

MINUTES OF ORAL EVIDENCE

taken before

HIGH SPEED RAIL COMMITTEE

On the

HIGH SPEED RAIL (LONDON – WEST MIDLANDS) BILL

Tuesday, 20 October 2015 (Afternoon)

In Committee Room 5

PRESENT:

Mr Robert Syms (Chair)

Mr Mark Hendrick

Sir Peter Bottomley

Mr Henry Bellingham

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Mr David Crausby

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Timothy Mould QC, Lead Counsel, Department for Transport

Witnesses:

Rt Hon John Bercow, Member of Parliament for Buckingham

IN PUBLIC SESSION

INDEX

Subject	Page
<u>Rt Hon John Bercow MP</u>	
Submissions by Mr Bercow	3
Response from Mr Mould	22
Closing submission by Mr Bercow	28

(At 14.00)

The Right Honourable John Bercow MP

1. CHAIR: Order, order. This is the HS2 Select Committee. This session this afternoon we welcome the Right Honourable John Bercow, Speaker of the House of Commons to do his main job which is to represent the villages of Buckingham. We've already heard some evidence from people from your constituency who are grateful for the work and grateful for the support that your assistant, Tom, has given them in doing their best to put forward representations and changes to the scheme. I'd be grateful if you could give evidence to the Committee on behalf of your constituents, John.

2. MR BERCOW: Mr Chairman, thank you. And let me say at the outset that I'm pleased to be accompanied by my stalwart and indefatigable parliamentary assistant, Tom Tweddle, who is very closely familiar with the arguments that I've been advancing over a period of years and is a great aid to me.

3. Thank you and your colleagues for giving me this opportunity to offer my thoughts to your Committee; and, perhaps by preface to what follows, I can thank you more widely with your colleagues on this committee both present and former who have invested a great deal of time and energy in the literal sense disinterestedly, as you have to be and to demonstrate yourselves to be, into the task before you. I also want at the outset to thank, because I often make the point as Speaker of the House that we say 'thank you' too rarely and ought to say it more often, Neil Caulfield, the outstanding clerk to this committee and his assistants who have always been on hand to advise not only me and members of my office but also my constituents who have on occasion found the process by which, colleagues, we in this house procedurally handle bills considered hybrid to be both convoluted and overwhelming. The excellent guidance offered by Neil and his colleagues has helped immensely and I know you won't mind my saying that you as members of the Committee are very lucky to have Neil and his team assisting you in your work.

4. Having read or seen the offered obvious by my parliamentary colleagues, I understand that it would be most effective if I essentially summarise the arguments of my constituents and seek to reinforce in your minds what the key asks are. That is how I've prepared my material for today. I know that colleagues won't need to be told but,

for the avoidance of doubt and for the record, I am of course speaking to you today solely as the Member of Parliament for the Buckingham constituency.

5. In terms of my dealings with HS2 Ltd, I am of course grateful to HS2 Ltd officials and managers who have met with me on a number of occasions over the course of the last few years often, though not always, in the company of affected constituents. However, I regret that the community engagement, which is a very different matter simply from the interaction with a member, has been sadly lacking.

6. Briefly I should just like to draw the attention of the Committee to the situation on Putlowes Drive in the Fleet Marston area. You will be hearing petition numbers 1561 and AP141 next Thursday in which my constituents will explain the situation in greater detail; but in essence HS2 Ltd has decided that it will acquire – not simply use – a private road for access to an autotransformer station.

7. I was contacted by a constituent yesterday – that is to say Monday – and was advised that while her next door neighbour had received notification of this plan she herself had not. Frankly, this standard of engagement is unacceptable and, if I may say so, it's a point that is so blindingly obvious that I doubt even the most perspicacious and articulate lawyer would seek to argue against what I've just said. Community forum meetings were often, for the period that they took place, more of a lecture by HS2 than a genuine dialogue with affected parties and many constituents of mine have felt as though the deck was loaded against them in their quest to achieve necessary mitigation or protection. I did attend a significant number of those community fora when I was able to do so and so I speak not from second-hand commentary but from first-hand experience. The fact that the body charged with leading the project seemingly has no genuine interest in the individuals and the communities that it will affect – indeed is already affecting – coupled with the lack of compassion is, in my judgement, deplorable. People matter, communities matter, and there has been no real impression in the mind of my constituents that that has been the attitude of High Speed 2. It is high time that HS2 recognise that fact and sought to improve upon their approach.

8. Briefly in terms of compensation, I've made clear throughout my responses to the various consultations over the course of the last few years that I feel that the packages, Chairman, colleagues, on offer are or have inadequate and have failed properly to

recognise the true impact that the prospect of the project is already having. I know, Mr Chairman, you have previously said that the new Need to Sell scheme is something which the Committee might wish to look at in the future in order to explore whether it is working in the way in which it was intended to do so and I, and I'm sure many others in my constituency, would welcome such a look.

9. Quite simply, if an owner, colleagues, wants to sell his or her property then the only reason in the opinion of property experts that that person cannot do so is that High Speed 2 deters purchasers. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that a sale can be made. If, Mr Chairman, as part of your consideration of the Need to Sell scheme you call for written evidence, perhaps I can give notice that I shall be very keen indeed to make a written submission on the basis of the accounts, and they are numerous, provided to me on this specific point by my constituents.

10. Running through the constituency – and, forgive me, I know you have to listen to a lot of this but it is the very gravamen of what we're expected to cover – I start with Ellesborough. Ellesborough Parish Council presented its evidence to the Committee on 7 September. We do not have a detailed map of this area but the area is visible on slide P8900. Ellesborough is a parish of some 600 residents at the south of my constituency bordered by that of David Lidington. To the east is Wendover and to the north is Stoke Mandeville. You may recall, Chairman, colleagues, from your site visit to Ellesborough in June, when you were accompanied by David Lidington, visiting the National Trust site at Coombe Hill. This is the highest viewpoint in the Chilterns which offers extraordinary views across Aylesbury Vale, and it is from this point that you will have seen the area in question.

11. The parish includes the settlements of Terrick, North Lee, Butlers Cross, Ellesborough and some of Dunsmore. Some of these areas have petitioned in their own right and you will, I think, be familiar with their grievances.

12. Nash Lee Road, well known to me but which falls partly in David Lidington's constituency, will house the proposed maintenance loops which are a cause of great concern to residents in Ellesborough parish. If these loops are to be sited here it is essential that the visual impact and unwanted additional lighting are mitigated as far as possible.

13. Finally in this context, I should like to remind the Committee that Ellesborough Parish Council made what I consider to be a rather modest request to which I hope you might be able to accede. If vegetation is to be used to mitigate the visual impact in this area, might it be planted at the earliest possible opportunity in order that when the impact on residents in this area becomes real the trees are sufficiently mature that they will have a tangible effect?

14. Moving up through my constituency, we come to the parish of Stone with Bishopstone & Hartwell. Slide A147(4) shows this area. This parish lies to the south-west of Aylesbury and has been a farming area for many hundreds of years. Starting with the villages of Stone and Bishopstone, there has been a degree of relief from my constituents having had sight of revised construction traffic figures published in additional provision 2 which reduced the number of daily vehicle movements in the area. My constituents need an assurance, however, that in future additional provisions this figure will not increase. It is important also that the Code of Construction Practice is a) rigorous and b) properly enforceable.

15. Incidentally, and I'm sure that you have heard this before, I think that it is very important that, as well as the Highway Authority, parish councils have a voice when the Code of Construction Practice, the local environment management plans and the local traffic management plans are established. HS2 Ltd has put forward a proposal to alter the alignment of the A418 or the Oxford Road, one of the key link roads between Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. When the parish council comes to present its evidence, you will hear their concerns about the impact of such an alteration. I know that this has been covered by both Buckinghamshire County Council and by Aylesbury Vale District Council and they, from a technical and highways perspective, are better placed than I am to deal with this matter. Needless to say, I fully support any measures which can be taken to reduce the blight upon my constituents by the road realignment and to ensure the safety of drivers turning out of the Bugle Horn housing estate. An inspection of the site will render it immediately and strikingly obvious just how unsafe the situation without appropriate mitigation would be.

16. There is to be a road head and construction site to the rear of residential properties on Meadow Way and Mayflower Close on the Bugle Horn Estate, the access road to which is extraordinarily close to the boundary of a number of properties: 10 metres

away at its closest point. I would like, colleagues, the Committee to consider whether this access route needs to be so close as I'm advised by my constituents that HS2 Ltd had conceded in earlier discussions that there is no reason why it cannot be moved further away. So some detailed drilling on that point does seem to me to be necessary.

17. The Committee might also like to consider a proposal put forward in the parish council's petition that construction materials for use on the site and excess materials for transfer elsewhere, currently planned to be transported by road, could be imported and exported using the existing railway network sited nearby.

18. MR BELLINGHAM: Mr Speaker, could you just put your arrow on the estate? It's to the south of Hartwell House, isn't it? It's to the south of the road, the A148? Perhaps you could put your arrow on it because we did pay it a visit, didn't we, I think.

19. MR MOULD QC (DfT): I think that's the correct point, just about there?

20. CHAIR: That's where we did the visit, is it?

21. MR BELLINGHAM: And we went into someone's garden and –

22. CHAIR: Looked over –

23. MR BELLINGHAM: The back door then looked out across the garden at the back, looking out across, if you're looking due east, towards Aylesbury.

24. MR BERCOW: So what you're saying is you've seen the site and you recall it?

25. MR BELLINGHAM: I'm just trying to confirm and refresh my memory but I think that's where we were.

26. CHAIR: When we did the visit.

27. MR BERCOW: That is where you were. And I didn't come with you on that occasion – I was with you on another occasion on your visit to the constituency – but on the occasion that you came with David Lidington, that is where you were.

28. MR BELLINGHAM: Thank you for that clarification.

29. MR BERCOW: Thank you. The council will elaborate on this when they come to

give evidence in the coming weeks.

30. Moving on, we come to Sedrup which is a relatively small hamlet to the west of the railway in line with the proposed location of some balancing ponds. You can't see it on this map but the south side of the proposed track is set in green banks which reach a halt when it reaches the Sedrup area. Although I'm advised that this is because of technical difficulties installing both a bank and a balancing pond, I would welcome an assurance that all options are fully explored and that if a bank is at all possible, even if it means a slight relocation or re-working of the balancing pond, one should be installed; and that residents on this side of the line should have the same level of noise mitigation offered to those on the Aylesbury side.

31. I note, colleagues, from additional provision 4 that a three metre high noise fence is now proposed for this area, but I'm afraid to report that this does not meet the needs of the community. They would like a continuation of the green banks, not some sort of industrial metal noise barrier which would look, frankly, awful in the context of this rural area.

32. Finally, in this area we have Lower Hartwell which sits in the immediate vicinity of Hartwell House. The National Trust, you might be aware, has come forward with what it has called a green bank proposal: essentially embankments with landscaping and planting which will reduce visual intrusion and noise impacts. I know that the National Trust will be appearing before you separately, both about this and indeed about other matters. If the Committee is minded to recommend that the National Trust's proposal is incorporated into the scheme – which incidentally I hope it will given the importance of Hartwell House in terms of heritage – I hope that consideration will be given to extending the mitigation just a little further in order that the residents in this part of my constituency are similarly protected from the impacts of HS2.

33. Aylesbury Park Golf Course, colleagues, which is on the cusp of my constituency, is severely impacted by HS2 such that once construction in the area begins and when the line is operational it will be rendered unusable as the line cuts across one of the courses. Given that the route is known, the impact on the golf course is already severe. Members of the club have not been renewing their subscriptions and indeed have been transferring to alternative facilities nearby. Last year the impact of this was a loss of around

£50,000. It does seem very, very clear to me, having visited the site and conversed with those running the club, that the explanation for this ongoing decline in membership is the impact of HS2 and not any other extraneous factor. Eventually the owners of the club will be entitled to compensation but the impact is already being felt now. And when the directors come to present their evidence to you I hope that you can look sympathetically upon their request that you recommend that they be put forward for a special compensation package. Without HS2 they wouldn't be suffering a decline in membership; the imminent demise of the club would not be in prospect. The requirement to go somewhere else would not have arisen. It is manifestly clear that it is the result, and I think exclusively the result, of this decision.

34. And it is a consistent theme of mine, and I dare say of other colleagues, Chairman, that of course the government is perfectly entitled in the vehicle of HS2 Ltd to bring forward an infrastructure project. Whether we judge it to be wise or unwise is a matter of opinion and debate. But if they do bring it forward and if they are prepared to accept the principle of necessary compensation, that principle should be applied unhesitatingly and with real commitment, not hesitatingly and without it. For the club to be forced to close down now, at least two years before construction begins, would be a huge loss to the community. By determining the compensation entitled now it means that the course would be able to remain in business for another couple of years at least and the Treasury will reap the benefit of ongoing VAT, National Insurance and corporation tax payments and it would keep 15 or so people in employment. Even if the owners of the club have in writing something setting out exactly how much compensation they will eventually become entitled to, it would at least help the business stay afloat for as long as possible. Such a commitment would mean assurances can be given to creditors and to the landlord that the business will receive compensation and that they can safely offer a degree of flexibility in supporting the golf course without risk.

35. Colleagues, moving up through the constituency we reach the village of Waddesdon, which a number of you visited some small number of months ago. The village will be represented here in Committee by the parish council on behalf of its –

36. MR BELLINGHAM: Is it possible to move up the line on the map? Is it possible to plot it on the map?

37. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: If you go to P8900 it shows it quite well.
38. MR BERCOW: The village will be represented here in Committee by the parish council on behalf of its 1,500 residents. All residents –
39. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: Sorry. If you follow the track you see Quainton just to the north-east and Waddesdon is just to the south-west of where the A41 is.
40. MR BERCOW: P8902. Approximately three miles from Quainton.
41. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: Yeah. Do you want to go into more detail, Henry?
42. MR BELLINGHAM: It'd be quite handy, actually.
43. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: 8902.
44. MR BELLINGHAM: Yeah. I mean we stood outside the carriage gates, didn't we?
45. MR BERCOW: We did. And I think we stood outside the village hall if I remember rightly. And we even went into the village hall.
46. MR BELLINGHAM: We did very briefly.
47. MR BERCOW: I remember because I think Sir Peter perorated.
48. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: No, no.
49. MR BERCOW: Are you now sanguine, if not about all matters at any rate about the location?
50. MR BELLINGHAM: Yes –
51. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: We were at the lodge gates first and then we came onto the village itself.
52. CHAIR: Yeah, we walked round the church and then we went in the –
53. MR BERCOW: All residents will be adversely affected by the construction traffic running through the village. The Committee may remember visiting this village on two

occasions members came to the Buckingham villages earlier this year, and it's clear to me you do. On the first occasion at a packed out gathering in the village hall, which I think is the occasion on which I was suggesting Sir Peter was perorating, the point was forcibly made to colleagues that the residents desperately wanted a relief road given that the increase in traffic will have an unacceptably negative impact on the character of the village and add yet greater pressure to the already busy A41 which runs through it. If I recall correctly, Sir Peter said that he was sympathetic to the request of the villagers and what was needed was a proposal supported by the village and the Highway Authority for the Committee to consider. Colleagues, I'm pleased to report that the parish council did exactly as Sir Peter sagely advised and undertook an extensive consultation. The result showed that the preference of the village was to support the request for the construction of a haul route and I hope that this can be sympathetically considered by the Committee. It is perhaps worth noting that while a full permanent relief road was presented in the consultation, it is clear that this is not a proposal supported by the local community. I think it's right to let the representatives of the parish council explain the rationale behind their position which is not unrelated to prospects of large scale housing development and possibly other considerations. But given that there were competing points of view proffered on this matter, I simply want to underline that the parish council is for the haul route – that is what they want – not the full permanent relief road; and I am with my constituents, the representatives, of the parish council on that matter.

54. Moving on, the Committee will be hearing shortly, though possibly quite fully, from Christopher Prideaux, constituent of mine who lives on the Diddershall Estate, a sizeable estate of over 1,400 acres. Christopher and his family are severely affected by HS2 including a substantial loss of land for, amongst other things, the siting of a national grid substation and an autotransformer feeder station. I know that Christopher will be raising these issues with you in the coming weeks but I should like to put it on the record that I support his requests for greater sound mitigation and appropriate ecological mitigation.

55. Colleagues, we then come – and I can detect readily that Henry is following me along the route from Waddesdon – to the village of Quainton, which is slide P9804. There are two major concerns for the residents of Quainton; those, colleagues, being the impact of a proposed realignment of Station Road and the issue of noise. I hope that

colleagues will forgive me if I don't go into great technical detail as to the proposals for the alignment of Station Road, a task I think better discharged by both the parish council and the Highways Authority, but I would just say that I am supportive of the parish council's proposal. If adopted, that proposal would reduce the amount of farmland required for construction, lessen the impact of passing traffic on residential properties and eliminate the need for this stretch of road to be elevated to the extent that it currently is under HS2 Ltd plans.

56. Of concern to the whole village is noise impact about which I know you have heard much from, amongst others, the High Speed 2 Action Alliance. I should just like to put on the record that although the bulk of the village, colleagues, is some 1.5 kilometres from the line at its closest point, villagers can already hear passing freight trains which come around four times a day; and this is exacerbated by a prevailing south westerly wind. I'm sure that you can well understand the anxiety of residents when they have to contemplate hearing high speed trains passing 18 or so times an hour. If the alignment in this area is able to be lowered, even if it is just by one metre, that would be a boon and, to a degree at least, the village would be grateful.

57. We now move to the Calvert area, colleagues, where you yesterday heard a joint presentation from Charndon Parish Council and Calvert Green Parish Council; slide P8906, please. Have colleagues got access to the requisite slide?

58. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: Yes.

59. CHAIR: Yes.

60. MR BERCOW: Thank you.

61. CHAIR: And generally it works as well. Once or twice we've been stuck but it works pretty well.

62. MR BERCOW: Thank you, Robert. I know that Buckinghamshire County Council presented to you last week about the impact in this area and I simply wish to echo the sentiment of what has already been put to you and to offer the propositions you have already heard my full and unflinching support. You heard in detail – I observed myself from my vantage point some of his appearance – the leader of the county

council, Martin Tett, about how this area will be a convergence point of a number of major infrastructure projects including the so-called IMD, the infrastructure maintenance depot, the east-west rail line and an energy-from-waste plant.

63. For what is, colleagues, a small rural area, it reaps absolutely no benefit whatsoever from High Speed 2. I think it is only right that the mitigation measures in this area are the best that they possibly can be. I fear however that typical mitigation such as screening and bunding would be insufficient properly to address the severity of the impact in this area.

64. Colleagues, I had intended to speak to you about the arguments for the relocation of the sidings as proposed by FCC and to explain to you why the HS2 Ltd proposals are unacceptable. However, I note from your comments last week that you'd rather hear this from FCC itself and I know that the parish council has addressed the matter as well in their earlier presentation. Perhaps it's best if I simply say that I truly hope that HS2 Ltd can thoroughly and sympathetically consider the revised proposal put forward for the relocation of the sidings by FCC. Moreover, I hope that the Committee will similarly give thorough consideration to a proposal which makes business sense which sufficiently protects nearby communities and which has the full support of the petitioner, the local residents, the affected parish councils, the district council, the county council and me as the Member of Parliament. In AP4, HS2 Ltd came forward with revised plans for the relocation of these sidings but I'm afraid that these plans are not acceptable to the community, nor FCC who have made clear that the proposal advanced by HS2 will not work in operational terms. I really must appeal commonsensically to the Committee to insist that the counter-case be heard here and be then properly considered by HS2. I'm making this point with some force though it is somewhat of an understatement by comparison with the force and intensity felt on the matter by my constituents as a result of long and unsatisfactory experience of dealings with HS2 to date.

65. On the matter of sustainable placement in the area, I'm cautiously optimistic in light of Mr Mould's comments last Wednesday that the use of land at Shepherds Furze Farm would be an absolute last resort. Given that there is an alternative waste site available, which has already been used for the placement of spoil projects such as the Olympic Park and Crossrail and the fact that it has more than enough capacity to take

spoil from this project too, it would be absolute madness to inflict yet more devastation on this part of my constituency. And I hope that a written assurance can be provided to Mike and Anne Wood, respected local farmers and long-suffering to boot, at the earliest opportunity.

66. Colleagues, near to the Calvert area is Steeple Claydon, slide P8910. The parish of Steeple Claydon will be home to the infrastructure maintenance depot. And colleagues may remember traipsing to the end of the Phoenix Pub garden to see the sheer magnitude of the IMD. Colleagues, we are talking about a rural village. Admittedly, it is the largest of the Claytons but it is a rural village. The depot will be eight times bigger than the picturesque village, sited on active farmland and the base from which Phase 1 is built. I make clear in my petition that the, and I quote, ‘abject lack of mitigation’ is not acceptable; and I hope that the Committee can instruct HS2 Ltd to ensure that the construction and operation of the site are as unobtrusive as possible. But even with sensitive lighting design and a rigorous Code of Construction practice, it is very clear that this area will be severely blighted. An invalid point does not become valid by virtue of constant, or indeed incessant, repetition. In other words, if there is no credible response to the point that I have just made, namely that the area will be severely blighted, and I politely put it to you, colleagues, that there isn’t, that point should be accepted and then graciously, comprehensively and if necessary generously addressed.

67. If it is so indispensable to the project, which I rather doubt, and that is the position from which HS2 Ltd, supported by the government, won’t budge then they must accept the logical corollary of that which is to do what is necessary to mitigate, to minimise the impact and make life less unpleasant for residents than otherwise it will be.

68. I support wholeheartedly the proposal put to you last week by the county council that the promoter should fund in full the construction of a station at Steeple Claydon, a measure which would go a significant way in compensating for the irrevocable widespread damage caused to the area by HS2. Colleagues will readily see the point. I’m sure you saw it and heard it and ruminated on it when you were twice in my constituency, area after area that were able, not rhetorically but literally to say, ‘for us, unamended and unmitigated, this project is all pain and no gain’. And if you’re in an area which is going to be almost literally dumped upon and you haven’t even got a stop on the line that point is underlined in triplicate. I don’t think I need to emphasise it

further. If a station were to be constructed in this part of my constituency, I genuinely believe that something positive can emerge from the otherwise dystopian nightmare in which my constituents find themselves.

69. Edi Smockum, who spoke to you last week as part of the County Council's evidence, summarised the situation perfectly: yes, requesting that HS2 pay for a station is a big ask but HS2 is asking something very big of Steeple Clayton and the surrounding areas. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Or with the right to proceed comes the responsibility to minimise the negative impact upon those who would be affected by so proceeding.

70. I consider this request to be proportional, colleagues, because frankly none of the mitigations proposed thus far goes anyway, by any stretch of the imagination, even to begin to reckon with the cumulative detriment that this part of Buckinghamshire will suffer. This village and the surrounding areas – Calvert, Twyford and so on – are bar none, as far as I can discern, the worst affected communities along the line route between London and the West Midlands. HS2 brings no economic benefit to the area and it does absolutely nothing to improve connectivity. By funding a station on the east-west rail line, HS2 would bring tangible lasting benefits to the area.

71. Incidentally, I've repeatedly made the point, Chairman, colleagues, that if money cannot be found appropriately to mitigate the impacts of this project then it simply shouldn't go ahead. The cost of the construction of this station is not, to me at least, insubstantial but when you look at the cost of the project in its entirety the cost is pretty minor.

72. Slide P8908. Colleagues, either enthusiastically or forbearingly, accompanying me on my journey will see the village of Twyford. This is a village with some 450 residents and a quite extraordinary sense of community spirit. It isn't detracting in any way from any of the others, but I've had a great many dealings with Twyford over the last five years and they have been extremely well organised and had very much a 'can do', 'we're in this together', 'let's try to get a better outcome' mindset which I greatly respect.

73. The line is 250 metres away from the nearest dwelling in the village and it runs to the back of the community recreation ground. The Committee may recall from its first

visit the stack of hay bales behind the ground which are extremely helpful in contextualising the proximity of the line, not only to the playing field but also to St Mary's Church which is Grade I listed and which dates back to the 12th century.

74. CHAIR: This is one of the few places where we turned up early, if you'll remember.

75. MR BERCOW: Yes. Well, Chairman, I'm very impressed by your recollection of this particular point. We didn't do badly on time that day but we were always a bit up against it. You're quite right that we did arrive there slightly early.

76. I see no reason why the line should run so closely to the village, especially when an alternative route is perfectly viable which, in the northern part of my constituency, would alleviate so many problems. This is something I know that the chair of Twyford Parish Council intends to raise with you, I think, tomorrow if memory serves me correctly; and I hope that you will consider this request.

77. Colleagues, if the route is to remain on its present alignment it is imperative that either the line is lowered or that the height of the noise bunding is increased to above pantograph level. This will mitigate the impact of noise to residents, it will protect the church and it will abate noise intrusion for users of the recreation ground, including the very successful cricket club. Given the impact that the project would otherwise have on this part of my constituency, I do not think that this is a lot to ask.

78. Principally, Chair, of course as you would expect, I am appealing to your disinterested sense of public service and of just entitlements. If per chance it happens, given that I have referred to the plight of the local golf club and to the prospective impact on our cricket club, there are people on this Committee to the sympathetic of the flourishing of either of those two sports, well, that should help to concentrate your mind. If memory serves me correctly, Henry, at least to name but one, has a notable interest in the subject of cricket and I trust that he will be sympathetic to the prospects of a club doing well which might do less well if it is not appropriately assisted.

79. In addition, Twyford has requested the early planting of trees along the great central railway footprint at the back of the recreation ground so that by the time that the line is operational the trees are sufficiently mature that they will actually have a

materially beneficial impact in terms of additional sound abatement as well as dust and air pollution.

80. Colleagues, slide P8912, please, shows Chetwode. I think colleagues might remember, those of you who were on the visit, going to Chetwode, coming towards the end of my patch, going in that northerly direction. We get there and the Committee will remember from its first visit that this is an extremely tranquil and historic village which has been farmed for well over 1,000 years. You will recall that we visited the Grade 1 listed church sited in the conservation area and heard not only from representatives of the village but also from the Church of England. And Belinda Naylor led our tour of the area. I know you're taking evidence from her as well. And for what it's worth, I think that the evidence was very powerful. Chetwode will be literally severed in half by High Speed 2 with dwellings on both sides of the proposed line. It has been repeatedly reported in the initial appraisal of sustainability under subsequent environmental statements that Chetwode will experience high noise levels. Indeed, in terms of sound I think I'm right in saying that it will be the worst affected village between London and the West Midlands. Given the size of the village and the proximity of the line to it, near enough every property in the area will be blighted in one way or another.

81. There are, if memory serves me correctly, 42 dwellings in Chetwode; 77 adults and 44 children live there. If there is no tunnel in the area, this historic community will become completely and utterly unviable. The proximity of the area to the line, the anticipated intrusive noise levels and the visual blight caused by HS2 will quite simply lead those who live in the area to leave. Chetwode will no longer be the desirable, picturesque village which, I think by common consent, it is now. It will simply become a collection of old houses separated by a high-speed train line.

82. These problems can all be solved by the construction of a green tunnel. We, that is to say the community and me, are not asking for a lowering of the line, nor are we asking for an expensive deep-bored solution. We are simply asking that the existing cutting be banked over the top and designed, colleagues, in such a way that the current landscape can be, so far as possible, retained. As far as I am aware, but if exploration of the intricacies of this matter is required so be it, this is entirely possible from an engineering perspective. The only reason I can see why HS2 Ltd has decided not to pursue this is that it baulks at the associated cost.

83. Let me put it very, very, very simply. I understand why HS2 Ltd baulks at the cost. They are deputed to deliver the project, making mitigations as necessary but trying to minimise cost to the public purse. I absolutely understand why that is the starting point on their part. However, I respond by simply referring the Committee to my earlier remarks about the rejection of mitigations on financial grounds. One of the things that has troubled Chetwode is that it has been concerned that because it is relatively small and the numbers of residents are relatively few, they might not be thought to have the potential political power to secure justice for themselves. A critical part, obviously, of the work of your important committee is to ensure that justice and fairness apply. And I simply underline the point if HS2 want to go ahead, it cannot in all conscience be done at the expense of the destruction of an existing and historic village. That is intolerable. So if there is a price to be paid to minimise the impact, that price should without question be paid. A green tunnel I think of not in terms of a huge expense for the promoter, rather I see it as a long-term investment to secure the future sustainability of this village. Again I refer back to my earlier comment: communities matter. Unless there is a tunnel in Chetwode, HS2 will destroy a community.

84. Finally, colleagues, we reach Turweston. Colleagues may recall this village from our fly-in visit back in June, when the heavens opened and it started to rain on our very last stop of the day. If memory serves me correctly, Chairman, with reference to what you said a few moments ago about our arrival in Twyford, we were indeed also a little early in getting to Turweston. Turweston has around 200 residents in 84 properties, incidentally seven of which have been purchased under the exceptional hardship scheme; three, potentially four, under the need to sell scheme; one compulsory purchased; and 11 upon which blight notices have been accepted. This represents, colleagues, a quarter of the village's housing stock that has been or will be purchased by the government. I think this goes some way to illustrate the scale of the impact of HS2 on this rural community.

85. There are two major asks from the village, neither of which strikes me as indulgent or unrealistic. The first relates to the village's playing field. The Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee playing field is used by various sports groups, the Scout group and by local residents for general recreational purposes. During the construction period, the size of the playing field will be cut initially by 40%, then by 20%, and after

that some 8% will be permanently lost by the track cutting across the north-easterly corner, as well as by the apparent need to have electricity power lines routed across the field. Colleagues, locating power lines across the field will severely restrict the area's use for organised sport and by their very nature, coupled with the adjacent pylons, will make the site far else attractive for recreational users. The village believes that the power lines should be undergrounded, if that is an appropriate verb... Perhaps I should place –

86. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: It'll do.

87. MR CLIFTON-BROWN: Buried? Buried.

88. MR BERCOW: Be generous. Sir Peter has suggested it will do.

89. MR CLIFTON-BROWN: Buried.

90. MR BERCOW: I'm glad there isn't a purist present, or I really would be in trouble. Well, they should be put underground to protect the playing field and the setting of the conservation area. While this option may be more costly, it is technically possible and it has been achieved elsewhere. HS2 Ltd has proposed an alternative site for a new playing field on land in front of a property subject to a blight notice. This is not an acceptable option for the community. The proposed new site would require excavating, levelling and landscaping which, when one considers the other construction work which the village will have to deal with, is not acceptable, especially when the community's strong desire is for the existing, well-used, popular field to be restored to its present state. Indeed I might, if I were given to exaggeration—which manifestly I'm not—be inclined to say that not only is this an unacceptable proposal, but it is emblematic of the insensitivity, dare I say it, the insensitivity of HS2 in addressing matters of this kind. I won't go so far as to say it's an insult, but it is certainly an insensitive handling of the matter and we cannot possibly be expected to allow it to rest there, and will not do so. HS2 Ltd has proposed this alternative and that alternative must be rejected.

91. The second request is that all construction traffic associated with HS2, regardless of their size, must be banned from travelling through the village. Colleagues, we got there, on that Friday afternoon, at about a quarter to five, if I remember rightly. And I

hope you've got some recollection of what a small village it is. The narrow, winding rural roads – it's a beautiful village in many respects, but the narrow, winding rural roads are simply unsuitable for construction vehicles. I mean, that is simply the case. It may be inconvenient for HS2 that they're unsuitable, but no amount of pretence that they could be made suitable will change the essential facts of the situation. Given the proximity of houses to the road, it would be utterly intolerable for residents if lorries were to be traversing through Turweston. There is a clear solution to this issue by routing all the construction traffic along the track of the route. Just briefly in terms of construction traffic, colleagues, you'll be hearing today I think from Hillesden Parish Council.

92. MR CLIFTON-BROWN: We heard from them this morning.

93. MR BERCOW: Indeed, you have already heard from Hillesden Parish Council. Good. And from Gawcott with Lenborough Parish Council. And colleagues may recall driving through Gawcott in June and noting that the village's rural country roads are patently unsuitable for large construction vehicles. I'm advised, however, that great progress has been made outside the Committee room in negotiations issues between the Highways authority and HS2 Ltd. I hope this can continue. Similarly, I am told that great progress has also been made in relation to a number of other proposed construction routes and hopefully this will lead to a number of petitions from my patch withdrawing their petitions. The petitioners will be glad to do that if they've got a deal, including, for instance, the Aylesbury Town Council, quite possibly. You've previously heard about the implications of construction traffic in Terrick and I hope that this too is something that can be resolved in discussions between the promoter and Buckinghamshire County Council.

94. Colleagues, thank you for your time today. And as I referenced at the beginning of my remarks, thank you for the work that you are doing. I know that you are not unduly delicate or sensitive flowers, but I do want to underline this is disinterested work. You are on this Committee precisely and very properly – inevitably, when you have made your visits you may have encountered a degree of understandable irritation, even irascibility, because of what is proposed. I was moved on a couple of occasions, in the course of your visit to my own constituency, to emphasise that it wasn't a question of what you were proposing to do to the Buckingham constituency; the project was that

of the government, whose agent HS2 Ltd is. You are simply performing your public duty and you're doing it extremely conscientiously. And whatever the outcome, I repeat, I think you should be thanked by that, together with all of your professional support staff who are going about it in a similarly public spirited way. I dare say at times you feel as though—and I'm sure you felt it this afternoon, you're just immensely polite, or have been so far—you are hearing the same arguments over and over again.

95. But it will be clear to you, as it has been to me since March 2010 when Secretary of State Adonis announced this undesirable, unwanted and unnecessary project, that there is a very considerable strength of feeling on the matter. Huge strength of feeling is to be found in particular amongst those communities directly affected by the project, though it perhaps ought to be added that there is I think also a wider feeling amongst people who are not necessarily in an affected village, but where very substantial sums of public money are involved, satisfaction is needed that the right course is being followed. This is already a very substantial project with very substantial expense.

96. It was at one time put to me that it was not credible for me to be objecting to the expense of the project and then demanding, or requesting, all sorts of mitigations that would add further to its cost. This was put to me in all solemnity by a very senior figure promoting the project. For the avoidance of doubt, let me make it clear that I absolutely can, absolutely can object to the project, which is hugely expensive, and argue for mitigations whose net effect will be to add to its cost. Not only can I do so, but I do so. Of course I do so, because if people bring forward a proposal that is going to be expensive and damaging, and the only way that it can be made less damaging is to make it more expensive, it is absolutely natural and logical and proper that a constituency Member of Parliament should make that case. My view on this matter I think will be clear to you and that view is strong. That view is unswerving and that view, as far as I can tell, is shared by the bulk of my constituents. And I just conclude by thanking you again and saying that in my 18 years as Member of Parliament for Buckingham, there has been no other single issue on which I have received such a large number of constituency representations. Robert, colleagues, thank you very much.

97. CHAIR: Thank you very much. Normally one doesn't – one would only do a Cook's tour of one's constituency doing a maiden speech. And such are the opportunities of high-speed rail that even an experienced parliamentarian has an

opportunity with both passion and eloquence to represent his constituents, as you've done this afternoon. I thought your initial comments about the compensation and about writing to Members of Parliament with constituents who are applying for the compensation scheme actually was a very apt one and something that we will be following up. Most of the matters you raise we've either heard from or will hear from in more detail, but is there anything that you'd like to pick up the Speaker has said? Spoil site; did you make notes about that or...?

98. MR MOULD QC (DfT): Yes. I said, I think yesterday, that the project now no longer proposed to use the land at Shepherd's Furze Farm that was included within the Bill for the purposes of excavating material handling and for sustainable placement. And that had indeed been communicated to the farmers and landowners, Messrs Woods. So that is the position. All that is left for us to consider, as I think I mentioned yesterday, is whether we are able to relocate a balancing pond that is right in the corner of their land, whether we can relocate that elsewhere. That is something we're continuing to review and we will be putting forward our conclusions on that to them in due course. They are appearing I think, or scheduled to appear, later in the near future so ideally we will be able to resolve that matter before they do so.

99. MR BERCOW: Well, Chairman, it would be churlish not to acknowledge how welcome that news is. We should be grateful for small mercies. In fact, I had been minded to say to you, with some sadness, that having spoken with thousands of constituents about HS2 over the years, it became apparent to me that in many cases people were becoming frankly very despondent. Consultation after consultation, community forum meeting after community forum meeting, and nothing seemed to be achieved. What has just been said and what I had gathered to be the case does provide some modest encouragement and I think it's fair to say that those constituents who have engaged with this process do have some considerable hope in the work that you're doing.

100. I mean, I don't want to increase the pressure on you—and certainly it would be quite improper to attempt to do so by some machination or device—but they have their hopes vested in you, because this Committee is, in a sense, the last main opportunity for people who haven't extracted concessions, mitigations, realignments or whatever, to do so. So I hope some good can emerge from what is otherwise – it is very easy for us just

to regard it as another issue, but what is otherwise an unutterably painful time for some constituencies, not just a matter of financial loss or visual. It is very striking; it is very different sometimes in these rural constituencies from other parts of the country. The number of very settled communities is that much greater.

101. And, you know, think about it from their point of view. They weren't looking for this, they didn't want it, they weren't consulted. There hasn't been any obvious route to get out of this, given the cross-party consensus and so on. So in a sense, I've had to say to them all along, well, 'Don't give up hope,' you know, 'KBO,' as Churchill would have said, 'Keep bugging on, keep making the argument, keep pressing your point, keep issuing your rightly insistent demands, and get your chance in front of the Committee.' So anything that you can reasonably do to secure a better balance in fulfilling the twin objectives of allowing Parliament to achieve its end on the project, if that's what Parliament continues to want, and allowing people relief will I think be widely applauded.

102. CHAIR: One of the biggest problems that I think we face is that the timeframe of a project like this is over many years. And because it's a government project, most people living in villages in Buckinghamshire think there's a filing cabinet in Whitehall with the design of every station, of every bridge; it's all decided. And when they ask a question of HS2, sometimes the reason HS2 can't answer it is because the bridge hasn't been designed and the fine details haven't been done. So it's when we start getting to this process that HS2 start looking at the detail, which is why you start to get settlement and more decisions are taken. But by the time you get here, people have lived with the project for some years and probably have already sort of felt that they're not telling us the truth, therefore... So that's slightly – it's the timeframe which makes things very difficult for Members of Parliament, very difficult for our constituents. Are there any members of the Committee who would like to ask questions of the Speaker?

103. MR BELLINGHAM: I've got one.

104. CHAIR: Okay.

105. MR BELLINGHAM: More of a comment I think, Mr Speaker.

106. MR BERCOW: Please.

107. MR BELLINGHAM: Obviously most of the villages in your excellent *tour d'horizon* are yet to come and see us. We've been on to the route onsite and I think having your own input at this stage is actually very helpful indeed, because they will be presenting their specific evidence to us in the near future. So in that respect it's very helpful. We had of course some parish councils with us this morning and they left us in no doubt at all what their asks were. One of your biggest asks, apart from maybe some of the comments made about realignment of the route, is around Chetwode and the need to have a green tunnel. We were I think all impressed by that church and the site visit we had with Belinda Naylor, as you say, showing us around. And that village is obviously going to be decimated. Has any work been done at a – obviously they'll be coming to give us evidence of this and we'll then have to take a decision, but has any initial work been done over costings of a green tunnel? Because just looking at the map, you can tell straightaway that it's in quite a deep cutting. And what you were saying was that you don't want to do anything other than basically cover over the cutting. But has any initial estimate been done on that, just so that the Committee can be guided for future reference, preparing us for the evidence that's going to be given by the parish council and the local landowners?

108. MR BERCOW: It is a question I've previously asked myself. And I think, Henry, to the best of my knowledge, that the answer is no. I'm sorry if that disappoints. It may be HS2 will come forward with some figure. I mean, it will be a cost in the millions.

109. MR BELLINGHAM: Of course it will.

110. MR BERCOW: You know, it is going to cost millions of pounds. We know that the station at Steeple Claydon, for example, has been calculated to cost around £5 million, probably considerably less. It will be in the millions and so, you know, I don't say that it is easy. But in the case of this particular community, the alternative is that, as far as I can see, it will cease to be. It will simply not be viable actually at all. The people who have lived there, including some generations, will inevitably I think have to go elsewhere.

111. MR BELLINGHAM: When does Belinda Naylor –

112. CHAIR: Would you like to respond on that, Mr Mould?

113. MR MOULD QC (DfT): Well, I was simply going to say you're absolutely right, Mr Speaker. The Committee will be hearing from petitioners in Chetwode tomorrow. My instructions are that we have costed the green tunnel proposal at around £70 million.

114. MR BELLINGHAM: Seven zero?

115. MR MOULD QC (DfT): Seven zero, yes.

116. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: And the population of the parish council is between 150 and 200.

117. MR MOULD QC (DfT): I'm sorry?

118. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: The population of the parish council area is between 150 and 200.

119. MR MOULD QC (DfT): It's certainly quite a low population area, yes.

120. MR BERCOW: It's fewer than 120 today.

121. MR MOULD QC (DfT): And I don't want to anticipate what is going to be said tomorrow to any degree, and still less do I want to steal the thunder of petitioners, but I perhaps just ought to take the opportunity of making this general point, if you will forgive me. There is a good deal of – there has for many, many months and indeed years been a good deal of disquiet amongst the communities affected by this railway, about its coming, and clearly there has been a good deal of criticism of the engagement that has taken place. It is not true to say, if I may say so, that communities were not consulted before the route was settled. There was a major consultation exercise in 2011 which – Mr Speaker mentioned that HS2 Ltd had made the decision not to proceed with a green tunnel. Of course, in reality it is the Secretary of State who has presently made that decision. HS2 Ltd is, as Mr Speaker said, the Secretary of State's agent. But I wouldn't want those attending these hearings to believe that these major spending decisions are made other than under the aegis of the government and therefore of course democratically accountable in that way. Whether that is the right decision of course is something that the Committee will want to reflect on having heard the evidence tomorrow, but it is certainly not one that has been taken without the scrutiny of the got. Now, we have, as you will hear, put forward some enhancements to the noise mitigation

proposals for Chetwode, which will be heard tomorrow as well. So there are some matters that will be heard tomorrow, but I wanted to make those points of context, if I may.

122. MR BERCOW: Well, I'm bound to say, gentlemen, I think Mr Mould is absolutely entitled to make that point, not only because you permitted him to do so, but because it has the advantage of being true. And so I certainly wouldn't cap him at that?. He is, in a sense, identifying the source of responsibility for the project. That's perfectly proper. I understand and you understand and know very well that of course HS2 is operating in accordance with somebody else's rubric, and it's a Secretary of State rubric. And in one sense I'm quite grateful to Mr Mould. One wouldn't even have to be a distinguished QC to understand the force of this point.

123. MR MOULD QC (DfT): I don't claim that honour myself.

124. MR BERCOW: But you are. It has the advantage of being true. It is of course down to the Secretary of State and that absolutely underlines the point that people who are making these important decisions should be held to account for them. And I hope that you can rely upon an understanding, human and empathetic approach from the Secretary of State on this matter. It would not diminish the Secretary of State or the government in any way; it would enhance them if they erred on the side of being big in matters of this kind. I'm not saying anything to this Committee that I've not said to the Secretary of State. I've said it to him several times. I mean, you know, I don't think I could make the point any more publicly without being discourteous and I don't wish to be discourteous.

125. CHAIR: Sir Peter?

126. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: At the risk of slightly delaying you from practicing your Mandarin, if ground can go grounded and surround can go surrounded, I think you can rely on your 'undergrounded.' But to be fair, 'fair-grounded' would not do.

127. CHAIR: Sir Geoffrey. Sorry, not Sir Geoffrey. Geoffrey.

128. MR BERCOW: I don't want to inject undue levity, but on the other hand, Sir Peter, if one loses one's sense of humour, one's lost everything. So thank you very

much for what you've said, which I appreciate. You know, for the avoidance of doubt, these are extremely serious matters. You know, all I care about, like every MP who's coming before you—I'm not different from any other MP coming before you—I want the best for my area. I admit I didn't want this wretched imposition in the first place, but if it is to go ahead then I want the best possible deal for my area. But I certainly wouldn't dispute, you know, either the good intentions or the professionalism of the people who are involved with this project, from whatever vantage point. They're doing their jobs; I'm simply trying to do mine.

129. CHAIR: Geoffrey?

130. MR CLIFTON-BROWN: Mr Speaker, thank you very much for your contribution.

131. MR BERCOW: Thank you.

132. MR CLIFTON-BROWN: As far as I can see, all of the things that you've outlined, and certainly the petitioners that have been before us so far, have been examined in great detail. And one of the great detailed issues we've discussed was the case for Turweston yesterday. I think one of the advantages of this Committee process is that it concentrates minds, both of the petitioners and of HS2. And as you saw in the case of Shepherds Farm, it does sometimes lead to the correct conclusion. And I have a feeling that in the case of Turweston playing field, there is a good solution. Being a property man myself, they clearly don't want another huge great piece of land, but a little piece of extra land for a child's playing field, for example, replacing the little bit of land they've lost, may well be part of a solution. So I think a lot of the issues that you raise are difficult and delicate on behalf of your constituents, but they are capable of some form of compromise. And a compromise is never ideal from everybody's point of view but at least gives people a modicum of happiness.

133. MR BERCOW: Chairman, can I just thank Geoffrey for what he has said? If he hadn't volunteered that he was a property man, I was about to make the point that he speaks with some authority on these matters as a distinguished Chartered Surveyor. I think that the Committee benefits from that sort of expertise. And insofar as colleagues, you know, are thinking of these matters pragmatically, on the basis that we shouldn't let the best be the enemy of the good, even if we don't get all that we seek, if we can get

some of what we seek, or partial accommodations, aught is better than naught.

134. CHAIR: As you paid your 20 quid to petition Parliament, you're allowed the last say. I don't know whether you've said your last word, but would you like to have a last word with the Committee? It isn't every day you get to petition Parliament, is it Mr Speaker?

135. MR BERCOW: No, it isn't every day that one gets to petition Parliament. My last sentence is accommodate the constituencies' requests as far as you reasonably can, thinking in terms not so much of the cost per person of a particular mitigation, but of the overall imposition on my patch by comparison with a great many other parts of the route. And having so reflected on my constituency, just think of—if I may ask—one other thing. And that is, would people be inclined to go to the lengths to which they've gone, to organise meetings, to put together material, to take time off work, to assemble detailed presentations, if they didn't think that the case was strong and they deserved recognition of it? Okay, there are people who are doing this as a matter of professional duty, although it is also a personally held strong feeling on my part, and Martin Tett is a county council leader with official responsibilities, and similarly, people in many cases are from the ABDC. Most of the people speaking on behalf of my constituency are doing so in their voluntary capacities for the benefit not of themselves, but of the constituency. Think of that. Please try to bear it in the forefront of your minds. And I and my colleagues, I hope, Cheryl and David Lidington and others, are happy, as we must, to trust to you to do what you think is right. And thank you, I richly appreciate this opportunity. Thank you all very much. Thank you for your good humour and your fairness and your forbearance.

136. CHAIR: Okay, well that brings us to the end of our session. I would be grateful if everybody could withdraw so we can reflect on Mr Speaker's views, as we always do. Order, order.