

Evading their responsibilities?



Little Missenden vent shaft looking north from the A413 (Photo: Keith Hoffmeister)

John Gladwin is unimpressed by HS2's current performance in the Chilterns

Covid-19 may have reduced activity in the country, but not for HS2. There's a lot happening along the A413.

Traffic

Local councils have been trying to find out how much traffic will be generated by the activities along the A413. Align and EKFB (HS2's contractors) publish the expected number of vehicles for each site, but they haven't produced a picture of the impact of traffic covering all the sites along the road. We found out recently that the access route for the sites in Wendover and Stoke Mandeville from High Wycombe via the A4010 has been cancelled, and all traffic for those sites will now use the A355 and A413. A summary produced locally indicates that this could double the number of HS2-related HGVs and LGVs using the A413, which will cause major problems. When challenged, HS2 Ltd denied this, but were unable to or unwilling to provide any data.

Chalfont St Giles Vent Shaft

Rapid progress has been made building the access road. It was supposed to be no more than 1.5m above the field level, but it appears to be well above the 2m fencing

bordering it. This blocks the view from the ground floor for most residents of Bottom House Farm Lane.

The Act approving HS2 specified that 1km of ancient hedgerow should be moved 2m. Instead it was totally removed without any notice, much to the disgust of the AONB Review Group and the Chiltern Society.

A temporary bridge for the access road was supposed to avoid damaging the River Misbourne. Nevertheless, some of its foundations were put in about 2m from the river, which risks part of the flow being lost, because at this point the bottom of the river is perched above the aquifer.

Amersham Vent Shaft

The AONB Review Group agreed that there should be a unique 'iconic' building to complement Amersham. The designs presented show a 9m-high rusty wall topped with an illuminated 'crown' of anodised fins. When presented to the public, the vast majority of comments were negative. My description is 'a rusty

firebowl fly-tipped in the AONB by an inconsiderate giant'. Both the Society and the Chilterns Conservation Board expressed very negative opinions. It needs to be integrated into the AONB, not stand out like a sore thumb. We await the 'You Said, We Did' response.

Getting this site up and running has resulted in access to Whielden St from the A404 being closed. Consequently all the traffic for Amersham Hospital has been forced to enter Whielden Street from Old Amersham. Buses were no longer able to access the hospital, and it was only when we and Amersham Action Group involved Buckinghamshire Council that a shuttle bus was laid on from stops near Tesco. Despite numerous complaints to HS2 Ltd and its contractors their vehicles continue to travel through Amersham Old Town and Whielden Street to reach the site, rather than using the approved route from the A404. 'No HS2 Traffic' signs are promised early this year, months after being requested.

Little Missenden Vent Shaft

Last May HS2 Ltd were carrying out ground investigations near Shardeloes Lake. A large chalk bloom appeared in the lake and lasted for several days. Align denied responsibility. We looked at it, and because the vent shaft is 0.5 mile directly to the north, and close to the Misbourne, this was the likely culprit, with water flowing through the fractured chalk in the aquifer.

Align are concerned about access to this vent shaft, which lies to the east of the A413 dual carriageway. HS2 Ltd had told the Parliamentary Committee that there were no safety issues in accessing the site, and that construction traffic from Amersham could go up to the Frith Hill roundabout and turn round there. Align has now applied for a roundabout at the Highmore Cottages junction at Little Missenden. Obviously this would significantly reduce the distance their trucks need to travel, but local people are very concerned that the delays caused by that roundabout will create rat-running through Little Missenden and Hyde Heath. This hasn't been considered by HS2 Ltd, and no traffic assessments have been

made available. Alternatives have been proposed and are being considered by Transport for Bucks and the contractors.

Tunnel North Portal - near Great Missenden

There have been a number of issues with proposed changes to the layout here. Only after protesters became involved did HS2 modify its stance and substantially reduce the number of trees to be removed.

A number of the footpaths in the area have been closed, more for the contractors' convenience than because of any danger to walkers. Recently we became aware of the intention to build another compound halfway up the haul road to the portal. After some significant discussions it's been agreed that this isn't required, and the hillside will be returned to grass after some chalk trials finish in the spring.

Jones Hill Wood

Approximately one third of this ancient woodland north of Great Missenden will be lost to HS2. Protesters were evicted from the HS2 section of the woods, but are camped in the remainder. To deter them, very bright white lights were

being used at night, despite the fact that barbastelle bats have been identified roosting in the wood. White lights impact the bats significantly, and as such this is an environmental offence. After negotiation, HS2/EKFB replaced the white lights with red and green ones, which have much less impact on the bats. What happens next is unclear, because to date the company doesn't have a licence to disturb the remaining bats.

Colne Valley Park

HS2 Ltd don't appear to have carried out a survey for water voles before beginning work.

Grim's Ditch

This ancient monument was surrounded by beechwood and holly, all of which was clear felled without notice. HS2 Ltd have refused to disclose the contents of ecological reports (based on prior surveys) in response to Freedom of Information requests from the Society.

Overall we're concerned that HS2 Ltd and its contractors are evading their environmental and local community responsibilities wherever possible, and neglecting basic mitigation measures.



Misbourne Bridge foundation (Photo: Keith Hoffmeister)



Grim's Ditch looking east (Photo: Jim Conboy)

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