

WHS2: The people doing their best for Wendover

By Richard Byford

When I arrived a few minutes later than I had hoped, at a meeting of the Wendover HS2 Mitigation Action Group (WHS2), two of the volunteers were in intense debate about the benefits and drawbacks of a plan produced by EKFB – HS2's main civil works contractor for North Chilterns.

They couldn't agree on the design that EKFB had submitted to Buckinghamshire Council, for restoration of the area where Ellesborough Road goes over the HS2 works. They were friendly and polite to each other, but in that instant, the only things they could agree on was that the 'official' plan was over-engineered, it would not be good for the people living in the area and that money was probably going to be wasted.

Somebody piped in: "It's as if EKFB didn't get the email." They were talking about the outcome of a meeting which took place in Wendover in early summer this year. With the help of Greg Smith MP, WHS2 and Wendover Parish Council had met with Mark Wild, who has been given the task of getting HS2 finished as well as it can be without wasting further time or money. As a result of the meeting, Mark Wild agreed that HS2 would interact with Wendover residents via a single point of contact and took away a number of mitigation points the community wanted to be addressed.

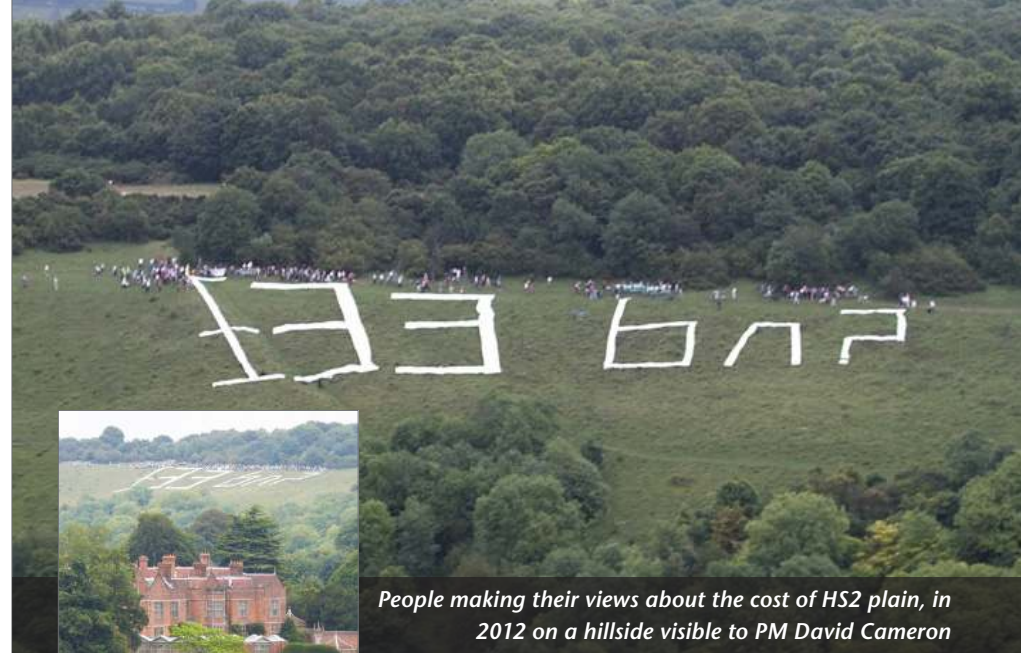
WHS2 members believe that this meeting has been a turning point in their 15-year existence, where it has finally been recognised that Wendover has some legitimate concerns and a right to be heard.

The story of hopeful protest

Wendover HS2 Mitigation Action Group is part of a history of opposition to HS2 which began in 2009. Until that point, much of Britain thought that the general idea of having a railway running up the spine of the country was a good one.

For many though, that changed the following year when it was revealed that the route would crash through the centre of the Chilterns – specifically, through what was then called the 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)' and now, 'National Landscape'.

Murray Cooke one of the first members of WHS2, gave me a potted history of the early years of opposition: "In March of 2010, the new HS2 Ltd published a report confirming their preference for the route to run



People making their views about the cost of HS2 plain, in 2012 on a hillside visible to PM David Cameron

through the Chilterns, emerging from the hills at the Wendover Gap.

"Opposition materialised and quickly brought together many groups into the HS2 Action Alliance, which first met in Quainton on 18 April of that year. A few days later The Wendover Society called a public meeting and soon after the group known as WenSTAG was formed – the forerunner of WHS2."

From 2010 until 2021, several initiatives and campaigns ran in parallel. A large amount of energy was put into stopping HS2 by lobbying, making representations to parliament and bringing the emerging injustices to the notice of national media.

Separate from that, popular resistance



emerged and was characterised by demonstrations, notably the White Elephant protest in 2011 (seen above in the Manor Waste).

In the meantime, other bodies including Wendover and Halton Parish Councils, supported by the group, challenged the detail of the HS2 proposals laid before the Parliamentary Select Committees. Their efforts to get the long Chilterns tunnel extended to an area north of Wendover were unsuccessful, but it did result in an extension to the "cut-and-cover" Wendover Green Tunnel and other important changes.

However, the 'High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Act 2017' (The Act), received royal assent on 23 February 2017. This act,

in effect, gave HS2 draconian powers that overrode those of the county councils and the parish councils over any land through which HS2 would pass.

In the meantime, the mitigation group continued to work hard to reduce the impacts on Wendover. It may not be obvious now, but a lot was achieved during that period, including resurfacing of the by-pass and forcing HS2 to recognise that there was a problem with the Chilterns aquifer water that they had to deal with.

The group updated its name to "WHS2 Mitigation Action Group" and pledged to "Do what's right for Wendover." The intent was to reduce the worst effects locally, by engaging constructively with HS2 and EKFB (HS2's local contractor) and forcing a dialogue with the councils.

Perseverance and Persistence

In 2021 Boris Johnson authorised mobilisation for the construction of HS2. Murray continued: "It had been the practice for EKFB to do whatever they wanted, at a time which suited them. Whilst Buckinghamshire Council is a 'Qualifying Authority' with a role to review and authorise some of the EKFB designs (and subsequent road closures and night working), it has rarely been able to influence the timing or nature of the works.

"The parish council was in a worse position. It isn't an official consultee and has had very little, if any, influence on what HS2 and EKFB did. WHS2 has helped bridge the gap by ensuring our MP and councillors are engaged and at least maintained a dialogue.

"This collaboration finally paid dividends when the community was able to push back against EKFB and HS2. When HS2 was overruled in a planning hearing relating to the construction of the 'spring chamber' (see front page of Wendover News, May 2025) this reached national news. As a result, it has forced EKFB and HS2 to listen to the community and to re-think their ideas."

Time to be heard

Since the August meeting with Mark Wild there have been some positive changes and a more collaborative approach is becoming evident. It has become obvious that while EKFB has excellent engineers, it can't possibly be right that contractors who don't know the area have not consulted with the community first with their plans. This is particularly the case with the reinstatement of landscaping and returning land after the work is complete.

This more collaborative approach comes with a few caveats: Some decisions are technical necessities that can't be worked around, and any improvements accepted need also to have a cost reduction business case and not jeopardise the project timescales.

For the WHS2 Group this means that now is not the time to give up on their efforts. Indeed, they remain optimistic that some positive changes can still be made in the next couple of years as the railway gets completed.

The challenge for WHS2 is that the

thousands of people affected by HS2 will probably have a range of opinions about what 'good' looks like at the detailed level. The challenge of getting members of a family to agree what to watch on the telly will pale by comparison. Hence the WHS2 Group is seeking to be a conduit for the best ideas coming from the community and at the same time asking for volunteers to help with the process.

Public meeting on 21 November

There will be a public meeting called "Wendover after HS2 – have your say," on Friday 21 November, 7pm, at Wendover Memorial Hall. It's the same night as the Christmas on the Manor event but with only a one-hour overlap, so you could visit both!

The event will start with a free glass of wine and a programme of presentations, giving an insight to what progress has been made over the year. The group intends to focus on the years ahead: noise mitigation, reinstatement

of footpaths, bridleways and cycleways and, just as important, landscaping. Crucially, it wants to listen to your feedback.

WHS2 members: currently the team includes Murray Cooke, Andy Band, Ron Petersen, Richard Williams and Martin Baxter. Andrew Burnet covers noise implications of the railway when in operation. Collectively, the team has professional experience in managing large projects and programmes such as: mechanical, civil, electronic engineering and hydrogeology; project controls and systems; legal and commercial law relating to construction contracts and disputes. James Harrington helps with comms and noise modelling. Wendover Parish council sends an observer to most meetings. WHS2 is actively supported by Wendover News and the parish council.

HS2 update



"Wendover after HS2 – have your say!" Public Meeting – 21 November

With the Parish Council, we are holding an HS2 Update public meeting at the Wendover Memorial Hall on Friday 21 November from 19:00. Come along and hear about what's happening with the HS2 project, what this means for Wendover, and help us prioritise what's most important for the community. We've been increasing activity on how land will be restored once HS2 is finished; and need your input about what you think should be done.

Spring Chamber planning application update

We are pleased to report that HS2 and EKFB have taken on board the local community feedback about their plans to create a "Spring Chamber" in the fields at the end of Dobbins Lane.

EKFB has now submitted a revised planning application that addresses the two main issues, with construction traffic now planned to access the site from Nash Lee End; crossing the field adjacent to King's Farm Shop. This removes the need for HGV lorries to come along South Street and Dobbins Lane, which



Tree clearance beside the Wendover Bypass, 14 September. Photo: Andy Band.

was of great concern to residents.

Secondly, the need for a permanent upgrade of the Public Right of Way across the fields into a permanent access road has been removed, which means the visual impact in the Chilterns National Landscape area of outstanding natural beauty has been minimised.

Wendover Green Tunnel progress

Work has started on building the "Phase 2" section, with concrete tunnel segments now being installed near Bacombe Lane. The "Phase 3" northern section needs a new access road from the Wendover bypass for delivery of the concrete tunnel segments.

In September there was an unexpected

overnight removal of a mature tree line along a lengthy stretch of the bypass (see photo at top of page). This breaches the limits of permitted construction noise and



also the extent of the land that was allowed to be cleared. We have raised this with Bucks Council and EKFB, due to the ongoing increased construction noise levels now being experienced at Thornton Crescent.

We are also concerned about the longer term situation where mature trees are expected to form part of the mitigation of noise from HS2 trains for North Wendover residents. Our modelling shows a need for trackside noise barriers in the North Cutting to meet the noise levels expected in the HS2 legislation, and we will be reviewing the situation with EKFB and HS2.

Small Dean Lane cycleway

The temporary bridgeway that enabled a safe cycle route between Wendover and Dunsmore was closed for 17 months from May 2024 for the construction of the underbridge that will allow traffic to access Small Dean Lane underneath the future railway embankment. The bridge is now due for completion by the end of this year.

We have been pressing EKFB to consider alternative ways of providing a safe cycle route, including escalation to Greg Smith MP and Mark Wild, the HS2 CEO. However, after detailed consideration of options, EKFB now thinks that it will not be possible to create a path through the works until the rebuilding of Small Dean Lane is finished; currently expected in early 2028.



Grove Farm Access underbridge, 5 October 2025. Photo: Murray Cooke.

Issues with HS2?

If you're affected by the HS2 construction activity in the Wendover area, please contact the HS2 Helpdesk team on 08081 434 434 (which is available 24 hours a day) or email hs2enquiries@hs2.org.uk to get your issues resolved.

It helps if you have photographic evidence and please get a complaint reference number so that we at WHS2 can also follow up issues as needed.



Need our help?

If you need further help, want to join us, or have ideas and suggestions that would mitigate the community impact, then get in touch at enquiries@whs2.org.

Doing what's right for Wendover
See www.whs2.org

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The Wendover Swimming Pool

Swimming in Wendover!

Did you know that Wendover has a swimming pool on the schools campus at Wharf Road? It's a volunteer-run charity and has public swimming sessions every day. There are free and paid memberships available, and bookings are fully online. More information, membership and booking at www.wendoverswimmingpool.co.uk

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