

HS2 in the Chilterns

AREA

OF

**NEIGHBOURLY
BEHAVIOUR ?**

since

Notice to Proceed

A compilation of reports from Chiltern residents and organisations, who have been attempting to mitigate the effects of HS2 over the past year, and for many preceding years

1.0 14-January-2021

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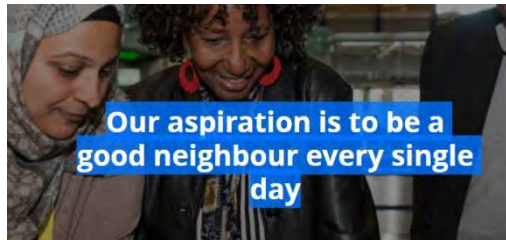
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Cover Photo – Great Missenden Haul Road construction;
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HS2 Activity since NTP

HS2 received 'Notice to Proceed' in April 2020, even though the effects of the Covid pandemic were by then obvious. This allowed HS2 to drop the pretence that major construction works (such as the Chiltern Tunnel South Portal) were preliminary, and to act as they pleased (to all intents and purposes) within the Act Limits. At the same time, face to face meetings between local community representatives, HS2 Ltd and their contractors were replaced by far less satisfactory online meetings, limiting the scope for questioning HS2 activities.



The HS2 website ('in your area') states that "Our aspiration is to be a good neighbour every single day". They have set out a 10 point 'Community Engagement' strategy :-

We will:

- 1 Continue to build respectful, long-term relationships with communities and actively encourage our workforce to listen to local concerns and be considerate and accountable for their actions at all times.
- 2 Work with communities to develop local two-way engagement and communication programmes, ensuring they are accessible and tailored to local needs.
- 3 Make sure communities are made aware in advance of any activities taking place in their area.
- 4 Operate a Freephone Community Helpline 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- 5 Make health and safety a priority for communities and our workforce.
- 6 Respect the wellbeing of communities, minimising disruption to their lives with local mitigation plans and activities, ensuring we meet the standards set out in the Code of Construction Practice.
- 7 Leave a positive and sustainable legacy for the communities in which we operate.
- 8 Respond to questions and complaints quickly and efficiently, with an acknowledgement within two working days, and responding within a maximum of 20 working days if we cannot answer the query straight away.
- 9 Promote awareness of all our property schemes so that anyone who may be eligible has all the information they need and is aware of the support available to them.
- 10 Display the Residents' Commissioner's and Construction Commissioner's contact details on all relevant materials along with our Freephone Community Helpline information and complaints procedure.

HS2 'Engagement' commitments - our highlighting (of those most often ignored)

However, after the end of the first calendar year of main works, we can report that despite their commitments, HS2 have fallen far short of these aims, and have now delegated engagement activities to their contractors where possible, with mixed results. The experience of living with HS2 construction resembles living under an army of occupation – a body which has no regard for the rule of law (as most regulations are suspended by the Hybrid Bill), and feels under no necessity to justify its actions.

Below are some instances of the un-neighbourly behaviour, and absence of community engagement, which have characterised the past 8 months.

Examples

Chalfont St Giles

5-22 May	Hedgerows on Bottom House Farm Lane (which were to have been moved) were destroyed, to the distress of the AoNB review group (May minutes)
Ongoing	Haul road built adjacent to existing properties; Inconsistent application of speed limits on lane Closure of lane to deliveries for properties
Oct-Nov	Damage to bed of the Misbourne, by temporary bridge foundations ?

Amersham VS

5-May	Whielden Lane closed 'for 7 weeks' (still closed)
Ongoing	Construction Traffic using Whielden Street
13-May	Shuttle bus provided, after public pressure
21-Aug	VS designs released

Little Missenden VS

30-May	Pollution incident at Shardeloes Lake, near to HS2 ground investigations
Ongoing	Illegal (?) lane closures on A413
30-Oct	VS design released; height exceeds ES spec new roundabout proposed since access now deemed unsafe

Great Missenden & Tunnel Portal

Ongoing	Footpaths – signage, diversions and closures
From November	Compounds & 'Chalk Test' works

Hilltop Villages

Ongoing	Failure to install hill-top traffic monitoring in time to produce meaningful data; Use of lanes by construction traffic
2- 8 Oct	Eviction of protesters from (part of) Jones Hill Wood
5-Oct	Bats reported in Jones Hill Wood
16-Nov	Grims ditch woodland destroyed; not mentioned in AWN

General

Ongoing	Failure to engage on design of key structures
Ongoing	Failure to engage on development of LTMP, and to assess traffic impacts

Abbreviations

A guide to HS2 speak –

AWN - Advanced Works Notice – typically released on the HS2 'Commonplace' website¹

Align – Main contractor for the Chiltern Tunnel (and Ventilation Shafts)

EKFB - Eiffage, Kier, Ferrovial Construction and BAM Nuttall, the main contractors for 80km of line north from the Chiltern Tunnel Portal

ES – Environmental Statement, explaining impact of works. SES3/AP4 (issued after Additional Provisions 4, the extension of the Chiltern Tunnel to South Heath) was the last to make significant changes in this area.

LTMP – The Local Transport Management Plan, which will supposedly limit the impact of construction traffic

VS - Ventilation Shaft – used to control air pressure within the tunnel, and for emergency access – but not for passenger evacuation

¹ <https://hs2inbucksandoxfordshire.commonplace.is/>

1. Chalfont St Giles VS

Bottom House Farm Lane – Hedge removal

In May, 2020, local people became aware of impending plans to remove up to 1km of mature ancient hedgerow beside Bottom House Farm Lane. Although widening the Lane was part of the hybrid bill, we understood that the Environmental Statement represented the worst case scenario which was to be improved upon at the detailed design stage. We also believed that the latest Vent Shaft Designs required less excavation and HGV movement and only limited lane widening at specific locations. At previous meetings, Fusion had expressed an intention to move the hedge by a couple of metres, which seemed an ambitious undertaking but at least indicate a desire to preserve the hedge. We were, therefore, shocked by the change of plan - to remove the whole hedge during peak bird nesting season.



Remains of the Hedge

Concerns were raised by the Chilterns Conservation Board at the May Chilterns Review Group. Fusion argued that hedge removal was needed to install a buried crate drainage system for the temporary construction road.

Representatives of Bucks Council and LUC consultants argued that alternative drainage systems were available and as much of the hedge should be saved a possible. Unfortunately, we

subsequently found out that hedge removal had already started relying on ecologists employed by Fusion identifying sections where active bird nesting was taking place – with relevant sections left until fledging was over.

Both the extent and timings of the works were, in our view, unnecessary and damaging to both our historic landscape and wildlife.

Impact on Bottom House Farm Lane residents

Height of the Embankment



Resident's houses - and the new Haul road
(Keith Hoffmeister)

Residents were told - verbally at least - that the embankment height of the new access road would be 1.5m above the field level. It's difficult to measure it precisely but with the Marwood barriers on top, it appears to be twice that, so obscuring the view from groundfloor windows.

Inconsistent speed limits

For months HS2 refused to remove the national speed limit signs they'd placed at the entrance to the Lane, making the speed limit on a single track farm lane past homes with children and pets higher than the 40mph imposed on the A413. Only after intervention by Dame Cheryl Gillan and Bucks CC did they removed the national speed limit signs. Now the new haul road - which doesn't directly pass homes and is twice as wide - has a 10mph speed limit.

Closure to deliveries etc

After switching all traffic to the new haul road, HS2 blocked off both ends of the old ruined bit of lane with cones and "Road Closed" signs. Workmen had to remove barriers to allow residents to leave and return to their homes. This closure and the lack of signs on and from the A413 directing traffic to properties in the old lane meant that delivery drivers repeatedly could not access the properties - residents received Emails regarding items ordered saying they had been "undeliverable".

The lane has been closed as far as the vent shaft site for several months, even though (during the bill process) HS2 stated it would remain open.

Good neighbours ?

A resident writes

"Obviously we have had months of noise, vibrations, dust, mud and traffic chaos. At one point they were using a "vibrating compactor" on the embankment. This felt like a prolonged earthquake in the house, with door frames, radiators and the contents of kitchen

cupboards rattling. When we complained, HS2 said they hadn't thought vibrations would be an issue. But they stopped using a Bomag machine with sheep's foot roller the next day. We suspect it shouldn't have been used so close to properties."

Bridge over the Misbourne

Concerns over the fragility of the perched River Misbourne have been raised by the CCB and other stakeholders since the Draft ES was first issued and subsequently discussed within the Review Group. Crossing the Misbourne adjacent to Bottom House Farm Lane was specifically mentioned in the DDP²:

Section 3.10.12

Particular care is required to minimise damage to the long approach track (Bottom House Farm Lane) and consequent loss of local landscape character through appropriate and full protective fencing and the use of an alternative parallel alignment if and where possible. Careful consideration should be given to the crossing of the River Misbourne to avoid further damage and, if possible, to include suitable remediation works.



**The River Misbourne, an internationally rare Chalk Stream
(Keith Hoffmeister)**

From these photos, it would appear that bridge foundations for the temporary construction route have been built directly into the bed of the River Misbourne. We have had good levels of autumn and early winter rain falls but, despite increasing flows at Amersham the river has, as far as we are aware, been slow to extend through to Chalfont St. Giles. The Chalk Streams Officer hopes to collect

² 'Detailed Design Principles' – Chiltern AONB review group

evidence from the Misbourne groups and will seek a response from the EA.

We are concerned that the foundations may have disrupted the perched river bed leading to a loss of flow for this section of the River. While we fear the damage has now been done, we will press HS2 and Fusion and seek a detailed explanation of their work and any mitigation measures they have taken or will take to alleviate harm to the River.

Amersham VS

Closure of Whielden Street

During petitioning at the House of Commons, residents of Whielden Street were assured that their street would not need to be closed during construction.

In early May, Align notified us that Whielden Street would be closed for 7 weeks, until 7th July. A day or so after this date, a further notification arrived to say it would remain closed until September. In September yet another notification arrived to say it would remain closed until December. Align were asked to re-open the road in December to help the shops in Old Amersham in the run up to Christmas. At a meeting in December, we were told that Whielden Street would continue to be closed until some time in February.

The closure means that all traffic for the hospital, most of which would normally access the site via the A404 and Whielden Lane, now has to travel through Old Amersham and along Whielden Street. In addition, the bus routes were diverted from the hospital stops (see next section).

There is an obligation on HS2 to keep the cycle path and footpath across the Whielden Street vent shaft site open, despite the road closure. This is a well used path, particularly for cyclists, between Old Amersham and the A404 cycle track. From the time Whielden Street was first closed, we asked for a sign for cyclists and pedestrians approaching the road closure to say that the path was still open, as it appeared that access was closed. Despite raising this multiple times, including with the HS2 Help desk, there are still no signs.

There have been on-going issues with the state of the path. It has been too narrow, there have been holes in the path, and perhaps worse was when and the diverted path was covered in gravel at a place where it was quite steep.



Whielden Street - Signs at the Old Town Roundabout (Pat Millner)

The signage relating to the closure of Whielden Street is amateurish, temporary, dangerous and confusing, especially at the village end of Whielden Street. There are four signs placed in the road, meaning that vehicles turning into Whielden Street have to enter it on the wrong side of the road. There have been accidents as a result of this.

There are further signs along Whielden Street, also in the road, narrowing an already narrow street. The signs are very flimsy and have been blown over more than once. These signs have now been in place for 7 months.

Continuing traffic on Whielden St, & lack of “HS2 traffic” signs

Construction traffic is prohibited from travelling through Old Amersham and south along Whielden Street to access the construction site. Despite this, there have been many reports of large HS2 vehicles travelling along Whielden Street. These are reported to the HS2 Enquiries desk, and sometimes directly to the contractors as well. Issues include:

- Getting no response at all
- Getting a response up to 2 months after the report
- Being told “this will continue to happen. Drivers are human”
- Denying they are HS2 vehicles.

In July, we asked Align to ask Bucks Council to put signs up around the outside of town, to stop HS2 traffic entering the town and indicating the correct route. Align indicated their reluctance to do this, although it wasn't clear why. This has been raised multiple times at meetings with HS2 and their contractors. In December one or two temporary signs started to appear around the town, and we have been told that permanent signs will be put up in January.

Provision of the Shuttle Bus

Amersham Town Council and Action Group held a meeting with HS2 and their contractor (Fusion) on 5th May 2020, a fortnight before the closure of Whielden Lane. At the meeting it became clear that the closure would require the diversion of the many bus services which stopped at the hospital, and a request was made that some alternative transport be provided to enable access to the hospital using public transport. (This was in the early days of the Covid epidemic, when concerns over reduced hospital attendance were emerging).

As no firm commitment was made to provide any alternative transport³, the Action Group wrote to local councillors and organisations, pointing out the difficulties which would be caused by the closure and asking for support. Following Emails to Martin Tett, the leader of Bucks Unitary Authority, a shuttle bus was provided between the nearest operational bus stops (opposite Tesco and outside the Crematorium) and the non-operational stop outside the hospital. This service is still in operation – and still required.

³ Although there was a proposal for pedestrian lights at the crematorium bus stop, so the sick could walk half a mile to the hospital

We consider that the failure to anticipate the need for this service, and the measures necessary to obtain it are incompatible with HS2's claim to be a 'Good Neighbour'

Vent Shaft Consultation

In September, a consultation was launched on the proposed design for the Amersham VS surface buildings. While the Environmental Statement had proposed a boring green box, the consultation promised 'a unique structure at the gateway to the town' with a 'crown' of (illuminated ?) anodised aluminium fins.



Artists Impression - HS2/Align

The 'consultation' invited participants to rank 4 groups of 6 objectives – giving a high degree of influence to the selection of the objectives. A comment field was included in each group, but again, the choice of which comments should be grouped together as 'the same' lies with the organisers. Some initial discussion of the questions in the consultation would be appropriate. Also, having indicated that an objective was important, it was not possible to indicate that the proposed design failed to achieve the objective – 'setting the building into the landscape' being one example.

Preliminary results indicate that the 'unique structure' approach was not well received, with objections from the Chiltern Society and Conservation Board. We await the 'You said ... We did' event to see what influence this has had on the design.

Little Missenden VS

Pollution Incident at Shardeloes Lake

In May a chalk discharge was recorded at Shardeloes Lake. The discharge covered 1/3rd of the Lake and indicated that some underground activity had created a pressure release of fine Chalk Sediment. HS2 had been operating in the vicinity undertaking borehole drilling around the Lake and surcharging wells to generate pressure tests. The contractor also confirmed they had been pressure testing boreholes at the Little Missenden Vent Shaft 0.5km to the North West. The Vent Shaft is situated upstream and in a position above the Lake. The contractor investigated the matter with their geologists and concluded that it was possible a pressure test had generated the discharge but they could not be certain whether it was testing of the vent shaft or testing of the boreholes around the lake. The Environment Agency attended the day after the discharge, once the water had nearly cleared, and were satisfied no further action was required.

In a group meeting in June the contractor indicated that they did not see any material risk to the Lake or Aquifer from tunnelling since in their terms it would be "like threading two needles through a sponge". Residents pointed out to the contractor that the Chalk is heavily fractured, yet the contractor remains convinced that they can engineer a solution that will not result in further pollution or damage to the Aquifer, Lake or nearby Chalk Stream. Their statements are all minuted and residents wrote to the Environment Agency to state that since the contractor could not distinguish whether the pressure tests at the Vent Shaft or Lake had generated the discharge, they clearly did not understand the structure of the Chalk sufficiently to responsibly undertake any tunnelling work through it. The Environment Agency continue to monitor the situation.

Lane closures on the A413

HS2 recorded in their 2013 Environmental Statement that there would be no temporary roadworks or impacts on the A413 at Little Missenden. Residents petitioned this stating the access to the vent shaft was unsafe and in the wrong location and how could HGVs slow down to 5 mph to access the site with vehicles travelling at 70mph on the outside lane. Residents were denied Locus Standi during petitioning, but Little Missenden Parish Council engaged on their behalf, raised the same issues and presented alternative access arrangements.



Lane Closure on A413

Again HS2 claimed there was no access safety risk with the site, no accident clusters nearby and the peak construction traffic would exist for no more than a few months. In Feb 2020, Align announced they would be closing the inside lane of the A413 until June. They gave the reason that they had to protect their staff as HGVs turning into the site would be at risk from other road users and this section of the A413 is a dangerous stretch of road. In June, residents asked when the roadworks would be lifted, we were told they would be extended to August. In August we were told they would be extended till October. In October we were told they would be extended "indefinitely".

Vent Shaft design consultation

The Little Missenden Vent Shaft consultation started in November. Align ran a series of 4 online webinars. Align spent the entire time speaking to participants and highlighting the "positives" of their proposals. Participants were encouraged to ask questions via a consultation box yet less than 50% of the questions were answered, many were insufficiently answered or deliberately vague or "still working on this" responses.

Align had an obligation to undertake a Tree Survey before removing trees from the site, this was requested at the meeting and ignored. The day following the 1st webinar, Align removed the trees anyway. We believe the Vent Shaft exceeds the height set under Limits of Deviation since the webinar confirmed the eaves height of one of the buildings would be 9m. In mid November, we requested a levels plan for the site, we are still waiting.

The hot topic is the proposed new roundabout on the A413 outside Little Missenden. We understand Align produced 5 designs which

included a temporary traffic light controlled junction or a temporary roundabout immediately outside their access. HS2 told residents during 2015 petitioning, the A413 access in this location was safe, there were no accident clusters near the site and they couldn't accommodate a roundabout immediately outside their site as there was not enough room so would route the HGVs via Great Missenden for a few months. Align now state the A413 access in this location is unsafe, there are accident clusters either side of the vent shaft and while they could build a roundabout outside their site, this would not solve the accident clusters they previously denied existed.

Align produced a design for a "temporary" roundabout remote from their site and outside Little Missenden Village so their HGVs can turn on the edge of the village for the next 5 years. In time this roundabout could become a permanent structure if Bucks Council accept it and this would mean Align would not have to endure the cost and inconvenience of removing it in 5 years time.

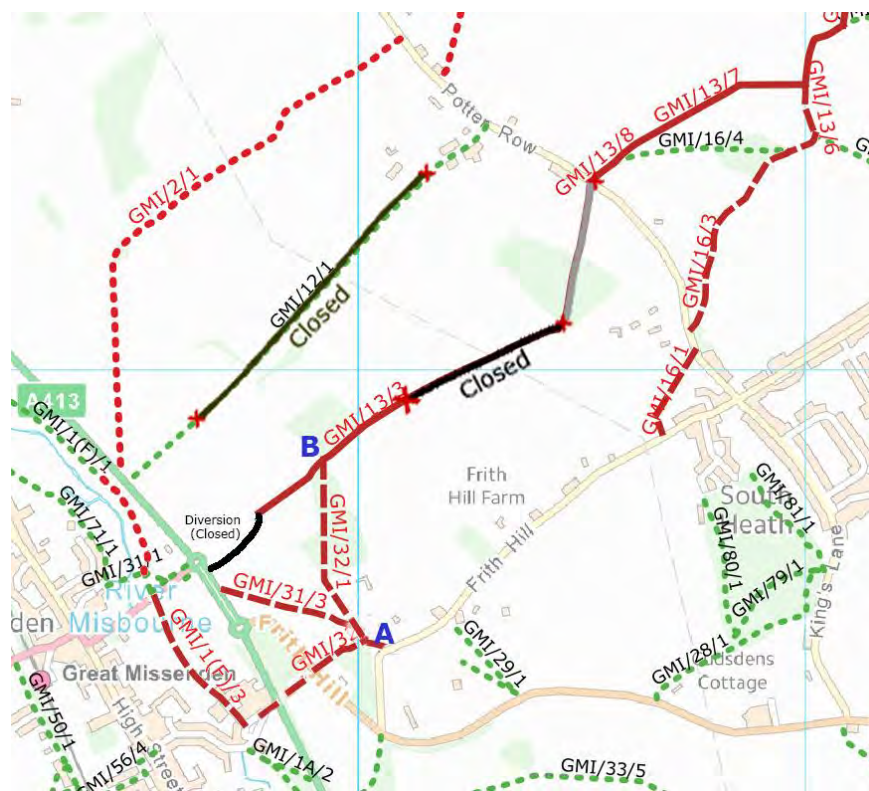
Residents complained to Bucks Council who wrote to Align informing them they did not consider the roundabout a good solution and encouraged them to seek alternative options. They also met with the HS2 Construction Commissioner to highlight our concerns on lack of road safety audit, the deceit during petitioning and risks to our school children from Rat Running on roads that Align had refused to assess. Align submitted their Schedule 4 application for the roundabout the next day!

Great Missenden

Footpath Closures

The Chiltern Line station at Gt Missenden provides easy access to an extensive footpath network, an attraction which should be promoted to show that the area remains open for business. Walking has become a popular form of exercise during the Covid lockdowns.

Two paths (GMI/12 and GMI/13) were early casualties of the construction program, and indicate an ongoing disregard for recreational activities in the AONB, and the benefit this brings to the local economy.



Initial closures were announced in August 2019, for National Grid works at the North Portal site – from 2nd September 2019 to 30th September 2020. (An advertised reopening of GMI/12 from Dec 2019 to January 2020 never happened).A request to reopen both paths during the Christmas-New year holiday was turned down.

Although the maps indicated that GMI/13 was closed between Potter Row and the A413, it was in fact open as far as the edge of the tunnel portal site, which left open a route to Frith Hill via GMI/32/1, through Stockings Wood. This changed abruptly, without notice, when the first 50 yards were diverted on a route 20 yards further away from the haul road. This was done with no notice, and the diverted path remained closed until the end of September 2020.

This was in fact the only section to reopen – new notices were posted on the remainder of both paths, indicating a new opening date in May 2021 – to avoid archaeological investigations, and new capturing operations. Neither appear to pose a particular hazard to walkers.

HS2 information paper E5⁴ states

“5.4. As part of the detailed design process, we will work with highway authorities, Local Access Forums, user groups (e.g. the Ramblers) and communities to identify the best way of maintaining public rights of way during construction.”

At no point did HS2 or their contractors enter into a dialogue with the Chiltern Society regarding their plans for these paths, the diversions to be put in place or the best locations for signage. We were sometimes notified of changes a week or so in advance, but no attempt at two way engagement was made.

It is now our opinion that it is HS2 policy to strongly resist any attempt to reopen any right of way within act limits which has been closed to the public.

Chalk Embankment Trial

This was announced in October 2020 –

“We will extract and stabilise chalk with cement to form an embankment. This will be 100m long and 30m wide. Throughout the construction of the embankment, tests will be undertaken to check the stability and make sure works are carried out safely. These tests are carried out at regular intervals until the embankment reaches the full height of 3m.

The void remaining from the construction of the embankment will be filled with stone. A number of tests are then carried out to monitor ground stability.”

This activity is taking place within 100m of the A413, next to the Gt Missenden haul road. An additional works compound has been constructed on top of the Chilterns, possibly near where the chalk is to be extracted. After pressure from local councillors, EKFB have agreed to restore this part of the site, once the trial is complete.

We enquired why this process was being carried out within the AONB, adding to the considerable environmental damage inflicted by the haul road, but had no reply. No other organisation would be permitted to commence industrial activity on a greenfield site within the AONB.

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672376/E5 - Roads and Public Rights of Way v1.5.pdf



Embankment Test Site (?)

Hilltop Villages

Traffic monitoring

Assurance 2719 (to Bucks CC) states

“The Promoter will seek approval of the relevant highway authority to implement appropriate monitoring across a screenline (at a point on each road intersecting an imaginary line, so that total flows on all roads along the imaginary line can be assessed and changes in flow between each road evaluated) of local roads in the areas of Dunsmore, the Lee and Ballinger Common from the A413, to determine any unintended diversion of traffic due the impacts of HS2 construction traffic using the A413. Monitoring will be reported and regularly reviewed at the relevant Local Traffic Liaison Group Meeting, established in accordance with the Code of Construction Practice and the Route-Wide Traffic Management Plan.”

However, installation of the necessary monitoring equipment only commenced in August 2020, some 3 years after the date of the assurance. By this time, traffic levels on the A413 had been reduced (due to the epidemic), and a certain amount of HS2 traffic was already using the local roads, for ‘preparatory’ works. The intention of the assurance – to obtain a baseline traffic flow before construction started – was therefore thwarted.

Grims Ditch



Remains of Grims Ditch Woodland

In late November, the beechwood surrounding the Grims Ditch ancient monument⁵ was completely felled. This was apparently not sufficiently significant to be mentioned in the advanced works notice, neither was the HGV traffic generated by removing the resulting timber. The legality of this operation is unclear; it is known that HS2 do not hold a bat license for the nearby Jones Hill Wood (where bats have been recorded). It is not known whether bats were present at Grims Ditch, since HS2 have so far refused FOI requests to release the results of ecological surveys of the area.

In a further display of good neighbourliness, an ancient oak tree was felled - some 20 yards from Kings Ash road - to facilitate accessing a temporary car park. HS2 maintain that "*We have committed to removing the minimum amount of vegetation to build the railway and we have rigorous processes in place to ensure this happens.*"⁶ We find this difficult to believe.



Pointless felling of an Oak tree

Jones Hill Wood

Following the extension of the Chiltern Tunnel to South Heath, Jones Hill Wood is now the only threatened Ancient Woodland in the AONB. Around 1/3rd of the wood lies outside the act limits, and is occupied by a protest camp, while the remainder is occupied 24/7 by HS2 guards. This follows the well publicised eviction of tree

⁵ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1021198>

⁶ Response to the Construction Commissioner, Nov 2020

dwelling protestors (including 'Swampy') by the National Eviction Team.

There is evidence of Barbastelle bat roosts in Jones Hill wood, and it has also emerged that HS2 do not possess a license to disturb bats at this location, so any felling on this site would constitute a Wildlife crime. The installation of lights within the wood (along the demarcation fence), and of bright lights on towers at the periphery, might well have been intended to hasten the departure of any remaining bats – a further offence. However, we are not aware of any occasions when Thames Valley police have interfered with HS2 activities to prevent such crimes, and it would seem likely that this wood is still standing only as a result of the publicity generated by the protests.



Jones Wood - Line of Demarcation

HS2 runs in a shallow cutting some 50m wide at this point. If a retained cutting had been adopted, as requested during the select committee hearings, then nearly all the threatened woodland could be saved.

General

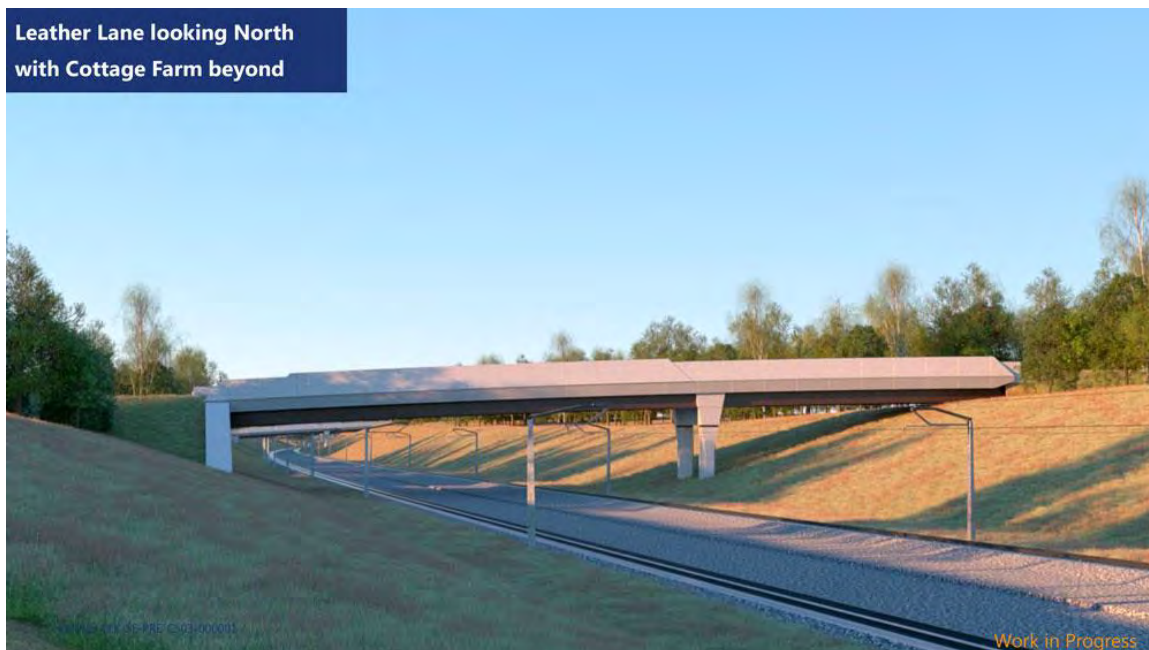
Design Elements

In our experience, the design of any element has already been fixed in advance of any public 'consultation' which might take place. One example of this is the Wendover and Smalldean viaducts, which the IDP referred to (in Spring 2018)⁷ -

The panel also found much to commend in the work developed by Eiffage Kier in the Chilterns: in particular the Wendover Dean Viaduct and the Wendover Green Tunnel south portal. Wendover Dean is one of the most sensitive locations on the Phase One route – and the proposed Wendover Dean Viaduct is a suitably sympathetic and elegant structure.

It is no surprise that the public 'consultation', held in September that year, was presented with what were essentially final designs, which 'have been called "grotesque" and "Stalinist".'⁸ Sympathetic and elegant did not figure prominently in the public response.

A consultation on Common Design Elements was held during 2020, with results presented in November; it is unclear what impact these abstract discussions will have in the real world, since EKFB presented pictures of a series of motorway style bridges over the Chiltern cuttings, in November 2018 –



⁷ Independent Design Panel - Chair's Report, Spring 2018

⁸ Times, 15-9-18

None of that consultation nonsense here – although there are issues we would like to raise –

- Why are there no 'Green' bridges in the AONB ?
- These bridges designed to accommodate 60mph traffic – as the lanes have no speed limit – although 30mph would be excessive on either side. Why ?

Local Traffic Management Plan(s)

The provision of a Local Traffic Management Plan was first discussed at the Hybrid Bill Committee hearings, and its appearance has been awaited ever since. A version was first approved by HS2 Ltd in October 2018, without any local input or engagement. It has since been revised three times, with the latest version being approved by HS2 Ltd in May 2020, still without any local input or engagement.

In October 2020, local councillors were given sight of the LTMP (all 197 pages) for the first time and on 4th November sent a critique of the document pointing out many errors and omissions: a number of key issues were identified which needed further discussion. The points raised included:

- The route is incorrectly described
- Affected local schools and community facilities are not listed
- Some local worksite compounds and their access are ignored
- Inaccuracies in the description of the use of some compounds
- Important U&As and other HS2 Ltd assurances are missing
- Absence of traffic modelling in key locations along the heavily loaded A413
- Complete absence of engagement with local communities
- Traffic impact on the A413 not accurately assessed
- Assessments of impacts on minor roads not considered
- Schools not included in impact assessments for mitigation
- Changes to traffic plans made without local discussion or communication

A further major change (from the scheme approved in the Hybrid Bill) is that the A4010 via Princess Risborough and High Wycombe is no longer to be an approved HGV route – consequently, all HS2 traffic between Stoke Mandeville and Amersham will follow the A413-A355 route to the M40. The A4010 may have been a bad choice of route, but then so is the A413, which will now be more heavily used than was the case when the scheme (and associated mitigation measures) were presented to Parliament.

A totally inadequate two page summary of the plan was posted in December⁹ – just a list of peak traffic at the EKFB sites, with no indication that this would be in addition to traffic from the Align vent shaft sites – Chesham Road, Little Missenden and Amersham. The fact that Align and EKFB cannot produce a single document showing traffic on the A413 does not seem to indicate a high level of cooperation between the two, and could lead to serious problems ahead.

⁹ [https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/commonplace-customer-assets/hs2inbucksandoxfordshire/Traffic%20Information%20Guide Winter%202020 Great%20Missenden%20to%20Stoke%20Mandeville_V7.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/commonplace-customer-assets/hs2inbucksandoxfordshire/Traffic%20Information%20Guide%20Winter%202020%20Great%20Missenden%20to%20Stoke%20Mandeville_V7.pdf)

Summary

In our experience, HS2 (& the contractors) regard it as a point of honour not to change any decision, once announced, and to avoid any meaningful prior consultations. Meetings now follow the old 'Community Forum' model, where plans are announced, objections are made but nothing changes. These forum meetings played a large part in poisoning the relationship between HS2 and residents, even before the inflexible Hybrid Bill process showed what little concern HS2 had for the environment and communities along the route.

Readers may have noticed that protest activity increases steadily, moving northwards up the line. This represents a challenge to the well established opposition groups, who have been attempting to alter the course of construction through lawful means. As can be seen from the above examples, there has been precious little to show for this approach – 1 shuttle bus ? – and so no argument can be made that peaceful means produce results. On the contrary, the continued existence of Jones Hill Wood suggests the opposite. The fact that HS2 appear prepared to break the law, if they can get away with it (for example, in regard to bat licenses), and avoid honouring inconvenient assurances where possible, further undermines any argument that lawful opposition is the best approach. It is unsurprising that other groups have been formed to oppose the project by direct action, following the failing attempts at engagement detailed above.



Grims Ditch (Remains of)

