

Mitigation of the Impact of HS2 on the Village of Hints and Area



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Prepared by Hints & Area Action Group Against HS2

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Introduction

The village of Hints is situated in the south eastern corner of Staffordshire, five miles from the ancient Cathedral city of Lichfield and three miles from Tamworth. It sits on the slope between Watling Street and Bourne Brook, a tributary of the River Tame. Hints and some of the adjoining landscape was designated as a Conservation Area in 1989 and remains an area of considerable natural beauty.

Hints was mentioned in the Domesday Book in 1086 as one of a number of manors, belonging to the Bishop of Chester. There has been a church in the village since the fourteenth century, although the present church was built in 1882-3.

Historians believe there has been a settlement at Hints since the Iron Age. In the close vicinity there have been finds dating back to Roman times, including a pig of lead and a number of coins. In more recent times the Staffordshire hoard was uncovered not many miles from the village, and close to the village of Wall the site of a Roman encampment. This has supported the research of some local historians who believe that one of Boudicca's famous battles against the Romans was actually fought in the Bourne Valley.

The prominent mound of Gold's Clump, immediately south of the Watling Street, has been considered a pre-historic burial mound, or alternatively a large Roman Tumulus. It is in fact a scheduled monument. To the north of Watling Street, aerial photography has shown several crop marks of probable Roman-British date. (*See Appendix 3: Historic Environment Record*)

Today there are some 119 households in Hints and close environs, with approximately 240 villagers in total. (*Data taken from Electoral Register*) The population is a mix of young families, young and middle aged professionals, local business owners, farmers and retirees. There is no doubt that the beauty and tranquillity of the area has attracted newcomers over the years but there are also families, where three generations live in the village.

A number of businesses are based in Hints and its close surrounds. Farming is clearly a major presence, including arable, sheep rearing, and soft fruit growing. There is a long established shoot, a number of equine related businesses (including a race horse training centre), and other more diversified businesses like an Events Centre which also is licensed to conduct Civil Ceremonies. There are also restaurants, farm shops and a factory producing Waffles, (not only for distribution in the UK but also for export, in particular to the Middle East). A number of these businesses will be unviable once HS2 is under construction; the track will run straight through some of these establishments.

As the village stands we do not have a Post Office or other shops, no pub and no public transport and yet we will soon have a 18 high speed trains an hour in each direction powering, through our village and surrounding countryside, blighting not just the village but the lives of all who live here.

We believe that plans have been made with little or no understanding of either the area or the destruction which will be caused to the countryside, to wild life and the rights of individuals to enjoy a peaceful existence in their chosen environment.

Impact of the HS2 line on Hints and Area

When the preferred route for HS2 was first announced the impression gained was that there was scant regard for the impact it would have on the lives of people living along the line. Concerns voiced were dismissed by all associated with the project, up to and including the Secretary of State, as the self-indulgent moans of a group of Nimbys.

It seems inconsistent to the people of Hints that an Environmental Impact Assessment was not carried out before the route was announced. It is inconceivable to us that no clear evaluation has been made of the impact this project will have on the environment, with the destruction of ancient woodlands, historical sites, listed building and areas of biological and biodiversity importance. Five sites of biological importance and 16 biodiversity sites will be seriously impacted.

Here in Hints the route intersects 16 public rights of way including two crossings of the Heart of England Way (part of the European footpath from Scotland and the South of France), impinges on two ancient woodlands, an historic park (Hints Hall) and slices through an area frequented by ramblers, horse riders, bird watchers and cyclists.

The absence of site surveys or baseline noise surveys suggest to us severe shortcomings in the process. The line is 450 metres west of the village and with land take required for the project, proximity will be less than this. From the south it emerges from a cutting to a 4 to 6 metre embankment. From this elevated position increased levels of noise are inevitable.

From the first version of the route and through various iterations, there have been inconsistencies and changes to the speed from 400 to 350KPH as trains go through Hints. We understand that the overriding principle for a high speed train is that the line has to be straight. Yet the design engineers have seen fit to introduce a curve as the line goes through Hints. We understand that it is this factor which calls for reduction in speed from 400KPH to 350 KPH.

Even at this reduced speed, the increased curvature of the line exceeds normal design criteria and therefore greater unbalanced centrifugal force between wheel and rail. This will cause increased wheel and rail wear and increased noise. Furthermore this also gives rise to increased safety concerns and the Rayleigh waves effect on the curve could be amplified.

Between the September 2010 report and December 2010 report the line was raised as follows:

- > 1 metre at Roundhill Wood
- > 4.8 metres at Rookery Wood
- > 7.3 metres at Rookery Lane
- > 2.0 meters at viaduct over the River Bourne

Any apparent mitigation conceded was pretty swiftly withdrawn and the introduction of the likelihood of night time maintenance exacerbated an already unacceptable situation.

At one stage an alternative shorter straight line was considered to the east of Hints which was rejected on the basis of cost, although by December 2010 report the cost difference had been eliminated because of the move further away from Lichfield and nearer to Bucks Head Farm in Hints. This alternative would have meant only 5 properties would be at risk of demolition, compared with 10 residential and 15 commercial properties on the published route. Mitigating the impact will cost money but in comparison to the total project cost of £17 billion, the figure is relatively low.

The construction phase of the project will be unbearable for residents, with excessive noise, possible 24 hour working, frequency and extent of heavy goods vehicle traffic and lack of access to specific amenities. All of this will have a dramatic impact on the effective operation of businesses, particularly farmers. With the construction work in the area of Bourne Brook, this is likely to seriously impede the extraction of water, critical to farming businesses in the Hints Village area.

It is ironic that Hints has not been considered sufficiently deserving of further mitigation; indeed mitigation offered in earlier reports has been eroded. In other communities, more acceptable solutions have been arrived at, despite the additional cost attached to the changes.

The revised route and its implications

As the route is currently configured, from Drayton Bassett, the line will run just below the surface before returning to a cutting which will infringe on two ancient woodlands, Roundhill and Rookery, and from there on a viaduct some 8 metres above ground over Bourne Brooke before returning back to a cutting. The new Rock Hill Bridge will pass over Watling Street and the A5 and over Flats Lane, where a possible Permanent Flats Lane Diversion is proposed.

Plans which are dispassionately put on paper by civil engineers will wreak havoc on the lives of many people. Residents of Hints will be subjected to excessive noise, light pollution and an impossibly dusty atmosphere. Our environment is essentially our most prized asset. Double glazing, sound proofing and monetary compensation will do nothing to mitigate **that** loss, even if appropriate compensation schemes are introduced to cover everyone affected.

The residents of Flats Lane and Knox Grave Lane, in particular, are living with complete uncertainty as to which properties will be subject to compulsory purchase. Those that are not purchased will be left in a community dissected by HS2 and left in an unacceptable proximity to the line with the problems of noise, vibration and visual impairment.

Further mitigation is critical if the residents of Hints and surrounding area are to have any quality of life during construction and after HS2 is operational.



Environmental and Biodiversity Impact

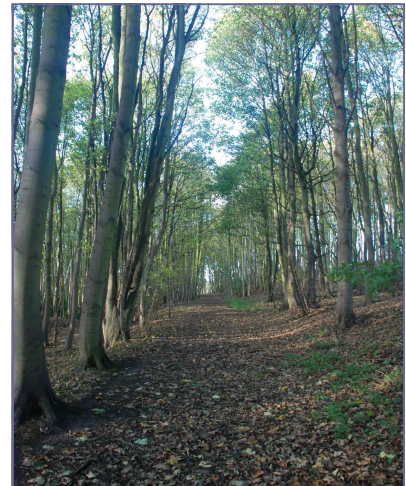
As the HS2 route passes through Staffordshire, according to Staffordshire Wildlife Trusts data, the route will potentially affect 10 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), 6 potentially newly discovered LWS and many protected and priority species. The failure to carry out a Sustainable Environmental Assessment has led to key environmental impact being ignored and would suggest a failure by the Government to fulfil their obligations under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act to have due regard to biodiversity. None of the information given to the public be it at road shows or in written communications has contained any major concerns for the impact on the natural environment. On the wider environmental front even assertions on the impact on our carbon footprint have been reduced to a carbon neutral position at best.

Specific Impact on Hints

- > The proposed route will bisect Bourne Brook in Hints. The stretch of the watercourse and the adjacent land incorporates approximately 94 acres of designated wetland habitats.
- > Snakes Hill and River Oxbow are areas of botanically rich wetland, to the south and north of which are expanses of periodically wet grassland which attract wading birds such as lapwing and snipe.
- > 4 ancient woodlands in Hints - Rough Leasow, Rookery, Roundhill and Brockhurst - are listed on the Ancient Woodland Inventory of Staffordshire.
- > Three existing sites - Rough Leasow, Snakes Hill and River Oxbow - are listed as sites of Biological Importance and Biodiversity Action Plan Habitats.
- > Three further sites – Rookery, Roundhill and Brockhurst have been identified as potential new sites
- > Staffordshire Wildlife Trust conducted a survey in 2011 of rare species in the Staffordshire area; Hints was included. A number of rare species of birds, bats and mammals were sited. *(See Appendix 2. for detail)*
- > There is evidence of a number of strains of bats present in different locations in Hints, School Lane, Dark Lane, Bangley Lane, the upper part of Waggoners Lane and Horsley Brook Farm
- > A Bat Survey undertaken at Bucks Head Farm found evidence of bats, including roosting perches, in more than one location at the farm. They were identified as the Common Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared Bat and possible Soprano Pipistrelle.
- > The most widespread bat found in the area is the common pipistrelle. The typical feeding radius from the known bat roosts and other wildlife is 10 kilometres.

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- > Roundhill, Rookery and Brockhurst woods and the wetlands are critically important as together they form an essential feeding habitat for bats and other wildlife. It is essential that these areas remain untouched, if the protection of these species is not to be impinged upon.
 - > All bats have EU and UK protection status. Infringements to the bats and their roosts are dealt with under the prevailing law (*See Appendix 1*)
 - > A separate section will cover general mitigation, but in specific relation to the protection of bats, the route between Drayton Basset and the Hints flood plains needs to be tunnelled, to ensure habitats are not disturbed. (*see also section on General Mitigation*)

Wildlife Habitats



Impact of HS2 on Property & Environment

Hints is a beautiful and peaceful place to live. The people who live here have, in many cases, lived here for a significant number of years; many were born here.

This beautiful environment has not been without significant disruption in recent years, with the construction of the A5 Bypass, the nearby M6 Toll Road and the extension to the Quarry on Watling Street. The village has taken its share of upheaval and less than perfect solutions being applied.

- > Since the announcement in the spring of 2010 of the Government's intention to extend High Speed Rail with the construction of HS2, the village of Hints has been blighted.
- > Properties on the market before the announcement no longer received viewings and worst still, prospective purchasers pulled out of pending sales.
- > Whereas property valuation initially fell 15 – 20%, the rate of property devaluation has increased and in some cases Estate Agents have refused to view properties, which are along the HS2 route, deeming them to be unsellable.
- > The majority of submissions for EHS were rejected, even those needing to move on health grounds or a change of job, necessitating relocation.
- > On a broader front, a grossly insufficient budget was put into the overall project cost for compensation and we have yet to see what promised newly constructed compensation scheme will do to adequately compensate home owners for either the loss of their home or the loss of value. Very few people in the country would feel happy if the Government took 20 – 30% of the value of their homes. They, like us, would view it as undemocratic.
- > There is a clear lack of knowledge and understanding of our village on the part of HS2 Ltd. and nowhere does any heed appear to have been taken of the fact that Hints is a Conservation Area. (*see Appendix 4*)
- > The noise and air pollution blight arising from construction will be immense and will make living in the area at this time intolerable. Wildlife habitats will be destroyed. The natural beauty of our environment will be decimated.
- > These appallingly deficient and undemocratic process will continue to be detrimental to the health and general well-being of villagers and the lack of any real recourse will exacerbate an already intolerable situation.

Mitigation

It is essential that Hints receives mitigation for the impact of HS2 for the following reason:

- > The village of Hints is a *Conservation Area*. As such any proposed development inside this and the adjoining area, which might affect its setting, or key views into and out of it, should be assessed on the impact such developments will have.
- > Canwell Estate and the Bourne Valley have been classified as *an Area of High Landscape Value*.
- > Two ancient Woodlands will be severely damaged and the area below these woods, adjacent to Hints Hall, is classified as an *Historic Park*.
- > Bourne Valley is a popular recreational oasis.
- > The proposed route intersects 16 public rights of way in this area. This includes 2 crossings of the Heart of England Way, part of the European footpath from Scotland to the South of France.
- > It passes through 5 sites of Biological importance including the Bourne Valley and Whittington Heath Golf Course.
- > It cuts through and will sterilise significant volumes of valuable mineral deposits in two undeveloped *Mineral Consultation Areas* one of which was the subject of a recent planning application to provide a substantial proportion of the future sand and gravel needs of the West Midlands when the existing quarry at Hints is exhausted in 2 – 3 years time.
- > The propose route will destroy many high value businesses providing local services and employment.
- > Several years ago a full Public Enquiry was held for the proposed Hints By-pass. One of the alternatives considered was through the Bourne Vale. This option was rejected on the grounds of high environmental impact and high engineering costs. So what has changed?



What form should mitigation take?

> **Tunnelling of the route between Drayton Bassett and the Hints Flood Plains**

This could be achieved by deepening the tracks (as shown on plan attached) and by amending the vertical alignment. This proposal assumes gradients and radii do not exceed those, already adopted by HS2 Ltd. The new tunnel works can be achieved by a combination of boring and with small areas of infill in between green tunnel work.

See Appendix 5: Map 28 - Revised Horizontal Alignment

(In creating the green tunnel, the same soil can be used as is dug out to form the tunnel.)

This would have significant benefits to visual impact of the landscape, to wildlife and to the environment as it :

- minimises destruction of wildlife and habitats
- minimises destruction of ancient woodlands and wet lands and maintains green corridor
- minimises removal of hedges
- As most of the villages look over the ancient woodlands, tunnelling would preserve the landscape.
- reduces train wheel noise as well as effects of night time maintenance
- reduces agricultural land take and disruption to farming process
- does not require permanent A5 or Rock Hill Bridge over HS2
- reduces permanent viaduct superstructure over flood plain and reduces embankment approaching Rookery Wood
- Rookery Lane Diversion unnecessary
- preserves Rookery and Roundhill woods (bored tunnel means no unsightly permanent cutting)
- no embankment required between Roundhill Wood and Waggoners Lane (fill only required)
- no permanent cutting and retaining wall required along Whitehouse Farm track
- no permanent Waggoner's Lane diversion required or bridge over HS2
- no permanent huge cutting or bridge required at Cranbrook Hill (A493)
- no cutting or permanent retaining wall required at lone oak property
- no permanent Drayton Lane or Shirral Drive diversion necessary
- Volumes of cut are massively reduced, thereby reducing carbon footprint by both earth moving plant during the construction stages and road going vehicles disposing of surplus overburden.
- Gas supply pipes for the area from the gas station in Waggoners Lane will not be affected
- Foul and storm outfall from Bangley Lane properties will not be disrupted.

> **Tunnelling of the route as it traverses Flats Lane**

This would eliminate the need for the new possible Permanent Flats Lane Diversion over HS2, which will have such devastating effects of splitting the hamlet in Flat Lane and Knox Grave Lane and leaving the residents in an unacceptably worrying situation of which properties will be compulsorily purchased and which will not.

It is recommended that where cuttings and embankments are unavoidable a system of earth bunding and tree landscaping is adopted as a minimum, to reduce wheel noise and disruption to wildlife wishing to migrate across the route

All temporary vehicle access corridors should be located on the north side of the works in order to minimise the necessity for further hedge stripping or removal of mature trees located along hedge rows. A number of ancient oaks will be removed as part of these works which should be replaced with well-established root ball trees as part of the final landscaping works Whips are not considered an acceptable replacement for a mature oak

This would be the best scenario to minimise the necessity for compulsory purchase, to reduce the amount of landscape impairment and to protect wildlife, bat roosts and their habitat.

It has already been conceded that green tunnelling will be used in the Chilterns (and rightly so) in order not to impact the beauty of the area. The same principle should be applied to Hints and its surrounding area.

