

Key landscape design principles for the HS2 route through the Chilterns AONB

The design will seek to conserve and enhance the distinctive and nationally recognised landscape of the Chilterns AONB and its setting, including its ecological, heritage and recreational assets¹ by striving to ensure that:

1. The railway is integrated into the landscape by design measures that are in keeping with the particular local landscape context and that meet associated ecological, heritage and social objectives.
2. The detailed design seeks to reduce significant effects identified on landscape character and visual resource identified in the HS2 Ltd Phase 1 Environmental Statement by using mitigation measures which are in keeping with the scenic beauty, character and context of the location.
3. Where large scale features, such as viaducts, cannot be integrated into the landscape, highest quality design should be adopted to create elegant features of interest, complementary to the character and intrinsic beauty of the Chilterns.
4. Design of permanent earthworks avoids change to the character of the chalk landform and its topography of dip slope, ridges, dry valleys and coombes, and all permanent earthworks are designed to integrate with their particular landscape context.
5. Woodland infill within dry valleys is avoided so as to maintain the pattern of woodland cover along steep valley sides and the plateau top. Preference is given to native species typical of the area that are resilient to disease, while giving consideration to climate change.
6. The small scale landscape structure and pattern of co-axial and other historic field patterns is maintained by respecting and re-instating where possible any historic hedgerows and boundaries that are disrupted (ref. 'Chilterns Historic Landscape Characterisation' 2009)
7. The character of the distinctive lanes, including holloways, that climb the valley sides to the higher plateau land and form part of the fabric of this historic landscape is respected. As far as possible, these lanes should be conserved (including truncated sections); restored where disrupted during construction; or, where sections are replaced, their character is reflected in the design of the new sections.
8. Where rights of way are severed, diversions will maintain the overall countryside experience, connectivity and enjoyment of the landscape and, where possible and desirable, the length of diversions will be minimised.

9. The impact of noise and light from the operation of the railway on the tranquillity and dark skies of the rural landscape and settings of its historic assets, is minimised with remaining impacts mitigated by measures that respect the local landscape character.
10. All structures should respect and respond sympathetically to the distinctive rural character of the AONB, including its historic buildings and their settings.
11. The hydrological and physical characteristics of the chalk landscape and associated dry valleys are respected in the design, in particular ensuring water attenuation features are well designed and integrated within the existing landscape, with potential for providing wildlife habitats.
12. Opportunities are sought to reduce ecological fragmentation by facilitating ecological permeability of the route and creating/enhancing valuable habitat to improve connectivity across the route. Interconnected networks incorporating a range of habitats (habitat mosaics) will improve wildlife connectivity across the wider landscape. All such measures should respect the local landscape character.
13. Greening of bridges, wildlife underpasses and other design solutions, are considered in order to minimise disruption to wildlife movement and habitat connectivity, deliver a range of other ecosystem services benefits, and improve integration with the landscape surroundings.
14. The use of additional infrastructure such as fencing, signage and lighting is minimised to reduce visual clutter and designed to integrate with its particular context.
15. Options for adjusting vertical alignment to reduce landscape and visual impact should be fully explored.
16. Options for reducing the width of cuttings are considered where there are opportunities to reduce harm to landscape character, wildlife habitat, historic assets and their settings, including ancient woodland.
17. When developing proposals for mitigation for the Hs2 scheme, consideration should be given to how this mitigation might also contribute to wider landscape enhancement.

NB: Overarching landscape principles are found in the HS2 Landscape Design Approach

¹ These aspects contribute towards the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Reference to heritage assets includes reference to their setting.