

NO HIGH SPEED DECISION FOR HS2

On Saturday 3rd December indication was given that next week the Transport Secretary Justine Greening will announce a delay in her decision on the HS2 high speed rail link. It was originally planned that a final decision would be made on the scheme prior to Parliament breaking for Christmas on 20th December. Instead, Justine Greening's decision is now expected in mid-January.

The proposed delay is to allow further consideration to be given for an extra 1.5 mile tunnel under the Chiltern Hills which could add an extra £500 million to the cost of that section of the line. This is potentially good news for those close to the southern end of the route where the line cuts through the Chiltern Hills to the north-west of Amersham. However, it is not yet clear whether the extra £500 million to pay for the new tunnel will come from additional funding, or whether cut backs will have to be made to planned accommodation works further along the route to pay for the tunnel. It may be that the proposed extra tunnel will bring benefits for those in the Chiltern Hills at the costs for property owners further north.

The fact that the Government are listening even at this late stage to public concern regarding potential damage to the Chiltern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and consider a costly change to mitigate the impact must be seen as positive action by the Minister. However, for most people along the 100 mile long route a decision by the Government is already long overdue. It has been over twenty months since the proposed route for HS2 was formally announced. Many families now need to know whether the scheme will get the go-ahead, and if so what impact the scheme will have on their homes plus the countryside they enjoy.

Marcus Blake of Berrys Chartered Surveyors comments "The £500 million needs to come from extra funding rather than result from cutbacks elsewhere on the route. Money should not be taken away from providing a careful design and well considered accommodation works to mitigate the impact of HS2 for affected property owners if it finally gets the go-ahead in January 2012"

In the meantime many homeowners close to the proposed HS2 route will continue to seek entry into the Exceptional Hardship Scheme which is available to those who can demonstrate an urgent need to sell their property. If Justine Greening gives HS2 the green light and confirms the route in January then the Exceptional Hardship Scheme will give way to the normal compulsory purchase compensation provisions – including Blight.

Let us hope that Ms Greening's New Year's resolution is to finally make a decision on HS2.

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