The Impact on the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was designated in 1965 and covers 833 square kilometres. It is one of the finest landscapes in England and Wales. The importance of caring for these special places is enshrined in legislation including the Countryside and Rights of Way 2000. Section 85 includes the following general duty on public bodies:

85. - (1) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority (incl a Minister of the Crown) shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.

There is a considerable body of national and local planning policy which specifically aims to conserve and enhance Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This means there are tight controls on any form of development, small or large.

To reinforce these national aspirations for the Chilterns AONB, in 2004 Parliament established the Chilterns Conservation Board. The Secretary of State appoints eight members directly to the Board to represent the national interest.

The Chilterns AONB is one of the most popular areas in Europe for walking, cycling and horse riding. There are over 50 million visits made annually for the purposes of enjoying quiet recreation (Tourism South East 2007).

The Chilterns Conservation Board opposes the proposed scheme because of the scale of temporary and permanent adverse impacts on the environment and its enjoyment which are contrary to the purposes of designation.

As proposed the High Speed Two will have the following permanent impacts on the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

- 7 miles/11.5 kilometres of the route will be on the surface, embankment, viaduct shallow cuttings or cut and cover tunnels.
- 18 hectares of woodland will be destroyed including 10.2 hectares of Ancient Woodland.
- 41 kilometres of hedgerows including 5.6 kms of important and historic hedgerows will be destroyed.
- A 150 metre section of Grim’s Ditch Scheduled Monument will be destroyed.
- 460 hectares of land will be taken for construction; 204 hectares will be permanently taken of which 194 ha’s is currently productive farmland.
- Over 200 mature and veteran trees (outside of woodland) will be felled.
- 12 million tonnes of spoil will be generated and potentially dumped in the Chilterns AONB.
- 17 kilometres of security fencing.
- 5.5 kilometres of noise barriers up to 4 metres high.
- 3 vent shafts up 4 metres high covering 3,300 sq. metres each.
• 2 auto transformers electricity stations covering 2,200 sq. metres each.
• Up to 500 gantries carrying overhead wires.
• 2 viaducts of 500 metres at Wendover Dean and Wendover up to 26 metre high including the gantries.
• 2 so-called green tunnels of 1 kilometre each of which involve complete excavation to a depth of up to 20 metres.
• An unknown number of telecommunication masts.
• 9 new bridges for roads, tracks and rights of way.
• 6 kilometres of redesigned and re-aligned country roads.
• Over 3.5 kilometres of new service roads.
• An unknown amount of lighting and light pollution caused by trains and flashing from the pantographs.
• Loss of ancient countryside.
• Loss of, and disturbance to, wildlife including loss of the entire Barn Owl population and severe restriction on the movement of mammals including deer.
• The creation of 29 settling ponds and flood swales.
• Over 1.8 kilometres of embankments and up to 16 metres high (with gantries of 8 metres on top).
• The visual intrusion and noise pollution of up to 36 trains per hour travelling at up to 360 kilometres per hour.
• Loss of amenity for over 10,000 residents living within 2 kms of the route.

Each one of these impacts would be a reason for refusing an “ordinary” planning application. The scale and breadth of the impacts listed needs to be considered individually and cumulatively. The conclusion of the Environmental Statement that the overall impact on the Chiltern AONB is not considered to be significant, but only moderately adverse, is not credible and is not supported by an objective analysis of the evidence.

If it is Parliament’s will that this railway is to be built on the current route then most of these adverse impacts could be avoided by a bored tunnel for the section of route through the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.