



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

18 August 2020

Dear Councillor Walsh,

I am taking the opportunity to write to all Wendover parish councillors, following the letter I received on your behalfs from your chairman, Tom Walsh, dated 29 July 2020 (Appendix One).

Firstly, I would like to pay tribute to the diligent and robust work of all members of the parish council who, for the past five years, have come together for the good of the people of Wendover in calling for a bored mined tunnel. Although I am a newly elected MP, the strength of your arguments is known across government; indeed the HS2 minister has noted as much in his correspondence to me.

The letter from Mr Walsh raised several points about the conduct of both myself and my predecessor in regard to your campaigning efforts which I feel need to be clarified in order to correct a number of misapprehensions – which I am sure will have been unintentional. I apologise in advance for the length of this letter, but I believe the situation warrants a considerable degree of detail.

Let me state unequivocally at the outset that as the Member of Parliament for Wendover, I am firmly committed to minimising the impact of HS2 on your lives. I am extremely disappointed that the decision to proceed with the railway was taken, but believe we must all now seek to achieve the best mitigation and compensation possible.

During my election campaign last year, I consistently highlighted my opposition to HS2 in hustings, in my election literature and in my first meeting with parish council representatives when I was briefed about the mined tunnel proposal. It is important to remember that this was at the time when the entire HS2 project was under review, and along with many others, I hoped it would be an opportunity for a change of heart by the new government.

Once elected, I took every opportunity to deliver on my pledge and speak out against HS2 in its entirety, both alone and working with other colleagues. These efforts included:

- 1:1 meeting with the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sajid Javid MP, followed by a detailed letter dated 8 January 2020 (appendix two)

Member of Parliament for Aylesbury

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- 1:1 conversation with then Chief Secretary to the Treasury (now Chancellor of the Exchequer), Rishi Sunak MP, about value for money
- 1:1 conversation with the Prime Minister's Transport Adviser Andrew Gilligan
- 1:1 meeting with former HS2 minister Paul Maynard MP about scrapping the project entirely. I also discussed the merits of the mined tunnel proposal and asked his department to further investigate your proposals
- I was a member of the HS2 Review Group of MPs and helped organise the group's wide-ranging efforts trying to persuade ministers of the merits of scrapping HS2
- and I had conversations with the prime minister himself on two separate occasions, including with colleagues at a full and frank meeting in the House of Commons.

Sadly, despite the best efforts of everyone involved, the prime minister was not persuaded, and the decision was made to proceed with HS2. I was informed of this by the Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps shortly before the public announcement and I instantly asked him whether he would therefore allow the mined tunnel in Wendover to proceed, and he instantly replied that he would not. Nonetheless, I stated that I had considerable information from both Wendover Parish Council and the Wendover HS2 Group, which I wanted him to consider, and he agreed to a meeting.

As you are aware, the concept of a mined tunnel was fully considered by select committees of both Houses of Parliament between 2014 and 2017, some years before I became the MP. It was rejected at that stage with the House of Commons Select Committee making specific reference to the proposed costs. Whilst I am fully aware that the parish council contests this strongly, that argument was rejected by the Committee.

The legislation for Phase 1 of HS2 sets out in Schedule One of the Act clearly that Works No. 2/14 and 2/28 at Wendover will be:

"Work No. 2/14 - A railway (8.3 kilometres in length) partly in tunnel and partly on viaduct commencing by a junction with Work No. 2/1, at its termination, continuing north-westwards, and terminating at a point 240 metres north-west of the roundabout joining the A413 London Road with Small Dean Lane; Work No. 2/14 includes a viaduct over the A413 London Road, the Marylebone to Aylesbury Line and Small Dean Lane."

"A railway (8.98 kilometres in length) partly in tunnel, commencing by a junction with Work No. 2/14 at its termination and terminating at a point 540 metres south-west of the roundabout junction of the A418 Oxford Road with Coldharbour Way; Work No. 2/28 includes bridges over Chalkshire Stream, Stoke Brook and Sedrup Ditch."

In short, the law passed in 2017 states that there will not be a mined tunnel in Wendover. Despite this, I pushed for the Transport Department to consider fully your arguments, and ahead of the promised meeting with ministers, I submitted two written questions (UIN 693 and UIN 692) about a mined tunnel in Wendover (Appendix Three). The response of Grant Shapps MP was unbending:

"Even if the alternative mined schemes were broadly comparable in these respects, the subsequent costs of seeking legislative consent for the detailed design change and the consequential cost of delaying the introduction of HS2 services do not represent good value for money or an effective use of public money"¹.

Nonetheless, I had a lengthy meeting on 3 March 2020 with the new HS2 minister, Andrew Stephenson MP (on behalf of the Secretary of State, who was involved in urgent coronavirus discussions) and key officials, at which I was able to present your arguments in detail. It would be fair to say that this was a meeting at which opinions were presented forcefully, and I can absolutely assure you that I did not mince my words over both the mined tunnel and the general treatment of Wendover residents. The minister stated again, however, that the government would not change its mind. I was insistent that the DfT should provide a detailed written response to the points you and I had raised. This was done in the form of a letter dated 30 March, which the parish council was sent via Mr Walsh, and which, *inter alia*, states (Appendix Four):

"I mirror the sentiments of [former minister] Nusrat Ghani when she sympathised that this will be very disappointing for your constituents to hear due to the time, cost and effort expended by them in their efforts to change the approved scheme, but after now providing a higher level of detail on the reasons why my Department has rejected the calls for a mined tunnel, I hope that your constituents will at least be assured that everyone involved has considered their alternatives seriously, fairly, honestly and with the appropriate levels of scrutiny expected. But I must reiterate that the Government will not be making any changes to the consented scheme."

In response, I was then sent follow-up questions compiled by the parish council's political consultant, Murray Stewart. I forwarded these directly to the department on 29 April. Again, the minister stated clearly that the department would not deviate from the consented scheme as approved by parliament. I have attached his letter as Appendix Five.

Subsequent to this exchange of correspondence, I was asked to join a Zoom meeting with the Wendover HS2 group, in which Mr Walsh also participated.

I was asked for my advice. It would have been simple for me to have said "keep asking, keep pushing, keep repeating the same mantra". But it would not have been the responsible thing for me to have said. Anyone can tell someone what they want to hear; it takes more integrity and courage to tell the harsh truth. My duty is to be straight with my constituents, even when it means having to deliver an unwelcome message.

Consequently, based on repeated refusals from ministers at all levels of government, orally and in writing, even to contemplate reconsidering the mined tunnel, and with great reluctance, I advised that it would now be worth proposing alternative mitigation measures that I could push hard to the Department for Transport.

I completely stand by this advice.

¹ Hansard source (Citation: HC Deb, 18 February 2020, cW)

This does not mean I agree that a mined tunnel is inappropriate, let alone that I agree with the DfT's analysis. But I cannot shift an immovable object, and I believe seeking a pragmatic solution to mitigation is required. If, as is the case here, I have been told that the mined tunnel is unequivocally not an option, then it falls to me to try to find alternative ways to reduce the impact HS2 will have on you.

For this reason, I have strongly endorsed the paper produced by the Wendover HS2 group with the HS2 minister. This paper makes alternative suggestions for mitigation, while fully recognising that none is as good as a mined tunnel. I have asked the minister to ensure the proposals are thoroughly considered by his officials.

Your chairman's letter concludes with reference to two priorities or actions for me:

1. "The first priority for us at present is to get access to the "evidence" of any reviews of our Mined Tunnel Proposal."

The DfT considers this to be contained in the letter of 30 March 2020 from Andrew Stephenson MP. I understand from my Senior Parliamentary Assistant, Elliott Banks, who also worked for my predecessor, that several FOI requests have previously been sent by the parish council for this information without success, and that the letter I obtained does at least provide more detail than before. In short, the department is not going to provide any evidence beyond what has been sent already.

2. "The second priority is to achieve the face to face technical meeting that has loomed and faded so many times already."

The DfT has refused such a request as its officials consider the matter closed on the basis that they will not reopen the Phase One Act; in the department's eyes a technical meeting is therefore unnecessary since it would serve no purpose.

This is also an opportune moment to address a remark by your chairman in August's edition of *Wendover News* regarding "the reluctance of our MP to ask questions of government on the mined tunnel", and his decision to ask them via members of the House of Lords instead. On 23 March, the Speaker of the House of Commons asked MPs to be judicious in their use of written parliamentary questions (WPs) given the intense pressure all government departments were under due to coronavirus. Responding to WPs takes a considerable amount of civil servants' time. Cllr Walsh and Mr Stewart were told clearly that for this reason I did not intend to place *any* written questions before the summer recess. Given the unequivocal nature of the DfT's lengthy letter refusing any prospect of a mined tunnel, I certainly did not consider it appropriate to place other written questions on exactly the same topic which would not change the substantive decision. It would have been wholly irresponsible of me to take time from civil servants who could otherwise be assisting the coronavirus effort, for absolutely no concrete benefit.

I would like to assure you, however, that I have not stopped questioning HS2: I have asked several oral questions in the House of Commons including to the prime minister, the Paymaster General, and the Second Churches Commissioner.

My parliamentary team is continuing to work on many outstanding issues, key amongst them, questions over hydrology. In addition, we are liaising with the local environment agency and council regarding the Schedule 17 and Schedule 33 notices, to ensure that all the necessary information is obtained before permissions are potentially granted.

I make a few points in conclusion:

First, it is worth reiterating that I do not want HS2, and never have done. Indeed, I again challenged the Transport Secretary personally about its continued relevance in light of the coronavirus pandemic, only to receive the same response as before. I am deeply concerned by the report of the National Audit Office, the poor return on investment and the spiralling costs. But the decision to proceed has been taken and is set down in law as a result of the democratic process.

Second, I share your dismay at the conduct of HS2 Ltd. Indeed, so does the prime minister himself. My staff and I are in regular contact with HS2 Ltd's representative for this area, and we make every effort to resolve individual constituents' cases over compensation and written assurances and undertakings. I have spoken personally with the Chief Executive to highlight both specific cases and the company's general approach and been promised that there will be improvements. I know you have heard this before, but I have told him in terms that I will not relent in continuing to hold HS2 Ltd to account publicly.

Third, I will continue to raise the concerns of residents and businesses across the entire Aylesbury constituency over HS2 in parliament, through the most appropriate means. This may sometimes be through written parliamentary questions, but my preference for a direct and immediate ministerial response is to have a personal conversation or to raise the matter from the floor of the chamber itself.

In my short time as your MP, I have endeavoured to give Wendover's residents and representatives pragmatic, mature advice and intelligent support, which I continue to regard as being more honest and responsible than taking a purely dogmatic approach. I remain utterly determined to serve you to the best of my ability, and to work with all the people of Wendover in the months and years ahead to achieve the best possible mitigation

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and its appendices, which I hope you will have found helpful and comprehensive. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at rob.butler.mp@parliament.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Butler', with a stylized, wavy line extending from the end.

ROB BUTLER

Member of Parliament for Aylesbury



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LONDON SW1A 0AA

Appendices

Appendix One: Cllr Walsh's letter, on behalf of the Parish Council, to Rob
Butler MP

Appendix Two: Rob Butler MP's letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer

Appendix Three: Written Questions regarding the Mined Tunnel at
Wendover

Appendix Four: Andrew Stephenson's Letter rejecting the Mined Tunnel.

Appendix Five: Andrew Stephenson's response to Murray Stewart and Cllr
Walsh's further correspondence

Appendix One



WENDOVER PARISH COUNCIL

The Clock Tower, High Street, Wendover,
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP22 6DU

Rob Butler MP
100 Walton Street
Aylesbury
Bucks
HP21 7QP

29th July 2020

Dear Rob,

HS2 – Mined Tunnel

Since our last discussion, re: HS2 and Mined Tunnels I and colleagues have put some considerable effort into taking soundings in the village to gauge my parishioners' attitude to the WPC campaign. The overwhelming feedback is that the WPC should carry on using the tunnel as the top-level mitigation target.

So, to recap. The WPC position is not to stop HS2. It is to get the best mitigation for Wendover.

People in Wendover remember your election campaign. Following David's rather subtle approach which disappointed many, they dared to hope for a more forthright approach from our new MP. They are now puzzled as to why you are reluctant to support our campaign. They see other MP's questioning government on HS2 and stubbornly refusing to be put off.

They do not understand your governments intransigence on the subject. They do not understand why government is unwilling to explain its position truthfully, clearly and accurately and they want evidence rather than waffle.

So, while it might be easy to let the Mined Tunnel concept fizzle out, that is not what the people of Wendover want. To confirm that view, at our last meeting, the WPC unanimously voted for our HS2 team to carry on seeking the best mitigation for Wendover. The tunnel option being that best mitigation.

As the HS2 circus gets closer to Wendover people are getting angrier and more vocal. Major issues like the noise levels, flood risk, pollution of the aquifer by Bentonite, the destruction of a major archaeology find and the unsatisfactory compromise cooked up between BC highways and HS2 relating to the A413/Small Dean Viaduct are still to be cleared up.

Government/HS2 has many questions to answer. Clearly, we are getting some questions asked in the Lords and we are now speaking to parliamentarians of all stripes to promote our message in committee, but help and advice and questions from our MP would be useful.



WENDOVER PARISH COUNCIL

The Clock Tower, High Street, Wendover,
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP22 6DU

The Wendover message is not just "tunnel". Our campaign has allowed us to get a detailed view of the HS2 project. It is badly run and hopelessly inefficient. Morale is low and leadership is weak and the financial controls remain poor. For all the PM's bluster and the laughable "reset" of the project and the talk of increased transparency, nothing has changed for the better on the ground.

So, on behalf of my parishioners I must ask for a renewed and positive effort from you going forward so that we, together, can try to secure the best future for Wendover, despite HS2. The first priority for us at present is to get access to the "evidence" of any reviews of our Mined Tunnel Proposal. The second priority is to achieve the face to face technical meeting that has loomed and faded so many times already. Could you please use your best efforts to help us to achieve these objectives?

Yours sincerely,

Tom Walsh
Chairman Wendover Parish Council

Appendix Two

Rt Hon. Sajid Javid MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London, SW1A 2HQ

8th January 2020

OAKERVEE REVIEW INTO HS2

Thank you for your time this afternoon, when I explained to you the concerns of my constituents about HS2. I know that as Chancellor of the Exchequer, you take incredibly seriously your duties as guardian of the public finances. It is in this context, and my understanding that you share oversight of the Oakervee Review, that I approached you.

Given that it is now conceded that the cost of the project has already risen to £81-88bn (2019 prices) from £55.7bn (2015 prices), and that the prime minister himself has indicated the final price might exceed £100bn, I would suggest that HS2 cannot possibly meet the tests of prudent public expenditure.

My own background on an NDPB (the Youth Justice Board) and as a non-executive director of an executive agency (HMPPS) means that I am acutely conscious of the Treasury's very stringent requirements that must rightly be fulfilled before there can be any major spending of taxpayers' money, including on capital projects.

I am concerned that the Oakervee Review has not had sufficient time to follow this detailed process before making its recommendations, nor properly to reconsider the business case for HS2. This is of great concern to my constituents. Much has changed since the scheme was originally proposed by the then Labour government, not least the possibility to use time on trains constructively, thanks to improved digital technology that permits stable wifi in order that passengers can work on the move. As you will be aware, there are many other concerns about the original business case, and comprehensive, fresh and truly independent review would seem wise.

As well as insufficient time to question the business case fully, I fear that the Oakervee Review has not properly considered alternatives which would have less of an impact on the public purse, which would clearly be of direct relevance to the Treasury. One such alternative has been proposed by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (Warwickshire) in the form of a 106-mile new line alongside or very close to the M1, to replace Phase 1. This would address the issue of capacity which is now said to be the principal rationale for HS2, rather than speed. Its cost would be £12bn for the stretch from London to Rugby and Leicester, plus £1bn to upgrade the Coventry – Birmingham mainline.

Appendix Two

In addition, many local businesses in the Aylesbury constituency fear for their very survival if HS2 is permitted to proceed, either because they will lose their premises, or because construction work will cause serious harm to their ability to trade. Your colleague the Transport Secretary has already visited one such business with me. Clearly this would have a negative impact on the strength of our local economy, and if repeated elsewhere along the route, also on the national economy.

Can you therefore reassure me that HS2 could only proceed if the Treasury explicitly assesses it passes these three tests:

- It is the best value for money option to tackle the two separate issues of capacity and northern connectivity
- It is genuinely affordable, given the constraints that rightly remain on the public finances, with many competing and worthwhile demands for taxpayers' money
- It is to the long-term economic benefit of the entire country.

I look forward to hearing from you and would be very happy to discuss these matters further.

ROB BUTLER MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR AYLESBURY

Appendix Three

High Speed 2 Railway Line: Wendover: Written question - 693

Q

Asked by [Robert Butler](#)

(Aylesbury)

Asked on: 11 February 2020

Department for Transport

High Speed 2 Railway Line: Wendover

693

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the hydrological effect of the construction of the green tunnel at Wendover on the potential risk of flooding in Aylesbury.

A

Answered by: [Grant Shapps](#)

Answered on: 18 February 2020

The Environmental Statement assessed the impact of the scheme on Water Resources (Volume 5 WR-002-010) in the Wendover area and specifically the impact of the green tunnel construction on water receptors.

https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140613022805/http://assets.dft.gov.uk/hs2-environmental-statement/volume-5/water/vol5_CFA10_Water_resources_and_flood_risk_assessment/Water_resources_assessment_WR-002-010.pdf

HS2 Ltd advises that the scheme is now entering the detailed design phase. My officials will respond to you shortly with further details on this matter.

High Speed 2 Railway Line: Wendover: Written question - 692

Q

Asked by [Robert Butler](#)

(Aylesbury)

Asked on: 11 February 2020

Department for Transport

High Speed 2 Railway Line: Wendover

692

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of the proposals for a mined tunnel in Wendover; and if he will publish the results of that assessment.

A

Answered by: [Grant Shapps](#)

Answered on: 18 February 2020

The Wendover Mined Tunnel was considered in detail during the passage of the Phase One Bill in both the Commons and Lords committees. Cost comparisons of the consented scheme and the tunnelled alternatives were considered in evidence to both committees during the Bill process and the primary conclusion was that the now consented scheme would be less expensive than the tunnelled alternatives.

Since then, DfT officials and HS2 Ltd have been challenged by Wendover Parish Council and your predecessor, Sir David Lidington, over these decisions and have presented further reports by OTB and Michael Byng (mbpc) challenging the consented scheme.

In each instance, it has been concluded that the Wendover Mined Tunnel would be harder to construct, is costlier and involves a significantly greater degree of risk to the consented scheme.

The Department and HS2 Ltd remain convinced that the Select Committee made the right decision when they accepted that there was a significant difference in cost between the mined alternative schemes and concluded that the HS2 Ltd scheme should be retained.

Even if the alternative mined schemes were broadly comparable in these respects, the subsequent costs of seeking legislative consent for the detailed design change and the consequential cost of delaying the introduction of HS2 services do not represent good value for money or an effective use of public money.

Appendix Four



Department
for Transport

Rob Butler MP
House of Commons
London
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From the Minister of State
Andrew Stephenson MP

Great Minster House
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London
SW1P 4DR

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Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

Our Ref: MC/280859

30 March 2020

Dear Rob,

Thank you for the letter of 6 February to Paul Maynard, regarding your desire to receive clarity from my Department on the proposal for a mined tunnel in Wendover. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this issue.

It was a pleasure to meet you on 3 March 2020 with my officials. In this meeting I agreed to set out the rationale behind the Government's decision to reject the mined tunnel proposal.

I feel it will be useful to set out the chronology of events relating to the Wendover mined tunnel and the reasons why the Government will not be redesigning the consented scheme in the Wendover area to allow for a mined tunnel.

HS2 Select Committee

The idea of a mined tunnel in the Wendover area goes back as far as the Select Committee stage of the Phase One Bill.

The House of Lord Select Committee on the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill Special Report of Session 2016-17 - published 15 December 2016 - HL Paper 83 stated¹:

Wendover is an attractive and historic market town with a population of about 9,000. It is popular with visitors to the Chilterns, especially those walking on the Chiltern Way. It will be more directly affected by the first phase of the HS2 project than any rural settlement of comparable size. The bill's proposals have provoked more petitions from Wendover and its neighbourhood, proportionately to its population, than from any other group of residents.

¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldhs2/83/83.pdf>

The force and sincerity of their feelings are not diminished by the fact that many of their petitions were in almost identical terms, and some failed to identify the location of the petitioner's home. If they lived some way away from the line of route these petitioners were liable to be met by a successful challenge to their locus standi.

*Almost all these petitioners sought as their primary remedy a bored tunnel passing through the whole AONB and continuing north of Wendover (which is not itself included in the AONB). **The House of Commons Select Committee considered this proposal in great detail but rejected it, primarily on the grounds of cost, but it recommended the extension of the bored tunnel (originally to be 13.4 km long) to South Heath (this was the most important change made by AP4, introduced on 12 October 2015). The Committee also recommended a short southwards extension, proposed by the promoter, of the cut-and-cover tunnel originally planned for Wendover.** There is a full record of these deliberations in the Committee's Second Special Report at paragraphs 112–133. Our own report has already recorded (paragraphs 21–26 and Appendix 3) our ruling that we (as Second House) could not consider changes requiring an Additional Provision without a direction (which was not given) from the House. Nevertheless we did think it right to hear some further argument based on the supposition that an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 could be as effective as an Additional Provision in enabling further compulsory purchase.*

The House of Commons Select Committee too deliberated the Wendover HS2 impacts and concluded in February 2016 that:

We do not believe that a bored or mined tunnel would be justified. We believe that the SES4 proposal (of mitigations) constitutes a proportionate and adequate package of mitigation for Wendover.²

mbpc Proposal

The July 2017 report into the Wendover mined tunnel proposal produced by Michael Byng (mbpc) was considered by HS2 Ltd on behalf of the Department for Transport after copies of the report were provided to the Secretary of State by members of both Houses from July 2017. The HS2 Ltd assessment was that the tunnel would be harder to construct, would be more expensive in construction terms, and – as a result of requiring new legal powers – would have significant negative schedule impacts and additional consequential cost. Department for Transport Ministers communicated the HS2 Ltd assessment to those members from October 2017 onwards.

² https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cmhs2/129/12907.htm#_idTextAnchor056

In December 2017 Cllr Walsh expressed his disappointment with this assessment and the Department, upon instruction from Paul Maynard, further considered the points made by Cllr Walsh. A full breakdown of the cost comparison between the consented HS2 Ltd scheme and mbpc design Option 4 was made in this letter, and for ease I have attached this as to this letter (**Annex A**) to set out why my Department rejected the mbpc design and costings behind it.

External Consultant and IPA Reviews

In 2018, your constituents requested that a 'double check' of the HS2 Ltd cost assessment of the mbpc mined tunnel proposal to be made. Wanting to show your constituents that the Department and HS2 Ltd had adequately and fairly appraised the petitioner proposals, DfT officials commissioned an independent examination on 3 April 2018 of the mbpc mined tunnel proposal and the HS2 Ltd response to it.

The review also considered whether the [petitioner] information provided was of a sufficient pertinence to justify a re-evaluation of the solution as included in the Phase One Act, such that there may be an advantage to adopting the mbpc proposal for adjusting the Phase One scheme to include a mined tunnel at Wendover, either in terms of cost or schedule.

This examination was carried out by a number of respected external engineering and Project Management consultants (Steer Davies Gleave, Nichols Group and KPMG). This examination concluded in May 2018 and reached a number of key conclusions that I will summarise below:

- HS2 Ltd had taken full and comprehensive notice of all petitioner proposals during the passage of the hybrid Bill through both Houses of Parliament that options were adequately assessed through the sifting process, and that evidence reviewed supports the decision the consented option remains sound.
- The reports provided by Wendover Parish Council and others in the correspondence did not adequately consider the geological conditions at Wendover, and do not adequately address the full scope, cost or schedule impacts of the proposed scheme.
- The comparison to the HS1 tunnel through the North Downs is not applicable as the HS1 tunnel is mined through the higher reaches of a chalk upland, mostly above the water table and easily dewatered where necessary. The Wendover proposal on the other hand would have a significant length fully below the water table and is currently assessed to be highly fissured as well as having gravel layers running through it, is currently used as an aquifer, and Affinity Water currently abstracts water from it for human consumption.

- Given the difference in ground conditions mining is not an appropriate method of tunnelling in this area because of the high cost of mitigating the considerable volume of water entering the tunnel workings during construction and that none of the mitigating methods are cheap or fast, and are unlikely to be environmentally acceptable, recommending instead that a slurry boring machine would be a more suitable tunnelling methodology, which would completely alter the cost assessment.

Further to this, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) were asked - following discussions with your predecessor, Sir David Lidington – in summer 2018 to assess whether DfT and HS2 Ltd responded appropriately, in compliance with agreed processes, to your constituents' mined tunnel proposal.

The IPA review took place between 31 July and 13 August 2018, was signed off by Cabinet Office Ministers and concluded that the mbpc Infrastructure Limited alternative mined tunnel proposal had been subject to proper scrutiny of engineering, construction and cost by both HS2 Ltd and DfT's external independent consultants. As the proposal had been taken seriously and appropriately evaluated it validated the original decision of the Select Committee to reject the mined tunnel extension.

OTB Engineering Ltd Review

During 2018, your constituents made reference in correspondence to a further assessment of a mined tunnel proposal conducted on their behalf by OTB. This was an iteration of previous tunnel proposals in terms of alignment, though it did have some differences – particularly in terms of its diameter.

Following on from this, Nusrat Ghani further wrote to Sir David Lidington stating that although she was confident that the mined tunnel proposal had been thoroughly examined by HS2 Ltd, DfT and their external independent consultants and her commitment to delivering the scheme as agreed by Parliament, in order to 'leave no stone unturned' she requested that your constituents provided DfT officials with the complete report from OTB Engineering Ltd so they could assess how they proposed to overcome the expected ground water ingress.

Following receipt of the OTB report, DfT officials initiated a legal review of the proposals from both the Department's senior legal advisors, and from our contracted Parliamentary Agents as the OTB report claimed that a mined tunnel and shaft could be constructed without the need for additional provisions in the High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Bill. DfT Officials also sought engineering review from HS2 Ltd and their contractors for the Wendover area (Eiffage-Kier). A summarisation of these findings is detailed below:

The OTB Engineering Ltd report claims that the mined tunnel can be constructed within the current legal powers. Following the receipt of two sets of legal advice, the Department strongly refutes this for several reasons. Our legal advice is that any scheme that conflicts with the specific description of the work in question in Schedule 1 to the Act is not permissible i.e. where the Act itself specifically defines the nature of the work. For reference, Work number 2/14 is described as:

"a railway, partly in tunnel and partly on viaduct..." and;

"a viaduct over the A413 London Road, the Marylebone to Aylesbury Line and Small Dean Lane".

We understand from the supplied report these crossings would be in the area where the proposed mined tunnel would be. If this change was adopted, this would conflict with the specific description of the nature of the work in the Act.

For this reason, we are of the view that the proposed change could not be taken forward within the powers of the Phase One Act.

Apart from the issue of statutory powers there is also the issue of the deemed planning permission for the work. The proposal from OTB had not been assessed in the environmental statement and would be likely to have additional significant environmental impacts.

There would accordingly need to be a major fresh application for planning permission for these accompanied by an environmental statement. We add that the Schedule 17 applications (e.g. for lorry movements) would also need to be accompanied by an environmental assessment.

All of this would lead to schedule delay and consequential cost impacts, both of which are judged to be significant, and thus impacting on the overall Phase One scheme.

From an engineering perspective, HS2 Ltd, with input from Eiffage-Kier (including input from engineers who worked on the HS1 North Downs Tunnel) have summarised their review of the report as follows:

- Whilst the proposal by OTB takes account of the technical requirements for HS2 operation, it does not compare favourably with the HS2 scheme in terms of construction cost;
- The costing supplied by OTB significantly underestimates the total cost of the mined tunnel proposal when compared directly to the cost of the HS2 scheme;

- The OTB proposal does not take into account consequential impacts beyond the mined tunnel and would be harder to construct, is costlier and involves a significantly greater degree of risk;
- The OTB cost estimate makes no recognition of the current HS2 programme, with detailed design and construction planning now underway by appointed contractors;
- Changing a significant length of the Bill scheme now would cause significant delay to construction works, likely delay to follow-on rail systems work and potential delay to scheme opening;
- Adopting the OTB proposal at this stage would therefore have consequential impacts on the schedule, which in turn would increase the cost of the HS2 scheme which is now being progressed;
- Increased project costs would also be incurred from having to extend the project lifecycle by approximately one year in terms of contractor payment and extending HS2 Ltd operating costs for Phase One.

Fol Cost Assessment Clarification

I understand that from recent Fol requests that several of your constituents have requested for a full cost comparison between the HS2 Ltd consented scheme and the OTB mined tunnel.

Due to the similarities between the mbpc scheme – of which significant time and cost was expended reviewing – combined with the clear advice from our legal representatives, the view was taken that it would not be worthwhile to allocate further time and public money fully reviewing the costs of a scheme on a line-by-line basis that had previously been done with the mbpc proposal, particularly as the legal advice from the Parliamentary Agents was so categorical in its assessment that the mined tunnel proposal does not provide a legally valid alternative to the scheme already approved in the Bill.

To clear up any misunderstandings, the Department for Transport does not hold these detailed costings and has relied upon the information supplied to them by HS2 Ltd and its contractors when detailing that the OTB proposal does not compare favorably with the HS2 scheme in terms of construction cost.

Looking at previous correspondence between Nusrat Ghani and Sir David Lidington, I can see she also rejected calls for Eiffage-Kier to cost the mined tunnel proposal as it had at the time been subjected to two independent reviews, and that the approximate cost of £500,000 to bring the proposal up to the same design maturity as the consented scheme contained within the Phase One Act, would not be an effective use of public money; especially due

to any mined tunnel requiring new legal powers and the impacts this would have on the Phase One project as a whole.

I must praise you and your predecessor for championing your constituency and the tireless work conducted from all involved at Wendover Parish Council and other concerned residents, but as you can see, both Houses' Select Committees, DfT Officials, HS2 Ltd, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, the Oakervee Review Panel and independent lawyers and engineers have all assessed the viability and merits of a Wendover mined tunnel, and all have unfortunately for you and your constituents agreed that it isn't a viable solution when compared to the consented scheme ratified by Parliament.

The PM has now announced that Phase One of the HS2 scheme is going ahead and we intend to announce notice to proceed in a matter of weeks.

I mirror the sentiments of Nusrat Ghani when she sympathised that this will be very disappointing for your constituents to hear due to the time, cost and effort expended by them in their efforts to change the approved scheme, but after now providing a higher level of detail on the reasons why my Department has rejected the calls for a mined tunnel, I hope that your constituents will at least be assured that everyone involved has considered their alternatives seriously, fairly, honestly and with the appropriate levels of scrutiny expected. But I must reiterate that the Government will not be making any changes to the consented scheme.

I will now cover other issues raised during our meeting on 3 March 2020.

Hydrology/Flooding

My officials received confirmation from HS2 Ltd when reviewing the OTB report that the results of recent ground investigation work have confirmed that the ground conditions in the area are indeed as they were assumed in the geological records used at the petitioning stage. The comparison with the ground conditions observed in the HS1 North Downs tunnel, so central to the OTB report, is therefore not borne out by the latest ground investigations in the Wendover area. These investigations have confirmed wetter and more fissured ground conditions which are not suited to the methodology OTB prescribe.

Following our discussion last week I asked my officials to engage with their equivalents at HS2 Ltd to provide further clarification to the hydrology Parliamentary Question you submitted. They have responded as follows:

The Environmental Statement assessed the impact of the scheme on Water Resources ([Volume 5 WR-002-010](#)) in the Wendover area and specifically the impact of the green tunnel construction on the identified receptors.

The current available data indicates that the northern section of the Wendover Green Tunnel (and much of the Wendover North Cutting) will be below the groundwater table albeit the quantity of groundwater intercepted by the Wendover North Cutting will be of low volume. The Scheme Design for the track drainage infrastructure therefore incorporates an upper estimate for groundwater intercepted by the North Cutting based on this available data.

Groundwater will be attenuated (managed through storage in ponds) in line with the overall project strategy prior to discharging into the watercourse network. The Scheme design has been further optimised along the watercourse network, replicating the behaviour of existing road and rail crossings upstream of Aylesbury. This serves to further attenuate flood flows, eliminating impacts in built up areas of Aylesbury.

Further assessments on the hydrogeology around Wendover have also been carried out by the Main Works Contractor's design team including intrusive investigations and aquifer testing. The data collected will be used to update the track drainage design and inform reviews of both the attenuation pond design and environmental assessments to enable HS2 to design in line with a 1:1000 year flood risk.

Funding and Mitigations

In our meeting, I outlined that the Aylesbury constituency had been the largest recipients of Community and Environment (CEF) and Business and Local Economy Fund (BLEF) with the following schemes being successful in their applications for funding

Wendover Swimming Charitable Incorporated Organisation	£74,000
Wendover Parish Council	£74,990
Forest Enterprise England (Wendover Woods Forest Centre ³)	£450,000
Buckinghamshire Business First	£74,898
Chilterns MS Centre Ltd	£74,855
Chilterns Conservation Board	£243,103
1st Wendover Scouts	£10,000
National Paralympic Heritage Trust	£250,000
	£1,251,846

³ www.forestryengland.uk/article/wendover-woods-forest-centre-0

In addition to this, the following concessions were made at the select committee stage:

- Tunnel extended at Select Committee Stage (Sir David Lidington admitted that the green tunnel provides noise protection for the centre of the village)
- Provision of more and larger sound barriers
- St. Mary's Church (mitigation measures provided by SC, and HS2 offered £250k towards further mitigations in the church building)
- Relocation of the Cricket Club. HS2 has offered to pay for the purchase and preparation of a cricket field as well as £200k for a new pavilion.

Both CEF and BLEF funds remain open for applications, and heartily endorse organisations and businesses in your constituencies to apply, in particular the school for the hearing impaired that you raised in our meeting.

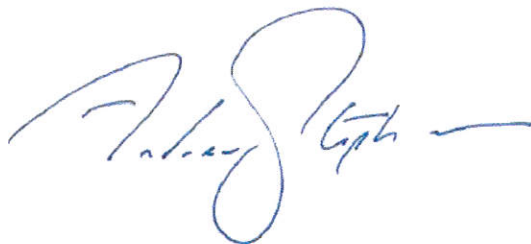
Details for these funds can be found at: <https://hs2funds.org.uk/>

A413 Dual Carriageway

Previously my Department had advised that the current Limit of Land to be Acquired or Used (LLAU) is extremely tight around the Small Dean viaduct which limits the degree of latitude for altering the siting of the structure. This is compounded by the engineering constraints on the line of the route, in relation to the orientation of the road which leaves little scope for changing the laydown of the bridge piers.

However, HS2 Ltd is continuing to work with local authorities on road schemes where the Act allows and the respective authority is in a position to fund such schemes, or where future-proofing has been formally sought; for example, the proposed Stoke Mandeville by-pass.

I will though raise this formally with HS2 Ltd to see if this position has changed as the design has matured and whether any changes can be made that would allow for potential future road widening schemes.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Stephenson', followed by a horizontal line.

ANDREW STEPHENSON MP

MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT

Appendix Five



WENDOVER PARISH COUNCIL

The Clock Tower, High Street, Wendover,
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP22 6DU

**Rob Butler MP response letter to HS2 Minister
Wendover Short-Mined Tunnel
Suggested Rebuttal Points
20 April 2020**

Dear Rob,

Many thanks for sending us a copy of the letter you received from Andrew Stephenson MP (Minister of State for HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail) regarding the Wendover Short-Mined Tunnel proposal (dated 30th March 2020). We have consulted extensively with tunnelling, costing and engineering experts to produce a comprehensive point by point rebuttal to the letter and enclose below some suggested points for you to consider when you make oral and written representations to the Minister.

Our response to DfT Notice to Proceed announcement

Like you, we are surprised and disappointed that the Department for Transport has issued the *Notice to Proceed* during the current COVID-19 crisis.

We agree that the *Full Business Case* published alongside the *Notice to Proceed* is fundamentally flawed and out of date as it was prepared before the outbreak of COVID-19 and the current period of uncertainty it has created for the UK and global economy.

Indeed, rapid developments and the uncertain outcome of the COVID-19 outbreak mean it has not been possible within the *Full Business Case* to undertake specific analysis to determine the outbreak's potential longer-term impacts to HS2 passenger demand. Furthermore, until new information is available on the potential longer-term impact of COVID-19 on rail passenger demand and economic growth it will not be possible to say whether this will materially impact on HS2's vfm.

The impact of COVID-19 has clearly not been taken into account by the Department for Transport and it is abundantly clear that there will be long-term changes to the UK's economy as a result of the pandemic, and that the way we work, and travel is likely to fundamentally change forever. We are fully supportive of your position that it would be far wiser to wait and reassess the business case for HS2 after the pandemic.

We therefore urge the Government to pause the HS2 project. When the pandemic is over, the Government should then consider whether there is a need for HS2 and whether £100 billion investment is fully justified in the new post-COVID-19 economy.

Such a pause would also provide an opportunity to progress an independent engineering expert peer review of the cost and practicality of the Short-Mined Tunnel option v the consented scheme (preferably by a construction engineer / contractor).

We now detail below our comprehensive point-by-point rebuttal to the Minister's letter:

HS2 Select Committee

- The current Short-Mined Tunnel proposal is a new proposal developed by OTB Engineering and was not fully considered by either the Commons or Lords Select Committees during the passage of the HS2 Phase One Bill.
- At Hybrid Bill Select Committee stage, HS2 Ltd's analysis was based on the old ARUP design for a Mined Tunnel option that adversely impacted South Wendover. This is in direct contrast to the new OTB Engineering design that was not considered by either Select Committee that carefully blends in with the HS2 Ltd vertical profile, so that there are no adverse impacts on either North or South Wendover.

Mbpc Infrastructure Limited Proposal

- The estimate of cost for the alternative Short-Mined Tunnel proposal at Wendover, produced by mbpc Infrastructure Limited, is prepared in accordance with the "The Rail Method of Measurement" (RMM Suite) and is based on the technical and cost advice published by the British Tunnelling Society.
- In his role supporting the Oakervee Review into the cost of the HS2 Project, Michael Byng had contact with HS2 Ltd. He has confirmed that the company failed to disclose its detailed estimate for HS2 Phase 1 to Mr. Oakervee and added that HS2 Ltd admitted, at a meeting of the Review Panel on 2nd October 2019, that it did not have a



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measured estimate prepared using the principles of the rail industry standard (RMM Suite). Mr. Oakervee and his colleagues were unable, therefore, to challenge HS2 Limited's estimate of costs.

- It is impossible therefore for HS2 Ltd to challenge the basis of the alternative Wendover Short-Mined Tunnel cost estimate, in the absence of any measured structured estimate of its own.

External consultant review

- The independent external expert review report was not made available to Wendover PC or indeed to relevant constituency MP's.
- Independent experts made no contact with Wendover PC and other relevant stakeholders for information or comment during the review process.
- Only a very short bullet point summary was shared with Wendover PC that lacked detail and context.
- No detail was released or shared with Wendover PC or constituency MPs regarding the review, terms of reference, resourcing, reporting or drafting process and questions should be asked concerning the drafting of the conclusions and recommendations, whether DfT officials were involved in the process, and whether the review was truly independent.
- References in the review to Affinity Water and impact on the water table are incorrect as the OTB Report demonstrates that the Short-Mined Tunnel can be constructed and operated safely below the water table.
- References to ground conditions in the review report are also incorrect. The OTB Report confirms that the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal fully addresses the geological conditions at Wendover and delivers significant environmental, cost and operational benefits compared to the current consented scheme.
- The independent expert review consultants that were commissioned to undertake the review included financial consultants such as KPMG with absolutely no experience in designing or constructing tunnels.

IPA Review

- No details were shared with Wendover PC or with constituency MPs regarding the review, resourcing, reporting or drafting process and significant questions remain regarding the drafting of the conclusions and recommendations.
- Indeed, the core conclusions of the review (validation of the original HS2 Hybrid Bill Select Committee decision) are incorrect as the Commons and Lords Select Committee's considered the former ARUP Mined Tunnel proposal and not the current OTB engineering proposal for a Short-Mined Tunnel.

OTB Engineering Report Review

- The OTB report fully considers the local context unlike the existing consented scheme that damages the environment and existing transport infrastructure at Wendover.
- The OTB report demonstrates that the Short-Mined Tunnel can be built within existing Act limits and in a much shorter timeframe than the consented scheme. It includes significant construction, operational and environmental benefits compared to the consented scheme.
- It demonstrates that the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal does not conflict with the specific description of the work in question in Schedule 1 to the HS2 Phase 1 Act as the proposed Short-Mined Tunnel scheme remains partly in tunnel partly in viaduct since it still incorporates the Durham Farm viaduct.
- Furthermore, it notes that following Royal Assent, HS2 Ltd made changes to the design and scope of the programme. For reference, please consider the *National Audit Office High Speed Two: A progress update* (January 2020):

18HS2 Ltd included ambitious savings targets in its forecast costs to get within the available funding on Phase One but did not change its approach in order to deliver them. To make Phase One affordable, HS2 Ltd incorporated £4.9 billion of efficiency savings, changes to the design and scope of the programme and price estimate reductions within its April 2017 estimate.

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/High-Speed-Two-A-progress-update.pdf>

- In response to the Minister's comments on the requirement for a new Environmental Statement we note that the entire HS2 delivery programme is expected to be delayed as a result of COVID-19 and that the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal would deliver significant construction, operational and environmental benefits that would "green"



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the HS2 route. Data from the European Commission suggests that the average time to complete an Environmental Statement from start to finish is between 6 and 12 months, although some may be shorter.

- The OTB Report used (1) *HS2: A Guide to Tunnelling Costs* (June 2015) and (2) *HM Treasury and Infrastructure UK Infrastructure Cost Review* (2010) as benchmarks for estimating the costs of the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal. However, HS2's costing bears no resemblance to these benchmarking reports:

High Speed Two. A Guide to Tunnelling Costs. June 2015

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/434516/HS2_Guide_to_Tunnelling_Costs.pdf

4.2 Tunnel Cost

In 2010 the HM Treasury and Infrastructure UK published an Infrastructure Cost Review that comprised an investigation into how to reduce the cost of delivery of civil engineering works for major infrastructure projects. The Infrastructure Cost Review Technical Report, Annex G comprised a benchmarking study for tunnels.

- Furthermore, a recent update carried out by the British Tunnelling Society and published in the September 2019 edition of their journal *Tunnels & Tunnelling International* entitled: *Tunnelling Costs and Production Rates Benchmarked*. concludes that "The good correlation between the 2010 and the 2017 data shows that costs of tunnelling have changed little in real terms over the seven-year period." The article also clearly shows that tunnelling costs decrease per unit length with increasing overall tunnelling length, contrary to the assertion by HS2 Ltd.
- We note that the current consented scheme does not meet noise EMR and statutory requirements and that major mitigation works will be required if large scale injurious affection claims are to be avoided (that could significantly increase the cost of the consented scheme), and would require changes to the Act and possibly additional legal powers (visual intrusion etc.)
- It is likely that much or all of the time lost in making the required design changes to accommodate the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal and any planning issues that may arise will be more than caught up during construction, since there will be only minimal site set up and reinstatement times required with far fewer construction interfaces and interference with local traffic etc., which also reduces programme risk. Furthermore, the potential for opening a through route at an early stage would greatly benefit the adjacent sections.
- The overwhelming cost issue regarding major projects such as HS2 that are constrained by their complexity and linearity is risk. The numerous construction methods including viaducts, cuttings, embankments, cut & cover tunnelling and interfaces between them plus their interfaces with adjacent properties, utilities and roads present in the HS2 scheme make it extremely risky in terms of delay and cost escalation.
- By simplifying the scheme to just one method of construction with hugely reduced surface impact such risks would be largely eliminated. The perceived risks of tunnelling are usually associated with subsidence and its effect on adjacent properties and utilities. This would not be the case for the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal.
- At 4.2km the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal is not a significant length of the consented HS2 Phase One Bill scheme between London and the West Midlands. Indeed, the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal would significantly reduce the construction programme timescale of the Phase One route.

A legally valid alternative to the consented scheme

- The Short-Mined Tunnel proposal does indeed provide a legally valid alternative to the consented scheme. Indeed, how can it not be legally valid since much of the HS2 route has been located in tunnel for precisely the same reasons as the proposed Short-Mined Tunnel. Furthermore, the "Green Tunnel" portion of the existing scheme developed by HS2 Ltd fulfils exactly the same function as the Short-Mined Tunnel.
- Indeed, the Short-Mined Tunnel could be constructed without the requirement for new legal powers. For your information, please see: *HS2 Property and Compensation for London-West Midlands. Decision Document – Properties above tunnels* that was published in November 2013:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/264080/8756.pdf

Subsoil rights

6.1 Background and Decision



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6.1.1 Under English law, freehold ownership of land includes the ground below the surface to an unlimited depth. Therefore, in order to build the tunnels and other underground structures required for HS2, the Government must acquire the land beneath the surface through which they will pass.

6.1.2 Our consultation included reference to the Crossrail scheme, whereby a nominal payment of £50 was made to represent the perceived value of the subsoil. Additionally, £250 was paid, where applicable, as a contribution toward professional fees associated with the purchase. Following the consultation, the Government has decided to replicate this system for Phase One of HS2.

- Since HS2 Ltd has since acquired the freehold through compulsory purchase of the route of the railway plus the wayleave required to operate it (embankments cuttings etc.) it must also own the ground below to unlimited depth and would be free to change the vertical alignment by any amount provided that it stays within the boundaries of the freehold and does not impinge on the amenity of adjacent properties and statutory authorities such as noise, vibration, subsidence, groundwater movement etc.

A recent example of this was the enlargement of Farnworth Tunnel by Network rail, where both the horizontal and vertical extent of the existing tunnel were modified to accommodate electrification. The modification significantly affected the A666 dual carriageway trunk road below which the tunnel passes. Such changes are commonplace for all UK utility tunnels without need for recourse to significant additional legal powers.

Conclusion / call to arms

- The Short-Mined Tunnel requires no additional legal powers and provides significant cost, construction and environmental benefits.
- However, HS2 Ltd has consistently avoided a meeting of engineering experts to discuss the cost and practicality of the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal v the current consented scheme.
- We are calling on the Government to pause the HS2 project to assess the impact of COVID-UK on the UK economy and future transport requirements. When the pandemic is over, the Government should then consider whether there is a need for HS2 and whether £100 billion investment is fully justified in the new post-COVID-19 economy.
- The Government must use a pause in the HS2 delivery programme to undertake an independent engineering assessment of the cost and practicality of the Short-Mined Tunnel option (preferably by a construction engineer / contractor) that would deliver significant long-term / whole life cost savings and environmental benefits compared to the current consented scheme.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Walsh
Chairman Wendover Parish Council

Appendix Five



Department
for Transport

Rob Butler MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

From the Minister of State
Andrew Stephenson MP

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Our Ref: MC/289034

27 May 2020

Dear Rob,

Thank you for forwarding me the two letters, both dated 29 April, on behalf of two of your constituents who both wrote about the Wendover Short Mined Tunnel proposal and other related matters.

As detailed in my comprehensive letter to you on 30 March 2020, I am very much of the view that the mined tunnel alternatives have been considered seriously, fairly, honestly and with appropriate levels of internal and external scrutiny. I am sorry that your constituents remain dissatisfied. Since I set out the Government's position on the mined tunnel in detail in my last letter, the Government has subsequently authorised Notice to Proceed for Phase One of the HS2 programme. To repeat those arguments again is unlikely to provide much comfort to you or your constituents.

There are, however, a number of points made in Mr Walsh's letter that I would like to address. It is incorrect to say that Michael Byng supported the Oakervee Review. He provided evidence to it, but was not a panel member and had no formal role in its consideration of evidence. In relation to cost, the panel were provided with the latest cost estimates from both HS2 Ltd and Mr Byng, and a full comparison of both was undertaken by KPMG on behalf of the panel and then presented to them.

It is correct that HS2 Ltd's cost estimate is not prepared using Mr Byng's Rail Method of Measurement (RMM) suite, but we have always made clear that this methodology is intended for use on Network Rail projects on the conventional network and not for new high-speed railways.

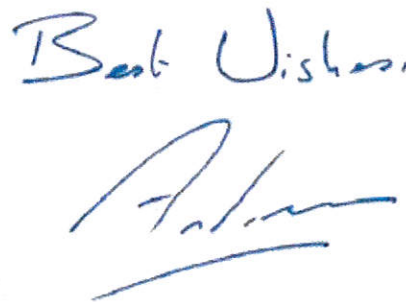
I also contest the assertion that KPMG were an inappropriate external consultant to use when appraising the merits of the mined tunnel proposal. Whilst KPMG are understandably thought of as one of the big four accountancy firms, they also have an engineering and construction arm.

KPMG's Engineering & Construction group (ECG) comprises construction professionals including quantity surveyors, engineers, building surveyors, general practice surveyors, planners and accountants, who have provided the Department with invaluable assistance throughout the HS2 programme.

Mr Walsh raised the issue of pausing and reappraising the HS2 programme during the current COVID-19 situation. I am clear that the UK Government will do whatever is necessary to deal with COVID-19 but must also continue to invest in the country's future infrastructure. We have carefully considered whether it is right to proceed with HS2 Phase One in these circumstances and, in line with Public Health Guidance which allows construction activity to continue where it is safe to do so, have concluded that continuing is the right course of action. Much of the initial work on the main construction of Phase One will take place off-site, developing further designs and logistics plans. We do not yet fully understand how COVID-19 will impact travel in the longer term, but we are confident that in the future people will still want to travel - particularly for leisure and business - and the country will still need additional rail capacity to provide a low carbon alternative to short haul air or motorway travel.

Maintaining construction now, where it is safe to do so, is important, both for the immediate supply chain but also for the wider economy with HS2 providing a vital lifeline to the many thousands of workers in the construction industry and across the manufacturing supply chain.

Again, I must praise you and your predecessor for championing your constituency and admire the tireless work conducted from all involved at Wendover Parish Council and other concerned residents, but I maintain that the alternative mined tunnel proposal isn't a viable solution when compared to the consented scheme ratified by Parliament.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Stephenson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

ANDREW STEPHENSON MP

MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT