

Gareth Epps  
Independent HS2 Construction Commissioner

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Dear Gareth,

Thank you for the two reports you have produced since your appointment as the interim HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner. We are committed to being a good neighbour to those communities affected by HS2 and your reports highlight the work that needs to be done to ensure we deliver and maintain positive relationships through effective engagement and communication.

I am pleased the independent steering group which will oversee the work of the Construction Commissioner has now been established. This group includes representatives from the local authorities on Phase One of the route and is now meeting regularly. Their role is to review your performance throughout the construction of Phase One of HS2 and make recommendations to Ministers as appropriate.

As you note in your most recent report, we have been carrying out a review of how complaints are managed within our organisation. We recognise the need on a construction project of this scale to be able to respond to concerns from members of the public in a timely manner and in a format that is accessible to all.

We are working towards launching a small claims scheme for Phase One. This scheme will enable claims to be made for damage from HS2-related construction up to the value of £10,000. Any claims will be passed directly to our loss adjustors Charles Taylor Associates to consider HS2 Ltd's liability, providing a quick and efficient mechanism for members of the public to be compensated.

I am delighted we have now introduced a Freephone helpline and minicom service so members of the public can contact our helpdesk at any time of the day or night to ask questions or report any concerns they may have.

Every community along the line of route now has a nominated member of the Community Engagement team who will act as their point of contact and represent their concerns within the HS2 project. This means issues arising can more readily be dealt with on the ground, by people with in-depth knowledge of the local area and construction programme.

The HS2 Community Engagement Strategy is currently being developed and sets out the high level approach to community engagement, the expected behaviours and activities of all staff and suppliers and how these translate into a set of ten community commitments. We expect to publish the Strategy towards the end of this month.

These commitments are set out in our Residents' Charter which was recently updated to reflect the step-change in how we will deliver HS2 during the next phase of the programme. The Charter provides clear measures against which HS2 and its contractors will deliver. The Charter also provides residents with more

information about your role, and how they can contact your office if they are not satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

The Strategy also describes the four types of engagement we will deliver and the range of communications and engagement tools and platforms we will use. It will be implemented through local engagement plans, which are being produced in partnership with the local authorities and communities along the line of route. Work is also underway on how we engage with vulnerable members of the community throughout the construction programme.

I note your comments on the findings of the review by Ian Bynoe. We are committed to delivering against all the recommendations he made by the end of the year and I will be updating on progress in due course.

As you know, we have now awarded the Phase One Main Works Civils Contracts (MWCC) and I am very pleased you have accepted our invitation to take part in the regular forum we will hold with our contractors. Your support is appreciated and I look forward to you making an active contribution as we move forward. We have held initial Community Engagement orientation workshops with our MWC Contractors which have been welcomed by all the joint ventures and has allowed us to emphasise the expectations we have on our contractors to be good neighbours to residents before construction activities are started.

I would like to thank you once again for sharing your observations and look forward to continuing to work with you as we embark on the next stage of the project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Thurston', written in a cursive style.

**Mark Thurston**  
Chief Executive  
High Speed Two (HS2) Limited