



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

HS2 Land and Property Review – Comments from Rt. Hon Andrea Leadsom MP, June 2020

1. Step change in community engagement

A: Minimising impact: minimising the land taken in the first place, avoiding precautionary or speculative acquisitions whilst recognising that where there is uncertainty in route design, there will be some degree of uncertainty for landowners.

One constituent has referenced HS2's failure to make a realistic assessment of impact on their property in the advance payment, despite it being a legal requirement to do so. Additionally, HS2 has failed to provide information or responses on sound mitigation, something which was raised with their agents a year ago. The constituent's agent has frequently asked HS2's agents for information on this but has not received a response.

Action Point 1: Better communication on potential impacts to property and a focus on minimising uncertainty.

HS2 should work better with local communities to accommodate local advice. HS2 tend to only use the 'rulebook,' for example when it comes to bridleways/footpaths, fencing off areas that are safe to use, making constituents use unsafe access routes. Local knowledge could be better used to identify potential road safety issues in this instance as well as strengthening community relations.

B: Minimising enduring holdings: retain owner occupation wherever possible and return surplus property to the private sector as soon as possible.

There have been instances where constituents have experienced compulsory land and property purchase and have been subject to great distress and uncertainty.

One constituent has received two different valuations from their land agent and HS2 Land and Property. This drawn-out process has resulted in considerable mental stress and financial pressures.

Action Point 2: A focus on allowing residents to stay in their homes for longer with the removal of any unnecessary uncertainty both financial and emotional.



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C: Supporting businesses: provide additional support to small businesses particularly on the issue of relocation.

It is clear that constituents need better support when it comes to the process of relocation.

One constituent has experienced issues with HS2 serving notices on commercial tenants in respect of surveys and other matters not affecting them, giving rise to concerns that they may have to vacate. They have had to spend a lot of time and effort reassuring their tenants that they are going to continue to be able to access and have a workable partnership with them.

This particular constituent has also experienced problems with a failure to provide essential business facilities. They have been left without a replacement drainage system as an accommodation works item, even though the HS2 Farmers and Growers guidance states that such facilities will be provided in advance of land being taken if practical to do so. In this particular case it would have been a practical matter for installation to have taken place in advance.

Another constituent has lost prime farming land to HS2 construction work and is unable to access other parcels of land due to ongoing access problems and road closures. This has led to a severe loss of income.

Action Point 3: Better communication and liaison with business owners and a focus on solving problems particularly when it comes to essential operating equipment and reaching agreements on settlements to reduce future trading uncertainty. Residents should be given clear expectations on turnaround times by HS2.

Minimising dispute and litigation: unless absolutely necessary

Communication with constituents from HS2 has been poor, with guidelines not followed.

Action Point 4: Improvements to communication in the dispute and litigation process- less formal language and a focus on bringing disputes to a quick and mutually satisfactory outcome. Residents should be given clear expectations on turnaround times by HS2.



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2. Amended policies

Examine the case to review the Compensation Code in the context of the HS2 land and property acquisition programme.

It is clear that all aspects of the Compensation Code should to be reviewed and claimants need to receive payment promptly in line with HS2 guidelines.

Action Point 5: The process around approving quotes also needs to be urgently looked at. I reference two constituent cases where the approval quotes for a replacement drainage system continue to be unresolved despite HS2 having them for several months.

Review DfT non-statutory property compensation schemes to operate more in favour of claimants in terms of speed and quality of service.

Ways to expedite payment promptly should be considered. In all of my constituent cases delayed payment has been an issue.

Action Point 6: Prompt payment be a key focus as should be working effectively with claimants and their representatives to reach a mutually beneficial solution. Residents should be given clear expectations on turnaround times by HS2.

3. Improved process of efficiency

Close out cases within the agreed timetable wherever possible, even when claimants are causing the delays. Better progress reporting and triage of issues.

There should be a review of bringing forward the deadlines to update both claimants and MPs acting on behalf of constituents. These deadlines should be in the public domain.

Time after time, constituents have asked me to deal with HS2 on their behalf because of delayed information or no information given at all. I have also received many complaints of poor communication from the HS2 helpdesk.

Action Point 7: Build a better rapport with residents, working with them to use their local knowledge that can help avoid potential problems. Take steps to prevent a high turnover of staff, particularly those in the Community Engagement team where trust is vital.

Nisha Mejer has been particularly helpful, and for the first time, we have been able to work with an engagement representative that has been productive and willing to engage.



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Close long-term disputes as quickly as possible, subject to vfm.

Disputes that drag on are clearly not value for money for either party, and seeking to expedite long-term disputes quickly should be a priority.

Action Point 8: In line with Action Points 3 and 4.

4. Better tone

Adopt a humbler and less officious communications tone.

I have witnessed officious communications tone whilst dealing on behalf of constituents.

In many instances, this approach has intensified the mental distress experienced by claimants and has led to unsatisfactory delays to payment, land access and other matters.

Action Point 9: All parts of HS2, but particularly the Community Engagement team to establish closer working relationships with residents and affected constituents, using their local knowledge to help identify potential areas of friction before they arise (e.g. bridleways, road safety, better traffic diversions.)

Respect the additional distress during the COVID-19 period.

It has been well documented that social distancing has not been respected across many sites in South Northamptonshire during lockdown. I have had many constituents contact me with photographic and video evidence highlighting the lack of social distancing.

It has been particularly distressing for constituents who have been self-isolating to see the lack of social distancing by HS2 employees whilst work has been continuing.

It was disappointing that video conferencing and other technology was not used sooner during lockdown to communicate with residents, and moving forward this should be used to engage with residents and other stakeholders.



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Avoid legally threatening language and legal action unless as a last resort.

In a number of constituent cases legally threatening language has been used, causing severe distress and anxiety.

Action Point 10: Use clear and cooperative language in all communication.

Action Point 11: An appeals arbitration process with clear turnaround times.