

HS2: Now Largely a Waiting Game...

Activities around the HS2 high-speed rail line plans have gone quiet during the summer, waiting for the start of Parliamentary Petitioning. The presentation of objectors' petitions to a parliamentary Select Committee is due to start in the autumn. However this will begin at the Birmingham end of the line, working southwards towards London. So when petitions from Buckinghamshire will reach Parliament is still unknown.

The Society is not itself a petitioner, but the impact of the line on the county's archaeological sites and historic buildings will be put on the Parliamentary agenda, not least by Bucks County Council, but also by several parish and parochial church councils and by individual landowners along the route. And members of the society have offered to provide expert evidence to support these.

In the meantime...

- The society was dismayed to discover the means being used to assess responses to the HS2 Environmental Statement Consultation. The society provided a detailed 17-page response, addressing the likely damage to major heritage assets and proposing additional mitigation measures where HS2 proposals were weak.
- Only afterwards was it announced that responses were assessed by HS2 Limited purely by a 'headcount'. In other words the BAS response counted as 'one' and the details were discarded. Instead of seriously addressing the issues, it would have been more effective to ask society members simply to send in a general protest letter.
- All was not lost, however, because a copy of our response was sent directly to HS2's own archaeology advisors. Later feedback has indicated that at least some of our submissions are being taken on board.
- The same applies to the geophysical survey carried out at Stoke Mandeville deserted village site by members of the BAS Active Archaeology Group. This revealed traces of former house platforms, ponds, banks and trackways. A copy of the survey report was sent to the HS2 archaeology team, who have now requested the detailed results.

A copy of the geophysical survey report is on the BAS website at
<http://www.bucksas.org.uk/documents/hs2stokemgeophys.pdf> .

- Also at Stoke Mandeville, the Church of England Archbishops' Council has added its support for a Legacy Garden to be built around the results of the excavation of the old church and churchyard. This has been jointly proposed by the society and the parish council.
- At Doddershall, the second Bucks deserted village site affected by HS2, concerns have been raised by proposals to increase the land required by the line. One reason given for this is to relocate ecological mitigation away from the medieval village, which is good news.

The bad news is that the newly required areas now include not just part of the old village site, but all of it – and the HS2 construction requirement now completely encircles the Grade 2*-listed Doddershall House.

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