

# Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held virtually, on Tuesday 24 February 2021

**NOTE: Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) and Government Guidelines on public gatherings, the meeting was held virtually on Zoom. Members of the public were invited to observe the meeting streamed live on YouTube.**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Mrs J. Hood in the Chair, and  
Councillors: A. Best, J. Davies, Mrs L. Davies, I. Fordham, M. Green, T. Kelt,  
J. Powell, C. Thornicroft and R. Townsend

**ABSENT:** Councillors: K. Argyle, Mrs A. Burgess, Mrs K. Dawson, M. Hatton, J. Hickling,  
R. Kenney and P. Leason

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**GP20/347** **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors: K. Argyle, Mrs A. Burgess,  
Mrs K. Dawson, J. Hickling, R. Kenney and P. Leason

**GP20/348** **Declarations of Interests**

None

**GP20/349** **Requests for Dispensations**

None

**GP20/350** **HS2 Phase 2a**

The Committee considered the Town Council's response to a Government consultation seeking the views of residents in a number of local authority areas on a variety of topics including the environmental and traffic impacts of the HS2 Phase 2a Scheme works between the West Midlands and Crewe.

A copy of the consultation document had been attached to the electronic version of the agenda.

A draft paper containing a response to the consultation had been prepared by the Town Clerk and circulated to all Town Councillors prior to the start of the meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee accepts the draft paper (attached as an appendix to the minutes) as the Town Council's response to the HS2 Phase 2a consultation under Clause 60 of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands – Crewe) Bill as amended in the House of Lords.

**RESOLVED:** That the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the General Purposes Committee is authorised to make any necessary minor amendments to the consultation response, should the need arise.

**CHAIRMAN**

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\* Items marked with an asterisk refer to reports or papers circulated with the agenda or distributed at the meeting. They are attached as an appendix to the signed copy of the Council minutes.

## **Response to Consultation under Clause 60 of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands – Crewe) Bill as Amended in the House of Lords**

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### **Introduction**

Stone Town Council is the local council which represents over 16,000 residents within the urban area of Stone in North Staffordshire. The Town Council has previously petitioned both the House of Commons and the House of Lords in respect of aspects of the proposed high speed rail link between the Midlands and Crewe.

The Town Council's concerns relate largely (but not exclusively) to the proposed Stone Railhead/Infrastructure Maintenance Base and its impact on the town, both during its construction and its ongoing operation. Within its petitions, the Council and its partner parish councils have presented a significantly more viable option for re-siting the railhead, but those proposals were not accepted.

This submission, therefore, restricts itself to answering the four questions posed in Clause 60 of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands – Crewe) Bill as Amended in the House of Lords. These answers will, however, focus mainly on the Railhead/Infrastructure Maintenance Base due to the excessive adverse impact this is expected to have on the area.

### **Question A – The impact of road traffic as a result of the HS2 Phase 2a works.**

The Town Council has previously challenged HS2 on its estimated number of HGV movements during the construction of HS2 and the railhead. The company has failed to provide information on its calculations of HGV movements, but the Council remains convinced that this number has been significantly underestimated.

Even without taking this into account, however, the Council still has very major concerns regarding HGV movements and their impact on the town:

1. A significant number of HGV movements are planned for the Eccleshall Road, through the residential area of Pirehill Lane and up to the top using the old dirt track to the proposed Yarlet Embankment satellite compound, then returning.

There are, however, two new housing developments along that route containing a total of 570 residential homes. These residential developments, Udall Grange and Langdon Green, are not shown on HS2 maps and so are unlikely to have been taken into account when traffic levels or other environment issues were assessed.

The Pirehill Lane route cuts through a densely populated residential estate to reach the satellite compound at Yarlet. The use of this route by HGVs would be likely to

force Tilling Drive to become a rat run for schools and other traffic, and could create a hazard for parents and very young children attending the three nurseries, two first schools and one middle school in that area.

The route along Eccleshall Road to the Walton Roundabout, which feeds both Stone town and the A34, is already heavily congested particularly at peak times. These two new housing developments will already create a significant increase in congestion along this route without any additional HS2 traffic. Additional HS2 traffic can only add to this severe traffic problem.

2. HS2 initially proposes to use the use the eastern end of Yarnfield Lane and its connection with the A34 at the Wayfarer public house for HGV access for around 15-18 months until the proposed links to the M6 open. This was originally predicted by HS2 to require one HGV movement onto and off the A34 every three minutes, but current intentions are less clear. Once the M6 connections are open HS2 is expecting the western end of Yarnfield Lane to be used by up to 1 HGV every 30 seconds in each direction. This appears to the Council to be unrealistic and would be likely to result in HS2 contractors seeking extensions to the working hours, with the resultant increased impact on local residents. Taking this into account together with the additional residential traffic/HGV movements referred to in the previous point would create a risk of economic paralysis to both Stone High Street and the surrounding business parks as motorists seek to avoid the A34 and A51 due to the extreme congestion likely on those roads.
3. An unfortunately all too regular occurrence in the area is a closure of the M6 between Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent, usually due to an accident. In these cases, whether northbound or southbound, motorway traffic is diverted onto the A34 through Stone usually resulting in a virtual "car park" along much of the A34 until after the motorway is re-opened. Additional HS2 traffic will only compound this already major problem.
4. In addition to the above, the A34 is a major route for emergency service vehicles, and any addition to existing congestion could have risks to the lives of residents of the area. For example, the A34 is the main route for ambulances from south of Stone, including the major residential town of Stafford, to the accident and emergency facilities at North Staffordshire hospital. Speedy access to this A&E department are essential due to the limited A&E opening times and facilities at Stafford Hospital.

In addition, the Stone Fire Station exits directly onto the A34. Any additional congestion could significantly affect the ability of the fire service to respond to incidents in a timely fashion, thereby threatening both local lives and property.

5. The A51 is currently used by cycle clubs who ride in large groups. The many additional HGVs that will use this route to access the sites near Stone will present a threat to their safety and potentially even stop them cycling for this reason. Current

government policy is to encourage healthy activities such as cycling, not put obstacles in the way.

Our petition to the House of Lords included our deep concerns for the safety of cyclists using the A51/A34 roundabout junction at the Stone Business Park. In order to relieve congestion that it will create, HS2 is proposing to construct a free flow lane between the A51 and the A34 southbound carriageway, however the Council has severe concerns about the safety of this proposal for cyclists.

**Question B – The impact of the phase 2a works on the natural environment, including but not limited to the impact on ancient woodland.**

This question has been answered with respect to wider environmental impacts, and not just limited to the natural environment.

Firstly, it is a major concern of the Town Council that works on the railhead site will be carried out day and night and once it is in operation as an infrastructure maintenance base it will both be supplied at night from the Norton Bridge to Stone Railway, and send its trains out onto the HS2 mainline to maintain it. This is likely to result in a significant and ongoing disruption to residents, particularly those in the Udall Grange, Langdon Green estates and parts of Manor Hill, in respect of:

1. Light pollution, as the site will be lit up at night to allow works to take place.
2. Noise levels, due to construction noise day and night
3. Air pollution, due to dust and other polluting materials from the construction site.

Despite having been granted outline planning permission years before HS2 submitted its proposals as part of the hybrid bill process, the environmental effects on these properties do not appear to have not been carried out by HS2.

A review needs to be undertaken of construction procedures and times of operation to minimise the impact of these problems on residents.

Secondly, it is well documented that in the first phase of HS2, contractors are breaking promises made during the consultation process and communities on the route of HS2 are facing “complete chaos” as a result.

A government cross-party transport select committee meeting was told that:

*In particular, HS2 contractors working on the first phase of the line have been accused of “demolishing first, then designing later [...] failing to stick to approved HGV routes [...] introducing last minute traffic diversions [...] damaging local roads and properties [...] and using temporary land take for longer than originally set out”.*

At the meeting, MPs, local councillors and senior environmental figures called for independent “sheriffs” to ensure contractors working on HS2 are kept in check.

To help mitigate this behaviour, we would like to ask that funding from HS2 would be made available to Stone Town Council to employ “Sheriffs”, along similar lines to those proposed

at the above meeting. This should help to ensure that this type of behaviour is closely monitored, and action taken quickly to deal with it.

**Question C - Whether there are sufficient transport provisions for the purposes of passengers connecting to HS2 Phase 2a and to address changes to general passenger movements caused by the HS2 Phase 2a works.**

Despite all the disruption that the building of HS2 Phase 2a will create for Stone residents, their “reward” for this will be a significant downgrading of their inter-city rail services once HS2 is in operation.

Currently it is a short journey by rail or car to Stafford Railway Station, where residents can enjoy a regular and speedy rail service to, for example, Liverpool, Manchester and London Euston. The HS2 proposals include some provision for continued links between Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent stations and the main HS2 line, but this in itself appears to be an inferior service to those currently operating via the West Coast Mainline. Should this service prove unviable, Stone residents would need to travel to either Crewe or Birmingham to join HS2. Each of these would be a significant journey in their own right, and result in a time to travel to London, for example, much greater than that currently enjoyed locally. Even catching a train from Stone or Stafford to get to Birmingham would result in termination at New Street Station, requiring further travel within Birmingham to Curzon Street in order to board HS2.

A further problem for the area would be the impact of HS2 on the capacity of the existing Norton Bridge to Stone railway by adding one train each way per hour to link to Macclesfield. This limits the scope for the use of this line to introduce new services to the area.

**Question D - whether the construction of new railway stations and improvements to railway stations, including any reopening of lines, is necessary in relation to question C.**

As referred to above, Stone Town Council and its parish council partners have previously proposed an alternative location for the railhead/infrastructure maintenance base at Aldersey’s Rough near to the M6 Keele Services. It is the Council’s strong view that this would have been a more viable option and provided a better and less expensive option for HS2 overall.

The use of Aldersey’s Rough instead of Stone would also facilitate the reopening of the former Newcastle/Stoke to Market Drayton line which would prove the catalyst to create new direct train services across the Potteries conurbation via Crewe to Manchester Airport, Liverpool and other North West towns and cities.

It would also enable stations close to Stone, such as Wedgwood and Barlaston to reopen to train services and provide additional local services through our town to Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent.

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