

Sir Mark Worthington

HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner

Sent by email:

complaints@hs2-cc.org.uk

30th June 2020

Dear Sir Mark,

Thank you for your reports as the HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner covering the final quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020. Thank you also for taking the time to meet with colleagues across the HS2 project and visit communities during this period. Your ongoing guidance continues to help us in how we respond to construction complaints and engage with those communities and local stakeholders impacted by the construction of the new railway.

Thank you for your observations relating to the volume and nature of complaints and representations you have received, in particular in relation to noise, construction traffic, vegetation clearance and ancient woodlands. We are also seeing an increase in enquiries as the project gains pace and the impact becomes more visible to communities.

We recently published our latest report documenting our progress towards being a good neighbour and delivering against our Community Commitments. This report covers the six-month period July to December 2019 and is our fourth of these progress reports, completing our first two years of reporting on how we are living up to the commitments we have made.

Alongside case studies of activities and projects across the route, these reports publish data on our handling of enquiries and complaints. Over these two years we have dealt with 62,055 Helpdesk enquiries, responded to 1,074 complaints and engaged with almost 60,000 people at more than 3,800 events. In the period July to December 2019 we received 332 complaints, an increase of 25% of the same period in 2018. We are very aware that the construction of the railway is becoming increasingly real for those living along the route between Birmingham and London. Of those 332 complaints, 95% were resolved within 20 working days and 99% were concluded at the first stage of the complaints process.

As you highlight in your report, the emergence of Covid-19 has understandably generated public concern around the operation of construction sites and led to a rise in the number of complaints and enquiries we have received. The HS2 Helpdesk has remained available all day, every day, with no break in service. During this busy time, and with the team working remotely, I am pleased we have been able to maintain our response levels with 97% of complaints received being resolved within 20 working days or fewer.

As you know, during the current period we have taken the decision to postpone all public face-to-face engagement events and meetings. We have put in place alternative ways of communicating with communities and local stakeholders to keep them informed, including through direct mailings, virtual meetings, newsletters, works notifications, the HS2 website and our 14 local community websites.

The health, safety and wellbeing of the communities along the route, and of our staff, remains our top priority. Across the route, we are working closely with our supply chain to continually review the works on all our construction sites in line with the latest Government guidance for the construction industry on dealing with Covid-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, our supply chain has stipulated to all staff and sub-contractors the requirement to comply with these guidelines. Where works cannot be delivered in accordance with the guidance, sites have been temporarily closed to ensure the safety of our staff and the communities in which we are working. Where our supply chain is confident it can operate in line with the guidance, we are continuing to deliver HS2 in line with the Government's strategy to invest in the UK's infrastructure, supporting the economy during this difficult time.

As you mention, we are very aware that during this period people are spending more time in their homes than they normally would. We have been engaging with residents to discuss any concerns and considering steps we might be able to take. For example, at Old Oak, where I know you have previously met with residents, last month we put in place mitigation measures to reduce the hours of work for some specific works and to move as many operations to the far end of the site as practical.

In your reports you also highlight concerns raised with you on a number of topics including noise, construction traffic and vegetation clearance. I know we have corresponded previously about our noise insulation programme and thank you again for your input into the discussions with HS2 Ltd and our contractors on this issue. We would be happy to share further information with you on the roll-out of the scheme and I will arrange for colleagues leading this work to contact you to discuss this.

We understand that construction traffic is a significant concern for those living and working near to the route. I agree with your observation that establishing best practice now will help ease difficulties in the future. Our contractors are obligated to ensure both their vehicles and the public roads they use are kept clean and have put in place a number of measures in order to do so. For example, in Warwickshire, which you mention in your report, our enabling works contractor LM JV has installed wheel washers at their larger sites and road sweepers that regularly move between their sites to keep highways clean. They also have a mechanism in place to be able to increase the number of road sweepers at short notice, for example when the weather is particularly bad. Tracking mats are also used to prevent mud and debris tracking from their archaeology sites on to public roads.

As you highlight, concerns around vegetation clearance and works in ancient woodlands continue to be raised and are likely to be subject to ongoing public debate. We take the

environmental impact of construction very seriously. Through our planning we have sought to reduce adverse environmental effects as far as possible, protect the natural environment and ensure HS2 leaves behind richer, more diverse and better-connected landscapes and wildlife habitats. Our contractors carry out all ecological work in accordance within the necessary regulations, powers and licences. I agree with you on the importance of working with communities to keep them informed and discuss any concerns; this includes sharing both details of works that are due to take place in their local area as well as how we manage our impact on the local environment.

You also note local concerns raised with you in the Colne Valley/Hillingdon area. Our community engagement team remains in regular contact with residents in this area and works with them to better understand local concerns and look at how we can lessen the impacts of the project. In addition to our programme of community events, we hold a monthly meeting with community representatives, which we have continued to hold as an online meeting during the current Covid-19 pandemic. We work closely with our contractors to provide full responses to issues raised. Thank you for sharing the details of the particular case you mention in your report, which I understand is being investigated further. I know the team would be happy to work with you on any further representations you may receive.

Following the publication of the Oakervee Report and the Government's decision to proceed with HS2, you will be aware that in April the Department for Transport approved HS2 Ltd to issue Notice to Proceed to our Main Works Civils Contractors working on Phase One of the route. The issuing of Notice to Proceed marks the point in the MWCC contracts where work transitions from scheme design and preparatory work, to full detailed design and construction of the railway between London and the West Midlands. This will ensure our contractors and their supply chains have the confidence that they can commit to building HS2, generating thousands of skilled jobs and opportunities for businesses across the country.

We recognise that concerns will remain in local communities impacted by the construction of the railway and we will continue to work with you to deliver on our commitments to be a good neighbour to those living and working along the route.

Finally, I was pleased to see the recent announcement by the Department for Transport extending the remit of your role as Independent Construction Commissioner to also include Phase 2a. I look forward to continuing to work with you and I know it will be helpful for the Project to have your guidance as we progress towards the construction stage on Phase 2a.

Yours sincerely,



David Bennett
Delivery Director
HS2 Ltd