

Stoneleigh Action Group against HS2 (Stag) Report for the year April 2011 - April 2012

The year started off with Stag coordinating the village response to a Govt consultation on compensation. Members tried to knock every door to get responses and to ensure that residents registered for the EHS, and the responses were hand delivered to DfT.

The next event was the HS2 Consultation on the proposals for HS2. The consultation posed 7 questions. A village event was held to run through possible answers last May in the village hall. Stag also submitted a "village response" which can still be viewed on the village website. There were approximately 55,000 responses internationally, the results can be viewed on the HS2 website. All questions apart from Q1 were virtually unanimously against the proposal.

The period between was relatively quiet nationally, Stag collaborated with the federation of AGs (Agahst) and various ideas were mooted. Hopes were raised when Justine Greening took over the job from Philip Hammond (who was appointed to defence to replace Dr Liam Fox). She was seen as potentially more environmentally friendly after her support of the campaign to say no to the third runway at Heathrow, but she may have had an ulterior motive in promoting the underused runway at Birmingham Airport via Hs2 to get her off a previous hook.

The decision to go ahead was deferred from before Christmas until 10th January.

We also collaborate in a South Warks group who have met with Jeremy Wright our MP, using JW as a conduit to Govt. In the light of the Community Forum (CF) these groups have stopped meeting, but JW has to date attended the CF and has expressed serious misgivings about the timescale for responses from HS2 to proposals.

Various groups, 51M, HS2AA, Heathrow Hub and Agahst have launched JRs challenging the Govts decision. We have not been a direct party to any of these.

In Stag, falling numbers of members and time has resulted in us limiting our endeavours to fighting for "our patch". We had made a submission in collaboration with Stareton village, Stoneleigh Park Residents Association (disappointingly support from the Abbey residents has been very short lived) for a cut and cover tunnel (3/4 in ground, 1/4 out covered over) before the decision and whilst not getting this, certainly the alignment was improved again, first improvement had got it further from the village, the second one saw it being lowered though the Showground. However we have not given up on the matter of the cut and cover "tunnel" and are raising this at the Community Fora. We are also trying to pursue common interest with LaSalle the operators of the Showground (although they are still reviewing their position as a business) and are looking at land from the River Avon crossing to the A46. We are optimistic that detailed design may take this into account, but time will tell. Their ambition to keep horses on site near a high speed rail line, and ours to have a tranquil place to live are very compatible. LaSalle's vision to organise and develop the site is also incompatible with HS2 without much more detailed information from the designers which is currently lacking.

Had our first CF meeting, grouped with Kenilworth and Burton Green. Time will tell if this is a worthy endeavour, we are talking to HS2 and whilst this shows no support or condoning the proposal, we are trying to get the best we can for our community, which could be simply stated as "we don't want to see it or hear it". This is in conjunction with WCC and also elected members of WDC, whilst WDC

as a body refuses to talk with HS2 Ltd. As a group we cannot see this as a compatible stance which is in the best interest of the public they are responsible for and to. There are a variety of proposals flagged up there, e.g. a bored tunnel between Kenilworth, under Crackley and Burton Green and emerging near Berkswell. So many things remain to be discussed, e.g. traffic management (clearly for us travelling to the west will be challenging), construction compounds, land grab for purposes ancillary to the track (substations, maintenance depots) are just a few. Effects during construction, e.g. construction traffic, spoil disposal, dust, noise also have to be understood and we await more details of these.

Our PC has cooperated generously and we have Richard and Alex co-opted to our meetings and to act as liaison between us and WDC. This has been very useful.

The consultation on compensation, we are told, opens shortly (May). This will last 12 weeks and the Govt are consulting about a compensation proposal which sounds as if it will be a revised version of EHS which we have already criticised in favour of a Property Bond. Is it also significant that the consultation will take place during the holiday season? This may not be suspicious, the Govt are slipping in their timescales and intention to issue a Hybrid Bill by the end of 2013, but there is danger that this will be rushed. Some village properties benefited under the original EHS provisions in the early days, but not now, probably because of the re alignment of the route further away and also because it is an underfunded scheme.

The CF may be seen as a very soft form of localised public enquiry which will not happen under a Hybrid Bill. Politically pressure is being applied, costs are clearly being shown to be rising and the Govt officially reduced its BCR from 2.4 (always seemed optimistic, estimates at 1.6 were being spoken of) to 1.2. The final Govt line is that it is in our best interest and we haven't as yet realised it, so take your medicine and don't grumble!

Stag will continue to press the case for the best deal for our community. Compared with other areas our problems are simpler and thus more solvable, the only problem might be that resources could be diverted to these other areas. What we do know is that trains will run at max speed through our area, deceleration/ acceleration will be rapid and not gradual, so we have to plan for this.

Finally I would like to record here our thanks to the village for the moral and physical support we have been given, supporting our events and so on, and to the Parish Council for the financial aid and now the support of two of our parish councillors, Richard and Alex. Lastly to all the members of Stag who play an amazing part in lifting flagging morale, coming up with inspired and amazing ideas and holding uppermost the concerns of our village, its outstanding environment and precious way of life. As with so many of our other village organisations, people give an inordinate amount of their time for free and without restraint, and for that I am most grateful.

Unfortunately this is far from over.....and if you would like to help, please get in touch.

If we get anything offered anything of significance from the CF which needs to be discussed by the village we will let you know.

Martin Smith on behalf of Stag

April 2012.