



HS2 RESIDENTS' COMMISSIONER

Report 5 – September 2016

Summary

It has been a busy few months for HS2 Ltd in terms of property and communication activities, with activity on all three phases of the line of route. This report will focus on where I have been most involved. It will highlight some areas where HS2 Ltd has made progress and other areas where more effort is needed.

My recent actions:

- Meeting residents, MPs and their constituents at a variety of events in each of the three phases, including HS2 information events, the Euston Community Relations Group meeting, and a number of smaller gatherings at the invitation of constituency MPs.
- Working with the Department for Transport (DfT) and HS2 Ltd on the information and events supporting Sir David Higgins' Sheffield and South Yorkshire Report 2016 published in July.
- Working with HS2 Ltd to enhance community engagement and to support ongoing efforts pending the appointment of the new Director of Community Engagement.



The property schemes

I have continued to monitor the various property schemes, as well as being involved in ongoing discussions with the Government about improvements to these schemes.

Phase One and Phase 2a Express Purchase Zone

This applies to some properties in the surface safeguarded area. All those affected who may be eligible should already be aware of their entitlement. People who live in this area and satisfy residency requirements can serve a blight notice on the Government. As of 30 September 2016, 175 Express Purchase Blight Notices have been accepted, and a further two are being assessed. As the project moves closer to Royal Assent, this number of applications shows the benefit of the early acquisition scheme in helping those most directly affected to plan their relocation at a time of their choosing.

Phase One and Phase 2a Rural Support Zone

This is the zone that lies outside the surface safeguarded area and up to 120m from the centreline of the HS2 railway in rural locations. As of 30 September 2016, 101 applications have been received, of which 88 have been accepted and one is being assessed. The scheme is generally working well. To date, of the 63 formal acceptances of HS2 Ltd's offer, some 63% have opted to take the cash offer - keeping communities together rather than individuals moving away from the area.

Phase One and Phase 2a Need to Sell

The scheme is open to owner-occupiers who can show that they have a compelling reason to sell their property, but have not been able to do so – other than at a substantially reduced price – as a direct result of the announcement of HS2's route.

As of 30 September, 223 applications have been received on Phases One and 2a - of which 103 have been accepted and a further 27 are pending a decision. I am pleased that the average time taken for a decision to be reached following receipt of an application is now at just under six weeks on a rolling 12-month period. The change in wording introduced in May under the Effort to Sell criterion has been generally



welcomed, and I anticipate an increase in the number of applications to this scheme as a result.

Phase Two Exceptional Hardship Scheme

This scheme is available to owner-occupiers who can show that they have an urgent reason to sell their property, without which they could suffer exceptional hardship, but have been unable to sell – other than at a substantially reduced price – as a direct result of the announcement of the proposed route of Phase Two. As of 30 September, 271 applications have been received.

Property schemes - positives and concerns

The main change to the discretionary property schemes (RSZ, NTS and EHS), which came into effect just before my last report, has been the ability for applicants to use any qualified Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) valuer of their own choice. This has been widely welcomed and taken up by the applicants, and is working well.

Home Owner Payments (HOP) for Phase One properties within 120m and 300m from the centre of the line of route are due to start once Royal Assent has been granted for the Phase One Bill - anticipated by the end of 2016. Following discussions with the DfT, which is responsible for the HOP scheme, I am confident that the necessary arrangements are in place to put this scheme into operation and make payment in a timely manner to those who qualify. I will be monitoring the implementation of this scheme closely, and will continue to work with the DfT and HS2 Ltd to ensure that the process is kept as clear and streamlined as possible and that timescales are published in scheme guidance.

I am also pleased to be able to confirm the DfT's decision about property schemes for Phase 2b. When the Government announces its preferred route for Phase 2b, the existing Need to Sell and Express Purchase schemes will both be extended to the proposed route. This means that, as soon as the route announcement has been made, and while consultation on



the discretionary property schemes for Phase 2b is still being undertaken, anyone who meets the qualifying criteria for either of these schemes will be able to apply for them. The continuation of the NTS and EP schemes will be subject to the consultation, but if confirmed they will be in place until one year after the railway is fully operational.

Please contact the HS2 helpdesk on **020 7944 4908** or email **hs2enquiries@hs2.org.uk** for further information.

Fulfilling the Residents' Charter

In the Residents' Charter, HS2 Ltd undertakes to "promote awareness of all our discretionary property schemes so that anyone who may be eligible knows about them." I have been pressing HS2 Ltd to take action on this for several months.

HS2 Ltd carried out an awareness campaign on the Phase One property schemes in August, which included distribution of leaflets, community posters, Facebook advertising and stakeholder briefings, reaching over 100,000 properties in total. From the Facebook advertising alone, the data show that there were over 9,900 'clicks through' from individuals seeking more information on the property schemes. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the campaign in raising awareness of the schemes and I hope that this will in turn generate more applications to the schemes overall.

I am aware, however, that applications to all of the discretionary property schemes remain patchy along the line. I encourage HS2 Ltd to regularly undertake further awareness campaigns for these property schemes.

One area of concern, highlighted to me a number of times in the past months, has been the approach taken by some external property agents and other members of HS2 Ltd's supply chain. As reported to me, some of the behaviour from these agents falls short of the way in which HS2 Ltd as a company should expect its representatives to act. Examples that I am aware of include property owners left waiting for property inspections on their moving day and unable to complete on their new purchase, an uncoordinated approach to surveys and assessments required by HS2 Ltd that



inconveniences homeowners, and an excessively slow response to negotiations leaving homeowners unable to plan their future.

In its response to Ian Bynoe's Report on HS2 Ltd's Complaint Handling and Community Engagement, HS2 Ltd recognised that "community engagement needs to be made a substantially higher priority by everyone working on this project." This must include HS2 Ltd's external agents and members of its supply chain. In their role of interacting with the community on property matters, the behaviour of HS2 Ltd's representatives will influence how HS2 Ltd itself is judged by the residents who are affected. HS2 Ltd needs to ensure that all of its agents are operating in line with the same key principles and corporate values that HS2 Ltd holds – including integrity and respect.

Community engagement – positives and concerns

HS2 Ltd's community engagement activity has increased and become more area-focussed since my last report. There are now three key engagement areas for Phase One - South, Central and North, along with a smaller team focussed on Euston. This has enabled targeted activity at specific locations within each area where particular issues may arise. Examples of these activities include an event in Ruislip on tunnel depths and ground settlement, and construction and noise insulation information events in Euston.

A new mobile unit, which I recommended in my last report, has now been procured and was rolled out at events in Birmingham in late September. I hope that the engagement team will make widespread use of this facility to reach those communities that are currently getting little by way of direct communications. From my observations, it is apparent that the focus for community engagement tends towards those communities and councils who are most vociferous.

The Camden team has recently launched a new interactive website that allows local people to read the latest information about the construction programme in and around Euston. The website also allows residents and people who work in the area to leave feedback on the construction proposals.



It is planned that a similar website will be rolled out in each of the main construction areas in due course. You can view the website at <https://hs2ineuston.commonplace.is/>

I look forward to the upcoming appointment of a new Director of Community Engagement for HS2 Ltd. I hope that the appointee will be able to bring together the strands of work being undertaken by each of the HS2 area teams, to ensure a coordinated and cohesive strategic approach to community engagement across the programme.

I welcome the recent appointment of Gareth Epps, the new interim Construction Commissioner. His role is to look into issues arising from the construction of HS2, providing impartial independent decisions. He will also mediate in unresolved disputes between HS2 Ltd and individuals - including claims under the small claims scheme, and will monitor complaints related to construction issues. For more details, please visit www.hs2-cc.org.uk.

There is to be a new Best Practice Engagement Advisory Group – suggested as part of the report by Ian Bynoe that I referred to earlier. The first meeting of this group has yet to take place but its purpose is to inform community engagement within HS2 Ltd by drawing on best practice from other significant infrastructure providers such as Crossrail, and to act as a sounding board for new ways to engage. Its membership will in the main be drawn from other transport infrastructure projects. I welcome this initiative and look forward to the first meeting.

HS2 Ltd has recently undertaken the first of several working draft Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) as part of its Community Engagement Delivery Plan (CEDP). The working draft EQIAs will help HS2 Ltd to deliver its commitments in the Residents' Charter to "engage effectively with all groups and those who may need additional support, where we are made aware of such need".



These draft EQIAs for each regional CEDP are intended to assist HS2 Ltd in identifying groups and individuals who are likely to be more affected -or affected in a different way- by the construction and operation of HS2 and who may need additional support; and then putting in place necessary provisions to engage with these groups or individuals. This is a step towards ensuring that engagement activities are better tailored to individual needs.

I continue to receive feedback and to observe areas where HS2 Ltd can do better in community engagement. There have been a number of instances where insufficient notice of events is given: on HS2 Ltd's website – only three days' notice was given of an information event in Boddington and seven days' notice of a recent event in Ruislip in September. Individuals I have met ask for at least four weeks' notice of events, so that they can make arrangements to be able to attend. While this may not be possible in all cases, HS2 Ltd must ensure that people are given enough notice of events.

Next steps

I will keep monitoring the property schemes, and will continue to pressure the DfT to bring forward the announcement of the preferred route for Phase 2b to the earliest opportunity. This is still anticipated to take place later this autumn.

I will also continue to work with the DfT and HS2 Ltd on the introduction of HOP to ensure a streamlined process when the scheme comes into effect. I will keep attending information events and meeting affected residents and community groups to understand their issues and concerns at first hand.

Additionally, I will keep urging HS2 Ltd to hold more community events - and to share information more widely once changes have been identified and agreed through the parliamentary hybrid Bill process.



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