

DAVENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Vicky Stock, 6 Grovemount, Davenham, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 8LY Tel: 07443 579 057
Clerk email: clerk@davenhampc.org.uk

8th March 2017

HS2 PHASE 2B
ROUTE REFINEMENT CONSULTATION

By email: route2b@dialoguebydesign.co.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Consultation on the route of HS2 between Crewe and Manchester

The following is the response from Davenham Parish Council to the proposed route for High Speed 2 (HS2) rail route between Crewe and Manchester. Davenham Parish Council are against the route, in particular the Middlewich to Pickmere realignment as set out in section 2.2 of HS2 Phase 2b, for the following reasons:

- The structural stability of the line - it passes through an area of high instability
- The risks posed by the line passing over or very close to an underground gas storage works
- Extensive Impact on Local Traffic and Business/Economy
- The destruction of a proposed economic area
- A disproportionate impact on the environment.

In considering the response to the route proposed by HS2, Davenham Parish Council have appraised ourselves that credible alternative proposals are available that considerably lessen the risks identified within this letter to both the tax payer and the safety of the travelling public. These alternative routes include:

- Transiting north of Northwich before sweeping east towards Manchester
- Routing the line to the east at a point south of Middlewich and routing close to Knutsford

Both of these alternative routes are considerably safer, technically less challenging, have a lower impact on the environment and are probably cheaper. The only item against them is that they may be more challenging politically. In making our comments Davenham Parish Council are not making any comment on the questionable economic case for HS2 as a whole and which underpins the case that the venture is a 'vanity project'. Nor are Davenham Parish Council making comment on the status of the HS2 project being out of control as well documented in the national and engineering press; the latter of which is not prone to exaggeration.

Taking each of our key points in turn:

Concerns over the structural stability of the line

By design HS2 intends to transport many thousands of people at high speed through the Cheshire countryside. This requires a firm foundation upon which to build the track and supporting infrastructure. The land in Davenham Parish is not a firm foundation. It lies within the salt mining areas of mid Cheshire where every house buyer will know is subject to subsidence and the occasional collapse of old mines. That is why property purchases in the area are subject to additional registry searches.

To route a train of hundreds of people, potentially every 6 minutes (10 times hour) for 18 hours each day, over an area of known land instability is irresponsible. The location of the mines and the geological voids are not widely known and the process of stabilising the land in the area is significant. Add to the equation the recent announcements concerning the rights for fracking in the area and the whole issue becomes dangerous with the perception that disturbing the land in the vicinity could actively lead to the collapse of a void.

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Furthermore, the intent is to raise the line in this area giving the image of HS2 falling into a large sinkhole from a collapsed viaduct – a gift to a sceptical media. The macabre scenario is exactly what is being proposed by routing HS2 through Davenham Parish in the manner proposed.

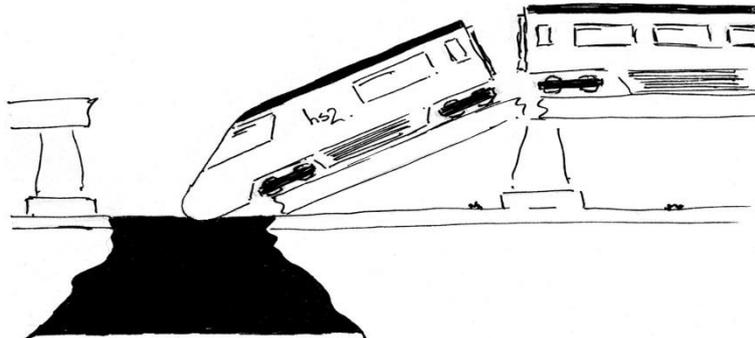


Figure 1 – HS2 heading for a black hole – Mid Cheshire Salt Voids?

Putting the scenario aside, the structural stability of land over which HS2 is proposing to traverse is incompatible with building a modern and efficient railway. From a safety perspective, the safety principle of as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP) directs that safer options should be pursued. In this case they exist and HS2 should take another look at the map.

Risks associated with routing near the underground Gas Storage Works at Stublach

The Stublach Gas Storage area is located on the boundary of Davenham Parish. Within this facility over 216 million cubic metres of natural gas can be stored below ground. While it is acknowledged that the route of HS2 has been altered to move the line away from this facility, it has increased the land stability risk above.

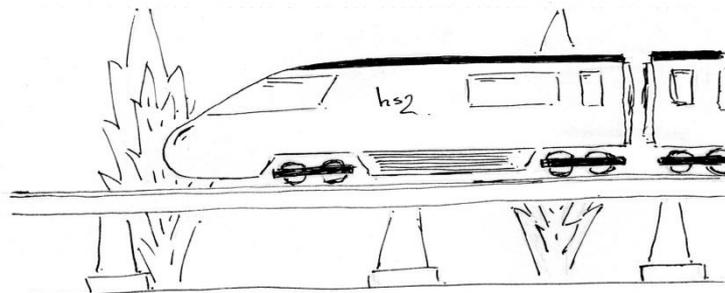


Figure 2 – HS2 crossing/near the Stublach gas works; cue the 1989 Peugeot 405 advert (Google it)

However, there remains a significant risk with respect to the gas storage works at Stublach and its proximity to HS2. While the location of the gas storage voids are at least known, the facility would not have been designed to take into consideration the vibrations and movement associated with HS2 either from the high frequency geotechnical disturbance which may be expected from operations and the passing of high speed trains or the low frequency disturbance from construction including the construction of the foundations. Both of these have the potential to damage the fabric of the gas storage facility and lead to a catastrophic failure.

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These operational risks are proposed prior to the fault scenario of electrical failure of sparks in the proximity of highly flammable gas. Again a potentially explosive situation, literally and politically, when you are proposing the transiting of thousands of people near to an explosive environment.

It is further noted that HS2 have made no proposals with respect to the safety case for transiting the gas storage works or the unstable land, or even whether there would be one. Again, drawing on the Safety Assessment Principles, alternatives to transiting the Mid-Cheshire salt mining areas exist, as detailed above, and these should be progressed as the favoured routes.

Extensive Impact on Local Traffic and Business/Economy

The proposed route will require extensive alterations to the A556, a busy road that already suffers from congestion and delays in the Gadbrook Park area during peak times. It is difficult to see how such major work as re-aligning this road, along with the amount of construction traffic in the area, could not cause considerable congestion, disruption and delays over a prolonged period. This will also inevitably impact air quality and cause economic impact on the supply of goods and services from and to Gadbrook Business Park and the wider Northwich area.

The destruction of a proposed Economic Development Area

A large amount has been made about the economic advantages of HS2. Similarly, the HS2 community are very vocal about their compensation schemes for communities and people impacted by HS2. Within Davenham Parish, HS2 transits through an area proposed for economic development adjacent to Gadbrook Park. This would suppress economic development and there are no current schemes in place for HS2 to compensate the impacted communities.

Therefore, while the economic benefits to the North of England as a whole are entirely questionable, the impact locally within the Parish of Davenham could be significantly worse from an economic perspective. The Northwich Urban area, within which the land identified falls, has been highlighted as strategically important to the development of the town by Cheshire West and Chester Council. Further, the Parish Council recently received representation from developers looking to increase the size of Gadbrook Park by extending the site to the south, across the land identified by HS2 for the line.

As such, at a local level, the economic detriment of HS2 is significant and the local communities must surely be compensated when the scheme destroys the potential for job and wealth creation in the area.

Impact on the Environment and Heritage

Notwithstanding the potential for track collapse, initiating a gas explosion and the destruction of jobs, the proposed route of HS2 cuts through some of the most picturesque countryside in the Parish of Davenham, enjoyed both by local residents and visitors from further afield. It will result in the loss of hedgerows and partial destruction of the mature woodland at Marshall's Gorse, to the South of Gadbrook Park. The removal of hedgerows and woodland will reduce biodiversity and will have a significant negative impact on wildlife habitats.

Significant woodland planting will be required, though this will not mitigate for the damage to the landscape character or loss of wildlife habitat. A minimum of 25m wide belt of mixed woodland either side of the embankment within open countryside is suggested, as appropriate, comprising at least 40% evergreen conifer species to provide some noise buffering during winter. Due to the height of the embankments it will be many years before such planting will provide any noise reduction or screening of the track, potentially as long as 15-20 years.

The Trent and Mersey Canal, which will be impacted by the construction of the line, is stunningly beautiful and the home for plenty of wildlife. A walk along the banks of the canal, which is a conservation area in the Cheshire West and Chester local plan, not only promotes a healthy lifestyle but gives the opportunity to see a plethora of wildfowl, a landscape enhanced by mature trees and/or simply enjoy the peace and quiet of the countryside. The canal also attracts holiday makers and day trippers on canal barges throughout the year, the trade from which some local businesses rely.

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The proposed route for HS2 not only cuts through this picturesque landscape, but it does so raised for a significant proportion of the length through the Parish, crossing the canal in several places. As such, it is expected that it will not only be an eyesore to those who live in the area but also the noise pollution associated with the new line will be in stark contrast to the current rural scene. The intended viaduct also passes within metres of Grade II Listed buildings in the Parish, namely Whatcroft Hall and related cottages, that form an important part of the local heritage alongside the other Listed buildings in Davenham village centre.

Again, given the alternative options available to route HS2 avoiding the Parish of Davenham, it is suggested that one of these alternative routes must be put forward as the preferred option.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Davenham Parish Council cannot support the proposed routing of HS2, not only through the Parish of Davenham but in general as proposed between Crewe and Manchester. The route proposed has clearly been a very limited desk-top study that has missed:

- The potential for track collapse
- The potential for a major gas explosion
- The potential to destroy economic development and jobs in the area
- The destruction of stunning countryside.

Some of these are fundamental safety and technical concepts while others, especially job creation, run counter to the very purpose of HS2. The lack of a proposed safety case to address these concerns suggests that the foundation of the Safety Assessment Principles, ie the ALARP principle, would place the unpalatable burden on the HS2 project of re-routing the line away from Davenham as there are alternative routes available to the project that must be considered in preference to the travesty of a proposal which routes the line across unstable land and across a major gas storage works.

We look forward to hearing the news that the project has routed the line away from the Parish of Davenham or, as is more likely, terminated altogether.

Yours sincerely

Vicky Stock

On behalf of Davenham Parish Council