

**HS2 Parkgate Steering Group Report on the work of the parishes of Abbots Bromley, Hoar Cross  
and Newborough**

**A summary of activity - July 2018 – April 2019**

This is a brief summary of the circumstances surrounding the plans by HS2 to build a new substation at Parkgate and the work of the combined parishes of Abbots Bromley, Hoar Cross and Newborough. The aim from the start has been to understand the reasons why HS2 came to favour Parkgate as a power source, and preferably to move the infrastructure out of our area. Failing that, we felt that undergrounding the cables would have a less detrimental visual impact on the landscape in the long term.

**Background**

HS2 phase 2a is the planned extension of the High Speed Railway 2. Phase 2a is set to run from the West Midlands to Crewe. Up until July 2018 the line, and its supporting infrastructure has passed close to our parishes but had not directly impacted upon them.

**July 2018**

News of the Parkgate proposal was leaked to the Cannock Chase Express and Star who published an article on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> July. It can be viewed here:

<https://www.expressandstar.com/news/politics/2018/07/04/huge-power-line-plan-for-hs2/>

Following some communications with HS2, we learned that Parkgate came into existence to solve some problems with the original plan for sourcing power in this area, the existing substation at Rugeley Power Station.

**Rugeley Power Station**

The power station closed in 2013. It is scheduled for demolition and mixed-use redevelopment including over 1000 new homes. There is an existing large substation on site which is a critical part of the National Grid and cannot be moved. HS2 originally sought to draw power from that substation, taking power on three sets of wooden poles across the countryside to what they call an Auto Transformer Feeder Station, located at Newlands Lane near Colton. After deposition of the original bill, which included this plan, two factors came into play which caused HS2 to look elsewhere.

*Political –*

The owners of the Rugeley Power Station site, Engie PLC (in the name of their subsidiary company Rugeley Power Ltd) petitioned against the plan. Engie's petition can be viewed here, petition 009:

<http://committeebusiness.parliament.uk/committee-business/1/high-speed-rail>

In the written petition, they do not specifically ask HS2 to look elsewhere, but their concerns regarding HS2's land take on site are evident.

Staffordshire County Council, supported by Lichfield and Cannock Chase District Council also petitioned in relation to the Rugeley Power Station site.

Again their petitions do not specifically ask HS2 to look elsewhere.

HS2 responded to their petition in a letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> May 2018, a copy of which can be seen here:

[https://www.parliament.uk/documents/00130\\_Staffordshire%20County%20Council\\_Statement.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/documents/00130_Staffordshire%20County%20Council_Statement.pdf)

This letter acknowledges the importance of Rugeley for redevelopment and states that HS2 have been talking to other interested parties in relation to action which could be taken.

### *Engineering –*

HS2 claimed that since the original bill was passed through Parliament, further work from National Grid suggested that Rugeley would not in fact provide the required resilience in terms of power supply to the railway. Two electrical circuits could be taken from Rugeley but due to “traction power changes” (we have never seen evidence or reports regarding these changes) HS2 decided they would need three circuits in this area. The third circuit provides back-up power in the event of failure of the other circuits, and can be used during planned maintenance etc.

The fact that HS2 and National Grid apparently made such a fundamental error with regards to the original power supply plan did very little to assuage concerns that the move away from Rugeley was entirely due to freeing up that site for redevelopment.

These were the circumstances surrounding the Parkgate proposals as faced when the HS2 steering committee coalesced in around September 2018.

### ***The HS2 Parkgate Steering Committee***

It quickly became apparent that all three parishes – Abbots Bromley, Hoar Cross and Newborough had common aims and objectives with regards to Parkgate, so a joint group was formed. Led by Bethan Waite (Newborough) with Alan Fleet (Hoar Cross) and Roger Jarman (Abbots Bromley), Charles Meynell, Brian Biddulph, Bryn Walters, Angela Brown, John and Helen Sherwood, Jeff Mason and Richard Knight, the committee essentially sought to put HS2 to proof as to their justification for Parkgate.

### ***Freedom of Information Requests***

We wanted to know if there had been any further recorded and viewable correspondence between Rugeley Power Station owners, Engie, and HS2. Such correspondence might have given enlightening information regarding political manoeuvrings to get HS2 away from Rugeley, so we submitted a Freedom of Information (FOI) request seeking this correspondence. The request was refused – HS2

stated that their staff should be able to freely discuss matters on email without fear of public scrutiny, otherwise all discussions would be taken off-air, as it were, which wouldn't help the process in the long run.

We wanted to see specific engineering reports in relation to the original plan to use Rugeley. Information regarding suitability of the existing substation, potential capacity which could be tapped into, engineering challenges etc, would have helped us to assess the veracity of the claim that it was no longer suitable as a source of power. HS2 responded by pointing us in the direction of their Community Area Report, a document which was in the public domain and already in our possession.

### ***Alternative Sources of Power***

If Rugeley was truly being ruled out, it still didn't answer the question of "why Parkgate" compared to other sources of power. Any lay person looking at the map of the area would see that there are numerous potential sources of power to the railway, several of them seemingly nearer to the railway than Parkgate. Our specific focus was on three areas:

#### *Kings Bromley –*

Adjacent to the A515 just to the south of Kings Bromley, the proposed HS2 railway line actually crosses the main National Grid 400kv system. There would be adequate power at that location and it is only a few miles further south along the line from Newlands Lane. When power was to come from Rugeley, Newlands Lane was deemed the optimal position from which to put power to the line. With Rugeley ruled out, could Kings Bromley be the location where power was put to the line instead? This would involve no new pylons at all, it would involve placing a substation adjacent to the line at Kings Bromley but that particular area is already facing significant reshaping as a result of the actual train line passing through. We suspected HS2 may have thought of this already, but if they'd originally promoted Rugeley as a power source without checking its capacity, we figured all ideas could still be on the table no matter how obvious they might seem.

#### *Lawnmeadow Covert –*

Near to Hill Ridware, the 400kv National Grid system again passes in closer proximity to Newlands Lane than Parkgate. The possibility of constructing a substation in this location to take power to Newlands Lane was considered by HS2 in the original bill, but it was discounted as National Grid said it "wasn't viable", but there was no indication as to why not. The route from a substation at Lawnmeadow Covert to Newlands Lane would involve 3.6km of cables compared to 7.7km from Parkgate. An acknowledged problem with the substation at Rugeley is that to draw power from it, to Newlands Lane, would involve tunnelling under the River Trent and the existing West Coast Main Line. Being located to the north of both of these hazards, Lawnmeadow Covert looked to be of specific interest, and it did not seem as if HS2 had reconsidered it as an alternative to Parkgate.

#### *Stratera Energy proposed gas-fired power station at Bellamour Lane –*

Chris Kemp, resident of Abbots Bromley parish, brought to our attention a planning application from a company named Stratera Energy to Lichfield District Council for a new gas-fired power station at Bellamour Lane near Colton. Stratera Energy are completely separate from HS2 and this planning

application is completely unrelated. It is a small power station designed to act as a buffer to the National Grid electrical supply. With the increasing reliance of the nation on renewable sources of power, dull windless days reduce the amount of power to the grid, so power stations such as this one are called upon – they can move from off to fully operational in under five minutes, so we wondered if this facility might be called upon as the supply for the third circuit which HS2 were saying could not be taken from Rugeley. In other words, HS2 would stick to the Rugeley plan but obtain the resilience they sought from this new facility at Bellamour Lane.

It took several meetings and the sifting of large amounts of information from HS2 to reach a level of knowledge and understanding of these potential alternatives.

### ***Undergrounding***

Our fallback position, in the absence of HS2 returning to Rugeley or seriously re-opening the investigation of alternatives to Parkgate, was always to ask for the cables between Parkgate and Newlands Lane to be buried underground. At an early stage, Michael Fabricant MP and Staffordshire County Council indicated they would support undergrounding, as did, later, East Staffordshire Borough Council.

The cost of undergrounding is significantly higher than pylons, albeit obtaining precise figures is not a straightforward task.

### ***October 2018 - HS2 community engagement event***

HS2 organised a community engagement event at Abbots Bromley Village Hall in October 2018, which was well attended by the local community. However, at this event, which obviously included some passionate debate, precise facts concerning Parkgate and the rationale for it, were not exactly forthcoming.

### ***Activity in Winter 2018/2019***

The steering committee met several times to discuss next steps and our options going forward. The submission of further Freedom of Information Requests was discussed but at this stage we knew that HS2 were about to publish a more detailed explanation for Parkgate, and this was duly made public in January 2019.

A copy of this document is viewable here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/776734/C861-ARP-PT-REP-000-100229.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/776734/C861-ARP-PT-REP-000-100229.pdf)

Note that the document still doesn't satisfactorily rule out the alternative sources of power mentioned above, nor does it especially detail the precise problems with Rugeley which caused it to be ruled out.

### ***Canvassing of Opinion regarding undergrounding***

We decided to find out the level of support for undergrounding the cables amongst landowners – those who faced having the cables directly crossing their land. We wrote to all of them giving information on the relative merits of undergrounding and pylons and we asked for their thoughts or preferences. We did not receive a comprehensive response from landowners but those who replied all favoured undergrounding of the cables.

### ***February 2019 – preparation of petition***

Upon receipt of the above document justifying Parkgate, the steering group quickly concluded that it would submit a petition. Points of petition

- More thorough investigation of alternatives to Parkgate
- In the absence of alternatives, underground the cables
- Seek reassurances regarding construction traffic, time management of traffic to and from the Parkgate site etc
- Highlight the nearby presence of Blithfield Reservoir and potential for birds to fly into cables

During the preparation of the petition, contact was made with the West Midland Bird Club – they look after the birdwatching and monitoring activities on the reservoir, and in they submitted their own petition.

### ***Support for the petition***

Support for our petition in its entirety came from Michael Fabricant MP and East Staffordshire District Council. The Headteacher of Newborough Primary School wrote a letter in support, the issue of traffic through Newborough being of specific concern. Staffordshire County Council supported our request for the cables to be placed underground instead of on pylons.

A copy of our petition is downloadable here (it is number 39):

<https://committeebusiness.parliament.uk/committee-business/3/high-speed-rail>

Our supporting documentation, which was presented to the Select Committee, is viewable here:

[https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/hs2-phase-2a/written-evidence/AP2-00039\\_HS2%20Parkgate%20Steering%20Group\\_Petitioner.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/hs2-phase-2a/written-evidence/AP2-00039_HS2%20Parkgate%20Steering%20Group_Petitioner.pdf)

### ***Promoter's Response***

HS2 responded to our petition and, for the most part, they referred us back to information which we already had. We did receive some assurances regarding traffic.

The committee felt that the response from HS2 was still insufficient and we therefore concluded to press on for an appearance at the select committee.

The Promoter's response can be downloaded here:

[https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/hs2-phase-2a/written-evidence/P1175%20Grid%20Supply%20Point%20Connection%20at%20Parkgate%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/hs2-phase-2a/written-evidence/P1175%20Grid%20Supply%20Point%20Connection%20at%20Parkgate%20(1).pdf)

### **Select Committee Opening Session – 26<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

Prior to our own appearance at the select committee, there was an interesting development at an opening hearing in the committee room on 26<sup>th</sup> March. In this session, HS2 first outlined to the committee their decision to leave Rugeley and move to Parkgate. This session is viewable here starting at 9.38:

<https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/b64f1edc-452b-4d7e-8abd-82271d57ca0a>

What is interesting is that the MP's on the committee seem at this time to be unconvinced by the decision to move to Parkgate. They ask almost all of the questions which we raised in our own petition. HS2's answers do not appear to satisfy the committee and they (HS2) are charged with providing further detail regarding the unsuitability of alternative sources of power and the justification for Parkgate.

There was an evident similarity between this session in Westminster and our own village hall HS2 engagement session in October 2018.

Towards the end of the discussion in relation to Parkgate, the MPs ask HS2 for a further explanatory note, with more detail regarding the rationale for Parkgate and the unsuitability of the alternatives.

### **HS2 more detailed response**

As requested by the committee on 26<sup>th</sup> March, a further document was made available by HS2 on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> April. The text of that document is viewable here:

<https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/Promoter%20evidence%20-%20Opening%20Statement%20-%20Traction%20Power.pdf>

This document does answer many of the points in our petition in more detail, but by this point we had committed to appearing at the committee hearing and there were still points to be made.

### **Select committee hearing**

The Select Committee hearing took place in the Houses of Parliament on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. Richard Knight outlined our petition and sought clarification on several points. The session is viewable here:

<https://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/a24453ad-eb9d-49f6-89ad-9def410c8e41>

HS2's responses to Richard's enquiries still did not fully explain the situation regarding Parkgate, but it was probably the best we could have hoped for given the general levels of obfuscation, and potential political overtones, surrounding the move to Parkgate.

At time of writing, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2019, there has been no news from the select committee with regards to decisions either way. However on 28 May 2019 HS2 published a document indicating that the additional cost to underground cables from Parkgate was just under £30M. It can be viewed here:

<https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/hs2-phase-2a/written-evidence/Underground%20Costings.pdf>

All publications relating to the AP2 Select Committee can be viewed here:

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/high-speed-rail-west-midlands-crewe-bill-select-committee-commons/publications-17-19/>

Richard Knight/May 2019