 Ltd consistently requires a separate drainage for the railway, and asks the design team to soften the landform further to create place that is as sympathetic to the building as possible.

Sustainability

The panel appreciates the design team's explanation of the way the proposed designs respond to the HS2 Sustainability Approach, and considers that they will meet its requirements.

Next steps

The panel feels that the Chalfont St. Peter Headhouse building has 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.

The panel supports the team's intention to include indicative information on the landscape 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 relationship with the wider landscape context, its contribution to the surrounding area and the design of drainage systems. The panel would welcome an opportunity to be involved in commenting on this at 'bringing into use' and 'site restoration' stages, once Schedule 17 decisions have been made.