

**Deborah Fazan**  
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Dear *Deborah,*

Thank you for your eleventh report as HS2's Residents' Commissioner and your ongoing work to help ensure we are delivering on our commitments to those communities who will be affected by the construction of the new railway.

One of our guiding principles is to be a good neighbour and respect the communities we are working with and the environment in which they live. As you previewed in your report, we have now published our second public report on our progress delivering our 10 community commitments, which covers the six month period July to December 2018. We have made good progress over the last year, but recognise there is still more work to do. As you will see in the report, we are listening to feedback from communities and continuing to identify ways we can improve for the future. We continue to welcome your advice and guidance as we do so.

One improvement we have already made this year is to introduce our new HS2 Helpdesk team, which we implemented at the start of April 2019. The new team are based at our Head Office in Birmingham and are working closely with our engagement managers based in communities, allowing us to improve the customer service experience we offer. The HS2 Helpdesk is available all day, every day of the year and can be contacted by freephone, email or minicom; last year we received almost 27,000 enquiries. This year we will also be raising awareness of our Helpdesk team to ensure that communities understand what the service offers and how to contact us.

You will be aware that we have also published the first four in a series of new local area engagement plans for communities along the Phase One route. These local plans set out how we will deliver our Community Engagement Strategy in each of these areas, recognising that each community is different and so tailoring our approach so that we inform, involve, consult and respond in ways that meet the needs of each impacted community. The plans introduce the local community engagement team and partners working on our behalf, provide maps



showing our key works in each area and inform communities about the different ways they can contact us.

Your report focuses in particular on the work you have undertaken with homeowners who have already sold their properties to HS2 Ltd under the discretionary property schemes. You have raised a number of issues identified through your discussions, as well as several recommendations on ways to improve the schemes for future users. There are some clear themes from the feedback and I recognise both the challenges we face, as well as the opportunities presented in the recommended improvements that you have shared.

The welfare of those living close to the route is a high priority for me as the Chief Executive of HS2 Ltd. The experience of applicants to the property schemes is an important indicator of whether we are demonstrating the right attitude in making interaction with HS2 as painless as possible. I have asked that the training needs of the team are reviewed; if we identify a need for refresher or additional training, this will be facilitated. As you have identified, it is important that we deliver a consistently high service level both from our own teams and our suppliers.

You have also identified that improving the clarity of information available from HS2 on the property schemes is a key issue, both in terms of written and electronic information. Importantly, you have highlighted the importance of setting the right expectations. We have a number of initiatives planned to improve the clarity of communications, in line with activity we have already completed. We are reviewing our documents related to the property schemes in order to meet Plain English standards; we aim to have Crystal Mark approval for key documents such as the Guide to Property Schemes by October 2019, and for other property documents by the end of the year. We will, of course, ensure you receive copies as these documents are finalised. We also intend to apply this level of clarity to information about the property schemes on the HS2 website, and to make it more intuitive.

The HS2 property and engagement teams will continue to work to identify further opportunities for bespoke briefings on the property schemes in areas of need. We have, for example, held Phase 2a property surgeries in locations including Hopton, Whitmore and Mavesyn Ridware. As part of the current Phase 2b design refinements consultation we are again offering one to one appointments to any newly affected property owners, alongside a series of 11 information events to support the consultation which runs until 6 September.

We have also made a start on a series of improvements looking at the feasibility of streamlined activities – both process and technology based – to make applications and acquisitions more straightforward. This will include further clarity on tracking progress through the conveyancing process and how we can provide further assistance to applicants.

I know you have been working closely with our Land and Property team at HS2 Ltd, as well as with the Department for Transport, to consider your findings. We remain committed to

continuing these discussions with you as we seek to identify and implement improvements, and I have asked the team to continue to share our progress in these areas.

In relation to property schemes, I also welcome your comments on third-party agents acting for claimants and your interest in ensuring that people living close to the route of the railway are not receiving misleading materials from third parties that do not represent the facts of the property schemes.

We have appreciated your input as we have been developing the Prolonged Disturbance Scheme and your guidance on how the finalised scheme should be delivered. I understand the government expects to make an announcement this summer, subject to final approval of the policy within government. I agree with you on the importance of ensuring the details of the scheme are clear and easy to understand by those communities for whom the scheme will be applicable, and I can confirm that we will be sharing a Plain English guide on the scheme with those local residents. We will continue to keep you updated as we prepare to launch the scheme.

Finally, as you are aware, colleagues from across the business are working to develop the documentation on ground settlement, in order to better help residents when applying for a settlement deed. We have been in contact with all residents who have pre-registered to provide an update and inform them that more information on the formal registration process will be shared later this year. In June 2019 we also updated the content regarding settlement deeds on the HS2 website; those seeking to pre-register can do so by contacting the HS2 Helpdesk. We will ensure that residents have sufficient time to make an application ahead of the start of tunnelling works.

I would again like to thank you for your latest comments and observations and I look forward to continuing our discussions at our next meeting.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark Thurston', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Mark Thurston**  
Chief Executive  
HS2 Ltd

