

VISIT BY RT HON PHILIP HAMMOND MP, SEC for STATE for TRANSPORT TO BUCKINGHAM re HS2

Press Release: For immediate release – 1st October 2010

Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP visited Buckingham Community Hall to meet with Councillors and Action Group leaders from the Buckingham Constituency to defend Government proposals on High Speed Rail.

The meeting held at 11am on Thursday 29th September was the focus of a large demonstration against HS2. The demonstration would have been even larger had Mr Hammond not required a last minute change in the time and venue of the meeting.

The meeting was opened by Rt Hon John Bercow, MP for the Buckingham Constituency, who gave an overview of the objections being aired and spoke forcefully of his own personal objection to the proposed scheme “in principle and in practice”. Mr Hammond was accompanied by his private secretary and 2 members from HS2 Ltd.

Attendees left Mr Hammond in no doubt about the intense strength of feeling across the constituency. Areas on which Mr Hammond was quizzed included

- Why does the Government establish Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to protect them from economic exploitation for future generations to enjoy, only to drive this scheme through their heart
- How comfortable can he be on the demand forecasts for HS2 given that the demand forecasts for HS1 have proved wholly inaccurate
- Why this scheme is going ahead so fast despite earlier independent reports questioning the economic viability and cost/benefit of UK High Speed rail.
- What independent validation has been executed on the HS2 Ltd case
- Why other cheaper and less environmentally destructive proposals made to the Department have been rejected.

Despite the fact that a final Government route will not be determined for over a year Mr Hammond rejected calls that the Exceptional Hardship Scheme should be extended to those on routes other than Route 3 who are suffering blight.

There was no clear commitment to produce an environmental assessment prior to consultation. HS2 will be holding seminars on noise abatement but comments made by them included the fact that the level of noise from the rolling stock to be used could not yet be assessed: this is despite the importance of understanding the level of environmental impact in assessing potential mitigation.

Villages represented asked specific questions about routing were Route 3 to be adopted, which the meeting was told would be addressed prior to and during the Consultation. Mr Hammond was left in no doubt by Twyford residents of the confusion and distress caused by changes and counter-changes made by HS2 around the route and potential maintenance depot at Calvert.

However the core of the questioning was directed at the Business Case for HS2 and its viability. Mr Hammond showed absolute determination that the scheme will progress. Those present, including Mr Bercow, are equally determined that the scheme should be properly and independently assessed as many of its core assumptions do not appear to stand up to close scrutiny.

PRESS RELEASE

In a joint statement Rae Sloan and Penny Gaines, action group co-ordinators from Twyford and Quainton commented

“We knew this would be a long campaign. We do not have the resources of Government but we have many determined people and increasing support from experts in the field. The campaign against HS2 has come very far from a standing start in just 6 months. We have years to fight this and we will win.”

MP for the Buckingham Constituency and Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow added

"I am flabbergasted that the Department regarded the Twyford venue as unsafe and that it took them until the day before the meeting was due to take place to make this inexplicable decision. The handling of the change of the time and place of the meeting was high handed and discourteous to my constituents."

Mr Bercow continued,

"I was pleased that the Secretary of State accepted my invitation to visit the constituency to discuss his plans for a high speed rail link. However, in terms of the principle, cost, and detail of his proposals, my constituents and I were in no way reassured by what Mr Hammond had to say. We will continue to fight against this policy as hard as necessary for as long as it takes to achieve the result that local people want."

Cllr Sue Polhill whose Quainton ward is directly affected said

“I am being asked by people whose lives are already blighted by this horrific scheme why it is being pushed ahead. The case for HS2 is flimsy. I left the meeting unconvinced by the Minister but hopeful that we can win on this if we can get our message across.”

Cllr Bill Bendyshe-Brown stated

“Even when the deficit is brought under control all of us will still be burdened with a huge weight of Government debt. Of course we shouldn’t stop spending on infrastructure but we must focus on what is most cost effective and most critical. £2bn of spending on existing lines meets a huge proportion of the projected demand for HS2 – we neither need nor want up to £34bn of taxpayers’ money to be expended on this project.”

Notes for Editors:

Attendees included:

PRESS RELEASE

Cllr Bill Bendyshe –Brown (The Risboroughs)
Gary Eastman (Twyford)
Penny Gaines (Quainton)
Cllr Netta Glover (Wing)
Cllr Tony Kirkland (Turweston)
Cllr Roger Landells (Twyford)
Belinda Naylor (Chetwode)
Cllr Sue Polhill (Quainton)
Christopher Prideaux (Quainton)
Cllr Richard Pushman (Hughenden)
Jeremy Quin (Pitchcott)
Rae Sloan (Twyford)

Contact Details:

Rae Sloan	Tel: 01296 738866
Penny Gaines	Tel: 01296 655613
Cllr Bill Bendyshe-Brown	Tel: 01844 275327 (O) or 07973 440009 (M)
Cllr Sue Polhill	Tel: 01296 585718