



Douglas Oakervee CBE  
c/o Department for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

26 September 2019  
By Email

Dear Mr Oakervee,

### **High Speed 2 Review**

I am writing to you on behalf of the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB). The CCB is an independent statutory body established by Parliamentary Order in July 2004. Our two purposes are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and to increase the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities. We also have a duty to seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities.

We represent those who both live in, and enjoy, the Chilterns AONB. Our Board is made up of representatives nominated by the bodies listed in Appendix 1.

The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is nationally protected as one of the finest areas of countryside in the UK. AONBs are designated by the Government for the purpose of ensuring that the special qualities of the finest landscapes in England and Wales are conserved and enhanced. In policy terms, AONBs have the same planning status as National Parks (National Planning Policy Framework 2019, paragraph 172).

The CCB opposed HS2 from the outset, on the basis that it will have a significant and lasting negative impact on the Chilterns AONB. Once HS2 was approved, the CCB turned its efforts to securing the best possible outcomes for this special landscape. We are therefore active members of the HS2 Review Group and an extensive archive of key information can be viewed on our website.

The CCB welcomes the Independent Review of HS2 and we look forward to seeing the review panel's conclusions, not least with regard to the costs and environmental impacts of the project.

The impacts that HS2 will have on the Chilterns AONB - the only nationally protected landscape through which the HS2 route passes - are well understood. These include:

- Dramatic changes in landform and the construction of vast concrete structures including two squat viaducts, tunnel portals, together with a new wirescape of overhead line electrification equipment, noise barriers and high fencing - all at odds with the natural beauty of a protected landscape
- Constant assault on tranquillity, from both the noise and visual disturbance of trains passing at high speed every few minutes through the Misbourne valley



- Physical interruption of many rights of way - including the internationally significant Ridgeway National Trail and the Chilterns Cycle Way - both used annually by thousands of people for relaxation and recreation, with recognised benefits to health and wellbeing
- The permanent loss of irreplaceable ancient woodland, which comprises complex communities of trees, plants, fungi, microorganisms and insects that have evolved over hundreds of years
- Loss of key elements of the Chilterns' cultural heritage - including ancient sunken greenways and one of the remaining sections of the Grim's Ditch scheduled monument
- Loss of historic hedgerows and field patterns, and fragmentation of habitats and wildlife corridors - directly contrary to the Lawton principles of 'bigger, better and more joined up' habitats
- Concerns that HS2 tunnels beneath the River Misbourne will impact on water draining through the fragile chalk and affect the flow of the Misbourne, and other rivers, in addition to affecting water quality. The Chilterns chalk aquifer not only supplies fresh drinking water to many people in the south east of England, but it is also the source of nine of the UK's internationally important chalk streams
- Direct loss of protected wildlife species. For example, HS2 Ltd has acknowledged that all barn owls living and hunting within a 6km wide corridor of the HS2 route will be killed.

Since the HS2 route was first announced in 2010, we believe the context of HS2 has changed considerably. In particular, the nation's - and the Government's - understanding and appreciation of the value of our natural world has increased significantly. We therefore take the view that to continue with HS2 would not only be damaging to the environment and people's wellbeing, but also be directly contradictory to key Government policies and ambitions.

In recent years the Government has increased its focus on the environment and has made a commitment to leaving the natural environment in a better state for future generations. It also aspires to be a global leader on the environment. For example, in January 2018, the Government published its ambitious 25 Year Environment Plan and, in June this year, made a commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by the year 2050. At the same time, there is clear evidence of increasing public concern regarding the loss and degradation of our natural environment.

The CCB is pleased to see that this aspect of the HS2 proposals will be examined, not least the immense tonnage of concrete that will be manufactured and installed throughout the AONB (tunnels, viaducts, track bed) and beyond. Operation of the railway will also put an on-going high demand for electricity on the national grid.

Evidence on the extent of the pressures on our natural world is increasing, along with the science of valuing our natural resources, which underpin our life and society. One of these resources is clean water, which is particularly relevant to the Chilterns aquifer through which the HS2 route tunnels.



The value of our landscapes in providing significant benefits to people's health and wellbeing is also now well understood.

The very nature of our transport is changing, with driverless cars expected on our roads by 2021. In addition, the Government is committed to the on-going roll out of high speed broadband across the UK, in recognition of the boost to the economy achieved by increased connectivity for businesses and home working. Business journeys are becoming far less important and even, in some sectors, frowned upon. Even when justified, internet connectivity available in all forms of transport will mean that journey time is not wasted and the cost of high speed should be questioned.

More recently, a Government-commissioned review of protected landscapes, led by Julian Glover, recommended that the way the nation protects and improves our landscapes needs to change radically. It proposes that the Chilterns AONB becomes a National Park. Significantly, the review says: *"It is precisely because the government has made big strategic choices for the region -such as HS2, the Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor, the Heathrow expansion and new homes - that it should also consider a big strategic choice now in favour of a new National Park for the Chilterns."*

The review also highlights the importance of the Chilterns for access and enjoyment: *"The Chilterns is an obvious choice for National Park status... it more than meets the criterion for recreational opportunity, with 10m people living within an hour's drive, many just a tube ride away."*

We believe that HS2 runs contrary to the Government's stated commitments to reverse nature's decline, to improve people's access to green spaces and to enhance their health and wellbeing. HS2 will lead to significant environmental costs as well as significant costs to the Exchequer.

We would be delighted to discuss our views with you in more detail and you would be most welcome to visit us here in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Elaine King  
Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Lord Berkeley  
Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport  
Cheryl Gillan MP  
David Lidington MP



### **The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

The Chilterns AONB was designated in 1965 for the natural beauty of its landscape and its natural and cultural heritage. In particular, it was designated to protect its special qualities which include the steep chalk escarpment with areas of flower-rich downland, woodlands, commons, tranquil valleys, the network of ancient routes, villages with their brick and flint houses, chalk streams and a rich historic environment of hillforts and chalk figures.

### **Chilterns Conservation Board**

The Chilterns Conservation Board is a statutory independent corporate body set up by Parliamentary Order in 2004 under the provisions of Section 86 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.

The Board has two statutory purposes under section 87 of the CRoW Act:

- a) To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB; and
- b) To increase the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the AONB.

In fulfilling these roles, if it appears that there is a conflict between those purposes, Conservation Boards are to attach greater weight to (a). The Board also has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the AONB.

Like all public bodies, including ministers of the Crown, local authorities and parish councils, the Chilterns Conservation Board is subject to Section 85 of the CRoW Act which states under "General duty of public bodies etc"

"(1) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty."

### **List of Organisations providing Nominees to the Chilterns AONB Conservation Board**

The Chilterns Conservation Board has 27 board members, all drawn from local communities:

- Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire County Councils
- Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough Councils (unitary authorities)
- Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, North Hertfordshire, South Buckinghamshire, South Oxfordshire, Three Rivers and Wycombe District Councils
- Dacorum Borough Council
- The Central Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire Parish Councils (6 elected in total) and
- DEFRA Secretary of State appointees (8 in total).