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Please ask for: Walter Bailey

The Rt. Hon. David Cameron, MP, Prime
Minister
10 Downing Street
London
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Your Ref.

Date: 27 August 2014

Our Ref. WB/2014/08/HS2/001

Dear Prime Minister,

High Speed 2 – Community Fund

I am aware that you may have received correspondence requesting the provision of a Community Fund in association with HS2, and I wanted to take this opportunity to share with you the perspective of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

Solihull MBC has consistently maintained the position of conditional, in principle, support for high speed rail. The Council is proactively working with HS2 Ltd, and Government departments, to ensure that the appropriate processes are put in place, and infrastructure delivered, to maximise and realise the economic growth and regeneration potential of HS2. These are seen as vital to maximise the success of the project. As an example of this, we are working hard to maximise the use of the land around the Interchange Station, the first one outside London, planning an ambitious 'Garden City' proposal, working on connectivity within Solihull and the wider area, job creation, economic growth and homes.

However, the benefit of hosting an HS2 station does not come without its disadvantages. Solihull will play host to some 14km of railway track and ancillary features, the majority of which passes through rural countryside and in close proximity to a number of settlements, in particular those of Balsall Common, Berkswell, Chelmsley Wood and Hampton in Arden. The Council's support for the railway was therefore made subject to both the associated economic benefits being maximised, and also the provision of appropriate measures to mitigate the impacts on, and compensate, local communities, businesses and people

The Council has worked with representatives of local communities and businesses, as well as HS2 Ltd, in seeking to secure measures that will appropriately mitigate some of the direct impacts of the railway; and has petitioned the House of Commons Select Committee accordingly.

There are, however, impacts associated with the delivery of infrastructure of this nature that inevitably cannot be avoided and / or mitigated, even partially. For example, there will be severance between communities, the nature of the landscape will be changed forever, ecological and recreational areas lost, and long-term noise impacts in what is currently a tranquil area. A number of key assets are also lost that provide facilities for community use. Although compensation may in due course be provided to owners of those assets, in most circumstances no alternative or replacement facilities are proposed by HS2 Ltd, based on the assumption that affected communities will adjust to changes after a period of 12 months.

Furthermore, the impact on those within the borough during the construction phase will be substantial. Despite the good intentions of HS2 Ltd to manage the impacts of construction, it will not be possible to deliver the railway, and its station, within the borough without local people, communities and businesses experiencing a sizeable level of disruption. The duration of the works in Solihull, although considered temporary in the timeframe of the HS2 project, will have a much greater impact within the context of people's lives and businesses.

The Council considers it imperative, and only fair therefore, that those most affected by the railway are provided with appropriate compensation for the unavoidable impacts they will experience. This could be achieved through the provision of a Community Fund, which would provide the opportunity for local people and business to secure support and funds to rebuild communities, through investing locally in measures to mitigate or offset the impacts of the railway.

It is estimated that a minimum of £2.5m is required to compensate for unavoidable impacts within the borough. On behalf of the Council, WSP Group has produced a report entitled *HS2 Statement of Opportunity*, which assesses some of the amenity, landscape, ecology and heritage impacts of the railway, both during its construction and operation. We would be delighted to share the report with officials if more information is required.

Given the onus on localism within the current planning regime, the Council considers it vital that a fund to support communities and businesses be provided and administered at a local scale. This will ensure that those affected by the railway can best decide how to deploy those funds, potentially for example through integration with the Neighbourhood Plan process.

The Council understands that some form of Community Fund is to be set up in association with HS2, and we hope that the issues and views conveyed in this letter can be taken into account in the development of Community Fund proposals. We look forward to your response and would welcome your support in establishing a locally administered fund that will enable local communities affected by HS2 to direct the funds to where they are most needed and will have the most effect.

I have also copied this letter to local Members of Parliament, Caroline Spelman and Lorely Burt, for information.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Ian Courts
Deputy Leader, Solihull MBC
Cabinet Member for Land & Economic Growth
& Chairman of HS2 Working Party

cc. Caroline Spelman MP & Lorely Burt MP