

Report on Minimum Mitigation for Hints Village
Presented to Professor Mc.Naughton on 18 July 2012
On Behalf of the Community of Hints
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Mitigation for Hints Village

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Introduction.

The route as now delineated north of the proposed Delta Junction could not be more damaging to the area through which it will pass. Super-elevated structures will be required at both ends of this section to accommodate the Delta and both Y junctions.

Also:

- at least 10 businesses are being completely destroyed,
- valuable sand and gravel deposits are being sterilised,
- a small rural community will all but disappear,
- potentially the southern Y will cut across the popular Kingsbury Water Park.
- a well known golf course (a lowland heathland of national importance) is bisected.

Environmentally it is bordering on vandalism. Not only does it destroy this heathland, it also passes through the middle of the locally highly valued sandstone hills landscape between Hints and the Canwell Estate along the southern slopes of the Bourne Valley. Apart from its natural beauty this area provides a significant local recreation amenity very close to the West Midlands conurbations on the north eastern side of Birmingham and, until now, has been largely preserved from the worst effects of infrastructure development.

Finally it impinges upon important wildlife habitats including the protected otter population on the River Mease and the roosts and feeding grounds of colonies of bats.

Whilst significant mitigation has been incorporated into the proposed route south of Birmingham, north of the Delta Junction, as the route has been developed, mitigation in this area has been, at best, nominal or reduced particularly around Hints.

Moving the line further away from Lichfield has increased its curvature around Hints and area to beyond the normal design limits. Thus the horizontal geometry, design speed, and safety of the line is being (unnecessarily) compromised, generating additional noise and night-time maintenance which will have an added deleterious affect on local residents.

This presentation is concerned with the **minimum** mitigation measures necessary to curb the worst effects of the environmental damage that will occur around Hints in terms of landscape, habitats, noise and night-time lighting & disturbance. It has been prepared as an adjunct to the Hints & Area Action Group mitigation document.

Community and Amenities.

The village of Hints is inhabited by a little over 200 residents. The local shop, petrol station

and school disappeared many years ago. The only amenities now available to residents are the village hall, which is owned and maintained by the community, and a shared appreciation and enjoyment of the local landscape and rural environment.

This has been sufficient to sustain a strong and balanced community life within the village. An outward demonstration of this is expressed annually in the Hints Village Open Gardens and Flower Festival which attracts around a 1000 visitors a year. Many of these visitors return each year because they are attracted to the calm and hidden beauty of the place. Unless a radical proposal for providing a significant degree of mitigation for this village is adopted all this will be lost and the impact on the community is likely to be severe and permanent.

Attachment 1

Conservation Area & the Environs.

Hints is situated on the northern slopes of the Bourne valley with magnificent views across the valley to the south. In 1989 the part of the village south of Watling Street including the grounds of the old Hints Hall was designated a Conservation Area.

Attachment 2

The whole of the area around Hints is in green belt and falls within Staffordshire's landscape policy objective of **Landscape Maintenance**. In areas classified with this objective substantial emphasis is sought to ensure that any development blends unobtrusively into the landscape and does not lead to the loss of features characteristic of it.

Attachment 3

Many of the houses in the lower part of Hints benefit from a vista of this landscape framed by two ancient woods on the horizon. Those higher up have a more extensive view across the Canwell Estate which is included in the same policy objective. The existence of these views gives added weight to the conservation area designation.

Attachments 4/1, 4/2 & 5

This landscape including the ancient woodland will be irrevocably altered by the cutting as currently proposed through the southern escarpment of the Bourne Valley and by the felling of several large mature trees that formed part of the park once attached to the estate of Hints Hall. This will be in direct contravention of the existing stated landscape policy.

Attachment 6

Ancient Woodland.

As mentioned above there are two ancient woods immediately opposite the village namely Rookery and Roundhill, both of which are also likely to be severely affected by the current proposals particularly if the potential effects of the establishment of leaf free zones either side of the track easement is considered.

Each wood will border the proposed cutting which in the case of Rookery actually transgresses into its southern boundary. Apart from damage likely to be done to these woods during the construction stage, they will be left sitting above the tracks and pose an added long term maintenance problem for the efficient and safe operation of the railway.

They are both important wildlife habitats in the area and support the breeding of game pheasants. The then Secretary of State Philip Hammond stated at a meeting held in Lichfield in October 2010 that such woods could not be replaced and therefore should be protected

when determining the route. It is apparent that adherence to this directive is superficial.

Public Rights of Way

In the Bourne Valley alone, 4 local footpaths and a bridleway (Rookery Lane) will be severed, 2 of which are used on a daily basis. They form part of a network of footpaths used by the public throughout the year to circuit the Canwell Estate to the south and the Hopwas Woods area to the north. The track intersects the Heart of England Way at Bucks Head Farm.

Attachment 7

Wildlife.

The 4 ancient woods in the Hints area and approximately 94 acres of designated wetlands in the Bourne Valley provide habitats and feeding grounds for a diverse range of animals and birds including most importantly colonies of bats which are protected under EU and UK law. Several roosting perches exist in Buck's Head Farm which is to be demolished.

Species of bats identified in the area include the common pipistrelle, the pipistrelle, the soprano pipistrelle, and the brown long-eared bat.

Mitigation.

The topography of the area, which can be likened to a natural amphitheatre, will exacerbate the high impact the scheme will have on the whole village in terms of noise, vista, and light pollution. The tranquillity of the village, much improved by the construction of the Hints Bypass in 2005, will be lost forever if the scheme proceeds as currently proposed.

Located within green belt in a landscape of high quality the village rightly enjoys the benefit of a conservation area designation and the amenity that this provides.

The sloping ground, through which the track is routed in cutting onto a raised embankment, does not facilitate the provision of effective superficial mitigation measures and such measures would have a severe visual impact on the landscape.

To ensure the minimum impact on the village, the ancient woodland, the local recreational amenities, the wildlife and the high quality landscape, the escarpment directly opposite the village should be conserved intact by lowering the track and driving a tunnel through the ridge. This should be extended on both approaches by green tunnels to merge in with the landscape. An embankment could then be constructed at the minimum height necessary to take the track across the flood plain.

The bedrock in that immediate area comprises a sandstone with conglomerate, siltstone and mudstone which should be suitable for a driven tunnel or, failing that, a more damaging cut & cover construction. Special measures would be required to protect woods during construction

Attachment 8

This is the only solution that would provide any satisfactory (but not complete) mitigation, to meet local and national objectives and guidelines, and would satisfy the public promises made by successive Ministers of State for Transport that they are seeking to minimize the impact of HS2 on local communities and environments.