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Registered Charity 310525

Tuesday 14 February 2012

Dear [Member of Parliament]

HS2: Environmental Impact Assessment

The primary aim of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, founded in 1847, has always been the conservation of the historic, archaeological and natural history assets of our county. As the longest established voluntary body concerned with the historic county, we are addressing this letter to all Buckinghamshire members of parliament.

During the HS2 public consultation period in 2011, the Society submitted evidence and made representations on the course of the proposed HS2 high-speed rail line. Our principal objection was that a decision was to be made before a full Environmental Impact assessment had been carried out, contrary to the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2009.

The inadvisability of this course of action was already obvious, but the Society now notes that recent amendments to the original route have further highlighted the absence of a full assessment.

May we draw your attention to one case in particular: the site of the old parish church at Stoke Mandeville, south of the modern village. Where the previous alignment of HS2 ran just to the east of this important site, the revised route (shown on map HS2-ARP-DR-RW-05009) goes straight through it.

The parish church of St Mary, Stoke Mandeville, was a Norman church. When it fell into disrepair it was replaced in 1865 by a newly-built church in the village to the north, and left to decay. The site remains today as a substantial mound surrounded by a cemetery with headstones. The last burial took place here a little over one hundred years ago. The area is maintained by the village as a nature reserve.

The church ruins abut the site of a medieval moat, probably the manor house, surrounded by the original late Saxon village of Stoke Mandeville. A substantial leat supplied a watermill further north.

Although now deserted, the site is of considerable historic importance. The amended route of HS2 ploughs right through what remains of the church, its graveyard, moated manor house, Saxon village – and other historic features that are still hidden.

Yet the site is not even marked on the official map of the HS2 route. And this is but one example along the 40-mile route of HS2 across our county of Buckinghamshire.

More >>>

We ask that you now insist that the Secretary of State for Transport, your colleague Justin Greening, fully implements an Environmental Impact Assessment of the kind that would be required of any developer planning large-scale landscape disturbance, so that appropriate mitigation strategies for the natural and historic environment can be put in place.

We note that the press announcement of the start of an 'environmental survey' by HS2 Ltd on 1 February omitted any mention of archaeological sites and historic standing buildings. Please would you bring this point to the notice of the Secretary of State and ask her to ensure that all environmental surveys and assessments by HS2 Limited should include the known impact of HS2 on the historic environment through which the line passes.

The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society will be carrying out its own survey of the route to ensure that all affected historic sites are recognised and taken into account. We ask that this evidence be taken into account when scoping the Environmental Impact Analysis.

Please contact me if you need any further information on this.

Yours Sincerely

Peter Marsden

Chair of Council, Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society