



High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill Select Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

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8th December 2014

Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

Dear Secretary of State,

As you know issues of concern for petitioners before the HS2 Committee include blight and compensation. One particular issue has arisen involving the interaction between those issues and planning policy.

Among our petitioners are members of a farming family in Staffordshire (Mr and Mrs Sadler and their elderly mother, petitions 783 and 784) whose property borders the proposed HS2 link to the West Coast Main Line. Their proximity to the proposed route entitles them to require their property to be bought by HS2 so that they can move, but the history of their involvement with the area means that they wish to rebuild on other land within the farm.

The possible creation of such a new building raises the question of what might happen to the existing buildings (which are sound, and might be capable of sale or rent to another set of residents once the project completes).

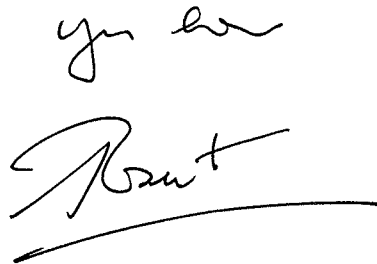
The Sadlers' difficulty, which we suspect will not be unique, is that the local planning policy for this area of green belt means permission to build will be granted only upon demolition of the existing farmhouses, the policy being that there should be no net gain in accommodation. Since the purchased buildings would become HS2's property, HS2 are naturally not particularly disposed toward such a course of action, and that is an obstacle to a sensible negotiation between the Sadlers and HS2.

In the absence of an agreed outcome the Committee might be inclined to recommend that HS2 be compelled to acquire the property, following which it would be compulsorily demolished. This will clearly have a negative effect on the project finances, which will be amplified in so far as similar cases come before us.

Applying a planning policy too rigidly ignores the special circumstances arising from construction of the railway: a policy of protecting green belt might sensibly be adjusted to allow for individual buildings to be retained where they remain useful and where the new buildings have been essentially forced on those affected as a way to remain in the area while reducing the impact of the railway.

Could a set of guidelines be agreed to deal with such situations? As you will understand, if agreement could be reached while our Committee is sitting that might assist greatly in resolution of some issues before us, and achieve what in our view would be a sensible outcome. It would also avoid a potential high cost to HS2 in being required to acquire properties for demolition.

In the particular case of the Sadlers I intend to announce that we might wish to invite Lichfield District Council to discuss the matters with us should progress not be made.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Syms', with a long horizontal line underneath.

Robert Syms
Chair, HS2 Hybrid Bill Select Committee