

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 FEBRUARY 2019

**Question to Philip Atkins OBE
Leader of the Council**

By Susan Woodward

Question

I was very surprised to see you as a co-signatory for an open letter to Party Leaders (<https://www.midlandsconnect.uk/media/1550/hs2-open-letter-final-210119.docx>) urging their support for HS2, in spite of unanimous and cross-party opposition to the project here at Staffordshire County Council and wide opposition across the communities we represent. You say, inter alia, “Our support must not flounder or stall. We must unite to deliver HS2, and we urge you to join us by offering your vocal and unwavering support.” Can you explain to me, the Council and the wider public, when your position on HS2 changed, why you decided to act in a way that is contrary to the County Council’s clearly expressed position and what discussions took place with fellow councillors before you co-signed this letter?”

Reply

The position of the county council remains as per the motion set out below and as approved by Full Council in December 2015.

However, HS2 is a complex issue with partners, Members and people across the Midlands and in the North West having differing views, concerns and priorities. While of course it is easy to pick out any one line from a comprehensive letter, as a county council we are keen to seek clarity on the progression of the scheme.

Phase One has already been given Royal Assent, where we have gained substantial environmental mitigation, and which will allow Staffordshire residents to benefit from HS2 via the Handsacre Link, and the key part of this letter for Staffordshire is that if HS2 is to be delivered, we would like to see “support for *Phase 2a in reaching Royal Assent before the end of 2019, as planned.*” This will not only remove uncertainty for everyone, particularly those whose property is blighted, but will allow us to press on with our commitment to get the best deal for Staffordshire.

It is important to remember that the decisions on HS2 rest with Parliament and not this council.

That motion approved in December 2015 said this council:

(i) Continues to express concerns on the impact of HS2 on Staffordshire, especially given the acceleration of the phase to Crewe.

(ii) Welcomes the efforts the council has made to mitigate the impact of Phase One on the county and its communities and our commitment to build on the experience gained to reduce the impact of Phase 2a

(iii) Continues to ensure Staffordshire's voice is heard in terms of mitigation on the environment and meaningful compensation for affected residents.

(iv) Engages with Government, HS2 Ltd, district and borough councils and neighbouring authorities to gain maximum economic benefits from HS2, building on the partnership of Midlands Connect to deliver better connectivity for all Staffordshire.

As a county council, we remain focused on getting the best deal for Staffordshire in terms of mitigation, compensation for residents, economic benefits and improved connectivity if Parliament makes the decision to proceed with HS2.

We petitioned against Phase 1 and successfully achieved the lowering of 8km of the line in Lichfield. We also secured an assurance that the Handsacre link, connecting HS2 to the West Coast Main Line, would be constructed. This will provide the infrastructure needed for Staffordshire to receive HS2 services and gain economic benefit as a result.

We also petitioned against Phase 2a and gained several assurances which amongst other matters will see improvements to the local highway network which will have long term benefits for the communities along the line of the route.

As Parliament has decided to date that the HS2 project will go ahead, we have a duty to make sure that Staffordshire shares in any economic benefits and improved connectivity that we can derive from the scheme.