

Deborah Fazan
HS2 Residents' Commissioner
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Dear Deborah,

Thank you for your eighth 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.

We are continually seeking to improve the way we communicate and engage with our communities along the route. I was pleased to read in your report your finding that community engagement is generally working well and that you have seen substantial improvements over the last couple of years. I fully recognise that, whilst we are making progress, there is still more to do. As we do this, I continue to value your observations, recommendations and continued focus on helping to improve the discretionary and statutory property schemes and our ability to effectively engage with our communities.

Following the launch of HS2's national Community Engagement Strategy in 2017, our focus this year will be to demonstrate what this means for communities at a local level, using tailored local engagement plans. The first plan for the area around Old Oak Common was released at the end of last year and plans for other areas across Phase One are currently being finalised.

As part of this tailored local engagement there will be 10 Commonplace digital engagement platforms for local areas along the Phase One route. These sites are currently being rolled out; across the sites that are already live there have been 15,000 unique visitors and 800 people have signed up to receive alerts for their area. As you note in your report, these platforms will provide valuable information and support to local residents about what is happening in their area. However, I completely agree with your comment that we need to ensure we are communicating with all those affected by the project, including those without internet access.

HS2's ten Community Commitments will be used as the basis to measure our success. As set out in the Community Engagement Strategy, every six months we will publish progress reports which measure our progress against these commitments. As well as providing transparency about our performance, these reports will help us to continuously learn and improve. The initial progress report will be published in spring this year.

Your report identifies a number of important challenges for HS2 Ltd. As you know, we continue to work through the development of a prolonged disturbance compensation scheme that is fair, reasonable and proportionate. I appreciate your views on this issue and would welcome your further feedback as we work to finalise the policy.

Regarding an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process, this is offered by HS2 Ltd in appropriate cases to property owners where statutory compensation cannot be agreed through negotiation. Guidance has been issued to individual applicants on the detailed ADR process. In your report you recommend that guidance should be published and provided to all those looking to apply through the Express Purchase scheme or issue a Blight Notice. The policy documents for the ADR are in the process of being finalised before being agreed through internal governance processes in early April. We would therefore intend to publish the guidance by the end of April.

In response to your recommendation regarding guidance for the Express Purchase scheme, HS2 Ltd currently has a guide for residents which covers both Blight applications and the Express Purchase scheme, which is accessible to anyone via the Gov.uk website. However, we recognise the need to develop a more comprehensive set of guidance in this area. We are in the process of developing an updated guide on 'selling your property via Blight or the Express Purchase scheme', which we hope will provide more accessible advice to residents. This will be agreed with the Department for Transport in line with other scheme guidance documents before publication.

I welcome your positive comments on the operation of the Rural Support Zone and Homeowner Payments schemes, especially given the high application rates that both schemes have experienced over the last year. Dealing with the particularly high application rate on the Phase 2b Rural Support Zone continues to be a challenge, with the team actively recruiting some temporary support to help focus on improving the speed of applications through the more complex stages of the process.

As you know, we are also seeking to improve accessibility to the Need to Sell scheme, which I agree needs to be as clear and accessible as possible. We are exploring a number of initiatives, including working with MP's constituency offices and developing the explainer video clips you refer to in your report, that seek to improve accessibility of the scheme. We would be pleased to work with you to further improve accessibility and to seek to learn from the experiences of those who have been through the schemes.

I would again like to thank you for your latest comments and observations and I look forward to meeting with you again shortly to continue our discussions as we take these issues forward.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Thurston
Chief Executive
High Speed Two Limited