



Environmental Audit Committee

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Robert Syms MP
House of Commons

Dear Robert,

13 May 2014

HS2 Select Committee

Congratulations on becoming chair of the HS2 Select Committee. As you begin your work, on behalf of the Environmental Audit Committee I would like to draw your attention to our report on *HS2 and the environment* (HC 1076), published on 7 April, and to the assurances we received from the Transport Minister on 29 April regarding your Committee's remit.

In our report we examined the way in which environmental impacts of HS2 had been addressed in the legislative and assessment processes leading up to this point. We recommended that your Select Committee should comment and report to the House on any issue relating to the environmental impact of HS2. This is necessary in order to address shortcomings in the process so far, in particular, as our report describes, the failure to take on board the formal requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment. Indeed, we saw in the Supreme Court's deliberations on the missing SEA a clear expectation that Parliament will ensure that the Hybrid Bill process will deliver the requirements of the environmental assessment directives. In that light, your committee plays a vital role in fully addressing the environmental impacts. We were particularly concerned that the proposed biodiversity offsetting regime for HS2 puts even the modest Government aim of delivering 'no net biodiversity loss' in doubt.

In the debate on the Instructions motion for your committee, Robert Goodwill MP gave us an assurance that:

If a petition includes environmental information that does not touch on the principle of the Bill, it is wholly within the scope of the [HS2 Select] Committee to consider that. If the Committee considers that some reasonable and practical mitigation could be introduced to address the issue, it will amend the Bill to do so. That is a key part of its role and its conclusions will be included in its special report.

In view of that assurance, we hope that you will be able to address the concerns we raised in our report, subject of course to such matters also being raised in the Petitions you receive.

Please let us know how your Committee plans to cover such concerns through its evidence-taking. I do hope that your Committee will be able to give these matters the time and consideration they deserve, particularly given the gaps in the process we have rehearsed in our report.

I am copying this letter to the other members of your Committee.

Sincerely,

Joan Walley MP

Chair, Environmental Audit Committee