

HS2 AND NORTHERN POWERHOUSE RAIL (NPR)

Report on meeting held 10th June 2019, attended by:

John Atkinson, Engagement Team, HS2 Community Area 3
Stephen Cunningham, Engagement Team, HS2 Community Area 3
Cllr. Anna Lee
Gill Ayres, Parish Clerk

BACKGROUND

1. Phase 2b of HS2 (from Crewe to Manchester) is divided into eight Community Areas. Each area deals with what are known as the 'Three Es':

- engagement
- engineering
- environment

John Atkinson and Stephen Cunningham work in the Engagement Team for Community Area 3 (from Lostock, Pickmere, Mere, High Legh to the Bridgewater Canal).

2. The case for HS2 has been developed around three core issues concerning the rail network:

- speed
- capacity
- connectivity

3. Connectivity is not just about links between key cities but also the need to improve branch lines such as the Mid-Cheshire Line Northwich to Sandbach (currently freight only). Trains running on HS2 will be able to use the branch lines as well.
4. In addition, a case is now being made for Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) to improve West-East / East-West access across northern England. One argument being advanced is that without HS2, NPR will not be viable when its costs and benefits are considered.
5. The HS2 route does not pass through Great Budworth Parish but it does affect nearby parishes, notably High Legh and Ashley, both of which will be seriously affected. The closure of Budworth Road (because of difficulties adjusting levels to cross the rail-line) may cause disruption. HS2 is under an obligation to keep footpaths open, but they may be diverted to a few key crossing points.

HIGH LEGH

6. The main issues, apart from the route itself, which blights many properties, concern:
 - two large land areas allocated on a temporary basis (but lasting several years) for earthworks and construction-related activity. Both will generate considerable additional traffic and disrupt traffic flows as well as being environmentally intrusive and increasing pollution levels;

- a new proposal, currently out for consultation, for two new grade-separated rail junctions to allow links to NPR;
 - a grid supply point and a transformer feeder station which will be environmentally intrusive.
7. Following a post on the Great Budworth WhatsApp, Cllr. Lee has been approached by the headmistress of High Legh Primary School expressing concerns about these issues.

ASHLEY

8. In addition to the actual rail route itself, proposals in Ashley also now include:
- a railhead construction site depot (temporary);
 - an infrastructure maintenance base (permanent).

NEXT STEPS

9. Consultations on the new proposals are currently underway. Following this, maps will be finalised and safeguarding areas confirmed before Phase 2b is enshrined in a Bill to go before Parliament in mid-2020.
10. The proposals will then be considered by a Parliamentary Select Committee that will receive representations (being effectively the largest Public Inquiry ever held in the UK) and last at least three years.
11. In the meantime, investigations will be undertaken to establish ground conditions along the route. These will commence shortly and a newsletter will be released advising the general public.
12. The Engagement Team will contact the headmistress of High Legh Primary School to discuss her concerns and will also look into a specific issue in Davenham raised by Cllr. Lee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. Great Budworth Parish Council may wish to increase its engagement with HS2 and NPR by:
- attending quarterly meetings of the Implementation Advisory Group comprising parishes in the local area;
 - responding to the current consultation <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/hs2-phase-2b-design-refinement-consultation> The Parish Council may wish to support High Legh Parish Council and Primary School by referencing their concerns in Great Budworth's own consultation response. This might, however, conflict with any support Great Budworth may wish to express in favour of NPR and improved West-East / East-West links;
 - facilitating contact between Great Budworth residents and the HS2 Engagement Team. If the Parish Council gathered any questions from local people, the Team would be happy to attend a Parish Council meeting (with public invited) to answer them and provide additional information;
 - uploading HS2 newsletters to the Great Budworth website.