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25 November 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Our shared responsibility to the residents living next to HS2 construction at Euston

We are writing to you, in our capacities as Member of Parliament for Holborn & St Pancras and Leader of Camden Council, to request your support for Camden residents living just metres from the construction site of the High Speed Two (HS2) terminal at Euston.

Since HS2 enabling works began in 2016, council tenants and leaseholders in Cartmel, Coniston and Langdale blocks on the Regents Park Estate and on Cobourg Street and Starcross Street by Euston Station, have experienced increasingly unacceptable disruption to their daily lives. The situation has become so bad that we now believe it is necessary to rehouse these tenants and adequately compensate leaseholders, with financial assistance from HS2.

Residents have told us that with the demolition of neighbouring buildings, their homes have been invaded by rats, their walls shake, their children cannot study, and they cannot sleep; and that following the loss of their local parks, poorly managed road closures and hoardings, they can no longer travel easily or safely by foot, bicycle, private vehicle or public transport, the delivery of their post is disrupted; and crime and anti-social behavior has increased. At the best of times such disruption would be intolerable. During the coronavirus pandemic, residents are necessarily spending much longer in their homes and cannot escape the disturbance.

Such disturbances inevitably have additional negative impacts on mental and physical wellbeing, particularly on those with pre-existing health conditions. On the 15th October Camden sent HS2 an evidence pack outlining excerpts from resident feedback detailing how challenging their daily living situation is living next to the existing HS2 construction. There have been at least 60 HS2 activity-related dust breaches and 13 air quality breaches as part of HS2's early works/site clearance programme. The number of reports we have received of people experiencing respiratory problems: a critical issue during this pandemic is of particular concern.

Main works are now underway, and we believe that with large-scale 'noisy works'¹ officially due to commence in 2021, these homes will soon be uninhabitable.

Camden Council was promised that the 150 assurances received in the parliamentary stages of the HS2 (London to West Midlands) Act 2017 would be sufficient to mitigate the worst impacts of HS2 works, and the government acknowledged that in the absence of effective mitigation the homes adjacent to the construction site would experience unacceptable noise, dust and vibration.

HS2 has not delivered on these agreed assurances. The package of noise insulation (NI) and mechanical ventilation (MV) has been installed in just 13% of the Camden owned properties which HS2 identified as qualifying, and the full package in just 7% of the four worst affected buildings. Our records show that to date HS2 has completed:

- Glazing of 232 of the overall 1104 eligible properties
- Glazing of 101 of the 798 Camden owned properties
- At Cartmel, Coniston, Langdale and Cobourg Street and Starcross Street properties (175 properties eligible):
 - 70 have received glazing;
 - Only 12 of these have mechanical ventilation; and
 - 15 of the 70 completed have reported snagging issues due to defective workmanship.

This raises broader concerns about the integrity of the assurances that Camden Council and other local authorities across the country have received from HS2. Indeed, the Oakervee Report found that HS2 had failed to address the concerns of local authorities along the line and residents affected by HS2 works².

There is now insufficient time to complete the remainder of this work before the start of 'noisy works' near Hampstead Road which will affect a large number of properties. Even if NI and MV were delivered in full and on time, the cumulative physical and psychological impacts of construction on these residents would remain unacceptable, which Camden has been raising since the parliamentary stages of the HS2 Act. Over the coming years:

- Extended working hours mean that construction will continue seven days a week and up until 21:00 during the week; and
- HS2 is legally permitted to exceed 75db 10 days in 15 consecutive days or 40 days in 6 consecutive months (the World Health Organisation has concluded that noise above 55db affects cardio vascular systems, and that above 40db vulnerable groups start to be affected³).

¹ We consider that 'noisy works' began officially in October 2020 with piling at Euston Station affecting a small number of Council properties on Coburg Street and Starcross Street. Noisy works along Hampstead Road and the cutting will be of a much greater scale and are due to commence in January 2021.

² Oakervee Review Para 10.26 - Evidence provided to the review indicated that HS2 Ltd's treatment of residents in some cases has not met the standards set out in the Residents' Charter. There is also ample evidence that HS2 Ltd has failed to properly address the concerns of local authorities and local people affected by HS2 works. As a consequence, this would indicate that, HS2 Ltd's stakeholder engagement is not adequate in its performance and strength, as well as not having people who are fully knowledgeable of the local areas affected by HS2. Further, the Review notes that contractors and HS2 Ltd need to work in harmony on these matters.

³ World Health Organisation Guidelines for Community Noise - <https://www.who.int/docstore/peh/noise/Comnoise-1.pdf>

In recent months, Camden Council entered negotiations with HS2 to discuss options for supporting residents and put forward a cost-effective proposal to decant the properties most seriously affected by construction, including both tenants and leaseholders. This proposal included collaborative working with the council to deliver replacement affordable housing in a way that offsets the overall cost to the programme and the government in the long term.

Negotiations made promising progress, so we were deeply disappointed that the Department for Transport withdrew its support without explanation during the final stages. This proposal represents the best outcome for residents, and your own officials acknowledged that it would be cost neutral in the long-term and offer the government excellent value for money. We urge you to reconsider this solution that ensures quality of life for residents and is cost-neutral to the HS2 programme in the long-term.

The HS2 in Euston construction site sits within some of the largest, most vibrant and active social housing communities in our borough and Camden Council has already worked closely with HS2 Ltd and your department to deliver replacement affordable housing for those blocks within the red line that required demolition. We kept the community together and gave families beautiful new homes.

We ask you, as the Secretary of State, to work with us and back the deal that Camden Council sought to agree with your department, to find a way forward for all parties and protect those who are being forced to suffer daily.

Our priority from the outset has been to secure the best for our residents, ensuring they can continue to live, work and learn in comfort during a decade of intense construction work. We also believe we are seeking the best outcome for Euston, for an ambitious, transformative station that supports a flourishing community.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person to visit the affected areas so you can see first-hand the disruption that we have described.

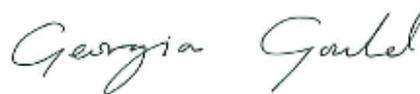
Given the high level of local public interest in this issue, we have shared a copy of this correspondence with the local press.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Keir Starmer QC
MP for Holborn and St Pancras



Cllr Georgia Gould
Leader
London Borough of Camden