

Minutes of Lead Portfolio Holder (Environment and Economy) Decision Making Session held on 13 May 2011

Present:

Decision Maker

Councillor Alan Cockburn (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Economy)

Officers

Mandy Walker, Group Manager, Regeneration Projects & Funding
Sustainable Communities, Environment and Economy
Janet Purcell, Executive and Member Support Manager

1. General

(1) Member Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None.

(2) Minutes of meeting held on 25 March 2011.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2011 be approved as a correct record.

2. Submission to the Transport Select Committee debate on High Speed Rail

Councillor Alan Cockburn considered a proposed submission to the Transport Select Committee debate on High Speed Rail. It was noted that this response to the Transport Select Committee was required by 16 May. The formal submission in response to the Government's consultation would be submitted before the deadline of 29 July. Councillor Cockburn was content with these comments, as they reflected the views expressed by the cross party working group and 51M network of local authorities.

Resolved

That the submission to the Transport Select Committee debate on High Speed Rail, appended to these minutes, be agreed.

3. Any Other Urgent Business

None.

The meeting rose at 12. 05 p.m.

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Lead Cabinet Portfolio Holder (Environment and Economy)



Submission to the Transport Select Committee debate on High Speed Rail on behalf of Warwickshire County Council

1. Introduction

1.1 This statement does not prejudice the formal response of Warwickshire County Council (WCC) to the Government's consultation, which will be submitted before the closing of the consultation 29 July 2011.

1.2 WCC is part of the 51m Local Authority network opposed to HS2 and endorses the evidence submitted on behalf of the 51m group to this Select Committee, covering all 6 issues which the Committee is to examine. In addition WCC wishes to bring the following specific matters to the attention of the Transport Select Committee.

1.3 WCC's meeting of the full council on 14.12.10 resolved:

“ that, as there can be no environmental or economic benefits for Warwickshire, this Council:

- (1) Opposes the proposed High Speed Rail 2 scheme.
- (2) Recommends that the consultation be deferred until all information is made available.
- (3) Instructs the Leader to write to the Secretary of State for Transport (copy to Warwickshire MPs) expressing these views.
- (4) Agrees to work with the other local authorities affected by the planned HS2 route, and with the Action Groups established throughout Warwickshire, to provide coordinated opposition to the current scheme”.

2. The Business Case

i) How robust are the assumptions and methodology used?

WCC considers there are several shortcomings in the methodology used:

- a) Concerns around the techniques used for long term forecasting and whether these are reliable, or give rise to extrapolation which increase risk & viability issues.
- b) An assumption that there is no further investment to the rail network for a considerable period, beyond current commitments, which is questionable.

ii) What are the pros and cons of resolving capacity issues in other ways?

WCC consider that the consultation does not provide sufficient information to examine other alternatives comparable with the HS2 proposal , to enable this

question to be answered. A key question should be what else could be achieved on the existing rail network, with the same level of funding and how would these pros and cons compare with HS2?

3. The Strategic Route

i) Which cities should be served by an eventual high speed network? Is the Y configuration the right choice?

The consultation does not include details of the Y route, or alternatives to the Y, nor station choice on the Y and therefore this cannot be properly considered. If the overarching aim is to reduce the north/south divide then further detailed consideration needs firstly to be made of direct benefits for key cities – which and how much, versus identifying more limited benefits for those cities /urban areas in between.

ii) Is the Government correct to build the network in stages, moving from London northwards?

No. The approach is flawed in not covering both networks, phase 1 & 2 together. Warwickshire is possibly the only County which may be affected by both networks, with a third of the HS2 phase 1 route within Warwickshire and potentially the northern part of the County affected by HS2 phase 2, but we are unable to examine the proposals for both simultaneously. The true costs and benefits of HS2 cannot therefore be examined.

4. Economic rebalancing and equity

i) What evidence is there that HSR will promote economic regeneration and help bridge the north –south economic divide?

WCC considers that the evidence to date does not adequately justify a reduction of the north/south divide. Rather the consultation material is based on high level evidence that HS2 will lead to increased economic growth, at a level which will produce economic benefits to the north, which will in turn help reduce the north/south divide. This is based on assumptions that improvements from HSR can lead to greater efficiency, through improved linkages between firms and between firms and their workers. It is clear however from the consultation information, that in terms of jobs growth from phase 1, half of the predicted 40,000 jobs will be in the SE. London and its hinterland will remain the magnet and major beneficiary from HS2 phase 1. The degree to which HS2 could help bridge the north/south divide should be examined in much more detail. Economic regeneration benefits will be localised to those areas and immediate hinterlands abutting new stations.

ii) To what extent should the shape of the network be influenced by the desirability of supporting local & regional regeneration?

If the aim is to support local and regional regeneration, then more detailed consideration needs to be made of intermediate nodes and impacts on other major areas, prior to a final route being approved. Warwickshire's economy is closely linked to Coventry's and the impact of HS2 on Coventry has yet to be determined.

5. Impact

i) Are environmental costs & benefits (including in relation to noise) correctly accounted for in the business case?

No. The business case and Appraisal of Sustainability do not go far enough. No local data has been used to consider the environmental costs and benefits, only national data sets. Nor has consideration been given to community impact. For example:

HS2 Ltd has recognised the EU and UK legislation to protect listed sites and species. However HS2 Ltd has only used part of the data that is readily available and without conducting any survey work. Only data on Birmingham and London's Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) has been used despite Warwickshire's being publicly available since the summer of 2010. This is considered to be a substantial flaw in the business rationale.

Within Warwickshire, HS2 will directly impact on 30+ LWSs, 13 UK & local Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) and Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) habitat types. The indirect impacts (hydrological, vibration, noise, light and general disturbance) could include a further 91 locations plus a further 5 Sites of SSSI (Special Scientific Interest), none of which are in the consultation information. Significant areas of ancient woodland will be affected.

The proposed route is well populated with European, national and county important species none of which are appraised in this report. The impacts on geology and geomorphology (apart from in hydrological terms) have not been assessed.

The approach in this area is contrary to current government strategies and policies.

Among the historic environment the sites affected include:

medieval earthworks, 17th century Dunton Hall, a grade II listed farmhouse at Coleshill, remnants of a mediaeval settlement at Stoneleigh, a mill race, Stoneleigh Abbey Park and Deer Park (grade II listed), World War II bridge defences plus 80 sites within 500m of the proposed route.

A number of unique Warwickshire landscape character types along the route could be adversely affected, altered or lost. The Appraisal of Sustainability report takes no account of any data from the Historic Environment Record for Warwickshire. The Historic Landscape Characterisation has been ignored.

In addition the environmental costs and benefits associated with the proposed circa 7,000 space car park at the Birmingham International Interchange Station need to be taken into consideration and examination made of the impacts on the existing road network and community impacts.

From:

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