

### **Berkswell Parish Council**

#### A moment in time.

I make no apology for dedicating this entire article to HS2. HS2 probably represents the single biggest threat to our thriving community and to our fragile environment we have ever seen. If it actually goes ahead (final decision likely to be given by the next Government), we will be subjected to years of construction misery, a permanent scar across our countryside, untold noise nuisance and our community will be cut in two – linked only by huge concrete bridges crossing the unwanted 250mph monster.

In consideration of the environmental impact of HS2, HHAG, our local action group has calculated that there are 267 issues in Solihull Borough requiring remedies – everything from excessive noise to farm access, construction traffic to flooding concerns. Of these 139 are in Berkswell Parish – over 3 times as many as any other Parish in the Borough. Solihull Council still supports the project, despite the environmental carnage it will cause. For how much longer will “urbs in rure” be Solihull’s motto?

So where are we now with the project? The Environment Statement consultation has finished. This invited responses to over 50,000 pages of information on the environmental impact of HS2. Berkswell Parish Council submitted a robust response highlighting the huge impact the line will have on our Parish. The next stage is for Parliament to receive the Hybrid Bill – once approved, this effectively grants planning permission for the scheme.

Hybrid bills are subject to additional Parliamentary procedures which are designed to give those affected a chance to make their view known. This essentially involves the opportunity to petition against the Bill’s detailed provisions, but not its principles. This is not petitioning in the everyday sense of gathering signatures. It’s a procedure whereby those affected, from individuals to large organisations, such as councils and businesses, can officially set out their issues and proposed solutions which could then be considered by those promoting the Bill and the select committees scrutinising it. Berkswell Parish Council will be petitioning on behalf of our community, but we’d also like to encourage you to do so too. We will be employing the services of a Parliamentary Agent to ensure we put forward our issues and solutions as forcibly as possible. We will therefore also be able to help you do the same.

Petitioning is not as daunting as some would have you believe. The origin of the name is from the French “petit” – it’s a democratic process designed to enable the “little” people to be heard on big issues. We requested that SMBC finance a number of workshops to help communities across the Borough petition effectively, but were refused. Instead, SMBC will organise a single general event for everyone in Solihull. The Parish Council does not consider this good enough, so is likely therefore to organise its own event, in partnership with Balsall PC. To hear all the cases will take a lot of time, and may delay the project. The Government and HS2 Ltd therefore want to reduce the number of petitioners - it’s disappointing that SMBC seem to be helping them.

A 3 week petitioning period is to be provided – our Agent advises that this is likely to commence on the 29<sup>th</sup> April. During these 3 weeks petitioners need to hand in their petition. A select committee will be

formed to hear petitions – this is likely to commence in July. Those petitioners who are to be heard by the committee will be given 4 weeks’ notice to prepare.

The Crossrail Bill provided a great example of petitioning. Hundreds of petitions were issued against the project, with petitioners including residents, small businesses, major global companies and politicians. Petitions were key to securing agreements with the promoters of the Bill and favourable decisions from the select committee that considered it. An entire new station was built as a result of petitioning – along with many minor amendments to lessen the impact on communities.

This is our moment in time. We all have a once in a lifetime opportunity to effect change. Future generations will have to live with the consequences of our actions over the next few weeks. We need to assume that the line will get built, and be prepared to fight through the petitioning process for improvements to the current proposals. Berkswell PC will provide you with all the support you need to present your issues and solutions with confidence. If you’re interested in participating please register your interest with Sharon Butterworth on 07443 644896 or by email at [clerk@berkswellparishcouncil.org.uk](mailto:clerk@berkswellparishcouncil.org.uk) and look out for notices of our “How to petition” event currently being planned.

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