

# The Colne Valley Park and HS2

The Colne Valley Park Community Interest Company (CIC) is publicly and determinedly opposed to the HS2 project, which will have a direct, negative and permanent impact on a precious and already vulnerable landscape.

We lobbied against HS2 and were deeply dismayed when, on February 11, 2020, the Government confirmed it was to go ahead.

We had hoped the independent review conducted in 2019 might spell the end of this highly controversial and expensive project. Unfortunately, despite gallant protests and heartfelt pleas to scrap it, The Greater Good argument ultimately prevailed, at the expense of a particularly beautiful part of the Colne Valley Regional Park.

The new railway's impact on the countryside is already being felt as preparatory work is carried out along the route between London and Birmingham. It hits the Colne Valley from Ickenham to Chalfont St Peter especially hard – the project includes two tunnel portals, an enormous viaduct and many construction sites. We would have preferred a tunnel to take the line beneath the Colne Valley, but the government rejected that call.

It would be all too easy to throw in the towel when major infrastructure projects, especially those as controversial and colossal as HS2, are approved. But, in our view, it is vitally important to continue to press for mitigating measures that will lessen its impact wherever possible, holding those responsible to their obligations, professional, political and moral.

The Colne Valley Park CIC is not a statutory consultee, and has had no authority to approve or reject HS2's planning applications. Nevertheless, despite our fundamental objections, we are taking a pragmatic approach, engaging with the project team, using our local expertise to campaign for the very best outcome as it proceeds, and holding it fully to account for its actions.

## **Our work so far**

- The Colne Valley Park CIC formally petitioned against HS2 together with local authorities and others. Commitments secured by this partnership include:
- Abandonment of provision for the Heathrow Spur
- Better diversion routes for some Public Rights of Way
- Creation of the [Colne Valley Regional Park Panel](#), an independent body made up of local authorities, wildlife trusts, environmental charities and government agencies that allows views to be directly and clearly heard.
- Production of an [Additional Mitigation Plan](#) for the Colne Valley Regional Park in line with the six objectives of the Park.
- A £3m budget, administered by South Bucks District Council on behalf of the independent Colne Valley Regional Park Panel, to support the delivery of the Additional Mitigation Plan – over £500,000 has already been committed to path improvements and helping bats and water voles. The £3m is independent of, and in addition to, HS2's own mitigation measures.

## **HS2's preparations**

HS2's preparatory work has become increasingly visible during the course of the last year or so. Many familiar and popular views across the Colne Valley are beginning to be compromised, footpaths closed, and the effects of traffic disruption felt.

In March 2019, we intervened when contractors acting for HS2 suddenly closed the Broadwater Lake Nature Reserve, and we immediately made a formal complaint that reached the Secretary of State for Transport. We were given to understand the closure was due to a communications error, but the episode serves to amply illustrate the active role we will continue to play in ensuring HS2 abides strictly by its project brief.

We will continue to pay close attention to HS2's activities, ensuring it sticks to the letter and spirit of its contract, and meets all of its mitigatory obligations as the construction project progresses.