

Pincher Defies Government to Oppose HS2

Christopher Pincher, Member of Parliament for Tamworth, this week voted against the Government's proposals for a new high speed railway through Staffordshire. The HS2 Bill was debated in Parliament and received the support of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. But forty one MPs, including Mr Pincher, refused to support the scheme which will have a severe impact on communities around Tamworth. Phase 1 of the project will pass close to Drayton Bassett, Hints, Packington and Swinfen whilst Phase 2 brushes Hockley and Stonydelph on the south eastern border of Tamworth.

Mr Pincher spoke in the debate saying:

"My constituents are not nimbys. They tell me that if the business case stacked up, if the mitigation was right and if the compensation on offer was fair, reasonable and quick, they would accept the proposals. They would not like them, but they would accept them in the national interest. The problem is that the business case does not stack up, the mitigations are not right and the compensation is not fair, reasonable or quick."

He went on to say:

"Mitigation in Tamworth extends to a few trees, except around the village of Hints, where the ancient woodland will be demolished to make way for the line. We will gain a few saplings, but we will lose a lot of ancient oaks, because HS2 will not build a cut-and-cover tunnel."

He added that the proposed route did not take advantage of existing transport corridors so doing much more damage to green spaces, did not connect effectively with major airports and was not financially sound. For these reasons, Mr Pincher said he could not support the proposals.

The final vote was 452 MPs in favour of HS2 and 41 against. So the project looks set to continue as the Bill will now be scrutinized line by line in a special "Hybrid Bill" Committee. The Committee's recommendations will not be known until next year but in the meantime affected communications can petition the Committee to have their appeals heard.

Commenting after the vote Mr Pincher said:

"I felt the only right thing to do was to stand up for my constituents and say no to HS2. Although there is no doubt that action needs to be taken to increase capacity on the West Coast Main Line, these proposals do not stack up. They were first introduced by Labour, continued by the Conservatives and are still supported by all the major parties. Only a handful of MPs including me voted against the Bill. So it looks as though HS2 in some form will go ahead. I will now help my constituents affected by Phase 1 to get their views across to the Bill Committee. And I will keep residents in Hockley and Stonydelph concerned about Phase 2 informed – although this is at a much earlier stage."