

**Deborah Fazan**  
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Dear Deborah,

Thank you for your twelfth 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. Your work continues to be invaluable in highlighting the areas we need to focus on improving, as well as acknowledging the progress we have made.

I also want to thank you for the time you have spent in communities along the route of the railway, meeting with local residents, attending engagement events and talking with HS2 Ltd staff about the work we are doing. In particular, I am pleased you recently had the opportunity to attend one of the Playing it Safe workshops at a primary school close to the route in Buckinghamshire. As you know, these workshops use drama to engage young people in thinking about the importance of staying safe when living or playing near construction sites. We have now held over 100 of these workshops to over 5,000 children, with pupils and teachers giving overwhelmingly positive feedback.

Since your report, you will be aware that we have published our third report documenting our progress towards being a good neighbour and delivering our community commitments, covering the six-month period January to June 2019. The report brings together a number of case studies of activities during the first half of this year, along with data on the handling of enquiries and complaints, funding awarded and the events we have held. For example, over this period our Helpdesk team handled over 17,500 enquiries, of which 72% were resolved at the first point of contact, and we have now awarded over £3.7 million to local projects from our Community and Business Funds. We still have a long way to go, however I feel the report is starting to demonstrate the collective effort across HS2 and contracting partners to improve the way in which we deliver community engagement across the project.

Over the past two years we have laid the foundations of our community engagement approach and continued to improve the way we engage with communities. Thinking about communities when making decisions will be critical to our success in building trust. It is important to acknowledge that we haven't always got this right, but we will continue to listen and adapt the ways in which we work until we fulfil our strategic objective of being a good neighbour to all affected communities along the route of the railway.

Managing the impacts on communities from a project with the size and complexity of HS2 inevitably presents challenges. Your report highlights particular challenges around the need for us to be more open as an organisation and more proactive in delivering on agreed actions with community representatives. I agree with you on the importance of engaging with communities fully and openly, and ensuring we respond to communities in a timely and accessible manner. It is our aim to have an ongoing two-way dialogue with local communities affected by our works and to provide local engagement opportunities where issues can be discussed and resolved. Our engagement is tailored to the circumstances of those communities, as set out in our published local engagement plans for different areas along the route. In line with your recommendations, I have asked the community engagement team to review how we can improve the current processes we have in place.

We have previously discussed the importance of ensuring we are reaching out and engaging with as many people, and as wide an audience, as possible. Since January 2018 we have now engaged with nearly 57,900 people at nearly 3,700 events. As you know, in the summer we visited a number of locations in communities along the route of the railway with a mobile event trailer. We went to places where people already visit – such as town centres and events like county shows and community fairs – to help ensure that local residents are informed about the HS2 project and have the opportunity to ask us any questions. In total we visited 14 locations along the route, engaging with over 3,000 people. This is an activity we will look to build upon in the coming year.

Following on from previous reports and the work you have undertaken with homeowners who have already sold their properties to HS2 Ltd under the discretionary property schemes, your report sets out the actions we have been taking to respond to your recommendations.

Since your last report, we have continued to look at ways to ensure information on our property schemes is accessible, easily available and understandable. I am pleased that your latest report recognises the progress we have made and that the user experience for applicants to our schemes has improved. We have now published our property scheme guides, which have all received the Plain English Crystal Mark. We continue to make progress on our website to ensure it is easier to navigate and use; I know the team found your attendance at our digital workshop to review our land and property content very helpful.

You recognise that our case officers are helpful and empathetic but highlight that land and property staff could benefit from customer-facing training. Our training programme is now in place and all case officers will have completed this by March 2020.

Treating applicants with compassion and care is important to us and in line with your recommendation, we are also planning to offer workshops and one-to-one sessions in early 2020.

We recognise that the property schemes and acquisition processes can be complex but your continued involvement with the Land and Property team will be invaluable to their improvement programme. I know you are soon to begin discussions on how we can apply feedback from applicants into our schemes, and I look forward to seeing the progress and impact this will have on the user experience.

As your report notes, the Prolonged Disruption Compensation Scheme policy was published by the Department for Transport in August. An introduction to the scheme is available now for residents and full guidance will be available for those potentially eligible in advance of the start of Phase One main construction works. We will be directly contacting households that are eligible under the scheme in advance of the construction works to discuss their options and to provide more information about the application process.

We are also planning our communications with potential applicants regarding Settlement Deeds. As you have rightly highlighted, it is important that all those entitled to the scheme know about it and residents must have sufficient time to make an application ahead of the start of tunnelling works. We appreciate your ongoing input as we develop further guidance materials on both Settlement Deeds and the Prolonged Disruption Compensation Scheme.

Thank you again for your latest comments and observations. Your feedback and scrutiny play an important role in holding us to account and ensuring we keep communities at the heart of this project.

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, cursive script.

**Mark Thurston**  
Chief Executive Officer  
High Speed Two (HS2) Ltd