

RESPONSE TO RESIDENTS' COMMISSIONER'S REPORT NOVEMBER 2015

I would like to thank Deborah Fazan for her second report as the independent Residents' Commissioner for HS2 Ltd. Her analysis of the current performance of the property schemes will be taken into account by the company in order to do more to increase awareness about them.

I am delighted that Deborah will be taking part in the review of the property schemes between DfT and HS2 Ltd later this year, as she can truly represent those who are affected, especially as a result of the conversations that she has been having since her arrival. This experience will be invaluable.

Property schemes

I am pleased with the judgement that the Need To Sell acceptance rate indicates that the scheme is working well. I will also be taking a close interest in the forthcoming review of the NTS from the DfT. I note with interest that, although a 'compelling reason to sell' is often why applications to the Phase One NTS scheme fail, there is often a lack of supporting evidence. We will be working with the DfT to provide more clarity on the adequate level of evidence required for any application.

Community engagement

Community engagement is vital for HS2 and I note Deborah's concern about increasing resources in our community engagement team. Recruitment is underway to expand this function. In terms of further activity, we have held six of our pilot engagement events (Hampton-in-Arden, Birmingham, Handsacre, Southam, Ballinger and Brackley) since the publication of Deborah's first report. Over 1,700 people have attended these and general feedback has been positive. We are carrying out exit polls to understand what people think of the events and to find out how they would like to receive more information about the project. This will help us shape further engagement and communications over the next year.

The remaining events are as follows:

- Wendover Memorial Hall, Wharf Road, Wendover, Bucks, HP22 6HF: Saturday 7 November between 11am and 4pm
- Perivale Community Centre, Horsenden Lane South, South Greenford, Greenford UB6 7NP: Thursday 3 December between 1pm and 7pm

The engagement team is planning further community events on the Phase One line of route in early 2016, which will build on the experience of this autumn's pilots. There has been a clear desire, in areas that we have yet to visit, for these events to be held, and the team is responding accordingly.

I have seen with great interest the use that is to be made of property for community use in Camden; I am pleased that HS2 has set the tone for what I hope will be other suitable opportunities.

Irregular properties

We are taking steps to identify vulnerable occupiers of the type that Deborah has highlighted, and we will work to address their particular circumstances on an individual basis.

Communications

It is clear to me from Deborah's report that HS2 can do more to communicate the property compensation schemes effectively. Although there have been applications to the schemes from all along the route, we will be progressing with a longer-term communication plan to help people understand what information they will need to submit to support their application. The results of the demographic survey that was commissioned in the summer will help the Corporate Affairs team to plan a campaign to improve this. These results will be presented to HS2 Ltd at the beginning of November 2015 and Deborah will be invited to hear these.

The feedback from our engagement events, the demographic survey and our autumn update will help Corporate Affairs to ascertain how individuals and communities want to receive information from us, and in what format. I look forward to seeing a more comprehensive communications and engagement plan taking shape over the next couple of months. It will need constant monitoring to ensure that it is effective, and that people are able to get the right information, at the right time and in the right way.

Deborah will publish her third report in early 2016 and, by that time, I would expect further communication about the schemes to be ready.



David Higgins, Chairman, HS2 Ltd