

HS2 submits plans for Balsall Common Viaduct

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HS2's has submitted plans for Balsall Common Viaduct in Warwickshire to Solihull Council.

HS2's main works contractor, Balfour Beatty VINCI (BBV), supported by a Design Joint Venture of Mott MacDonald and Systra together with architects Weston Williamson + Partners, have engaged with people in the local area over the last year to gather feedback on the viaduct – a 425-metre-long section of the UK's new zero-carbon high speed rail line.

HS2 says understanding the landscape context was a key focus of the design, allowing the team to create a viaduct that 'reflects and reveals' itself within the landscape. Planting and species selection was another key focus, with the plans now including wet woodland planting using native species to the local area; mixed native woodland plants such as midland hawthorn and black poplar, two notable local species; woodland edge planting to provide screening; and hedgerow planting to improve wildlife connections.

Reflecting the historic local growing of flax for weaving into linen, an alternative grass species mix will incorporate blue flowered plants including blue flax, cornflower and forget-me-nots. Bird boxes will be added in the trees in various locations to serve common bird species such as robin, blue tit and great tit.

HS2 says a realignment of Bayleys Brook will increase habitat for fish, aquatic invertebrates and

potentially water vole. Design changes have also reduced the size of the railway embankment running parallel to Bayleys Brook by 75 metres, improving the resiliency of the area to flooding, and enhancing views through the viaduct to the wider landscape.

To improve connections, the Kenilworth Greenway will be extended to Station Road on the south-eastern side of the existing railway line and a further extension towards Lavender Hall is currently under consideration. Options for cycling and bridleway extensions are also being considered.

HS2 Ltd's Senior Project Manager for Balsall Common, Alan Payne said: "Over the last couple of years, we've worked closely with the community and local councillors to incorporate their feedback on Balsall Common Viaduct as much as possible. We're confident that our plans respect and enhance the local history and natural environment of the area, and will provide new green areas for people and wildlife to enjoy.

"The HS2 project supports nearly 30,000 jobs – of which nearly 9,000 are employed in the West Midlands, with local businesses across the region benefitting from supply chain contracts. Once complete, HS2 will transform journeys across the UK, help boost the economy and provide extra capacity on the existing rail network."

Shaun Ruffles, Landscape Architecture Director from HS2's Design Joint Venture said: "The team have worked hard over the past 4 years to significantly improve on the hybrid Bill design to ensure that the environment and people using the area are at the heart of the design.

"The finalised design for the Balsall Common Viaduct has been driven by its context and responds directly to it. The concept of 'reflect and reveal' has been key to this, with views of the viaduct revealed and filtered by the mature oak trees in the wider historic landscape. The viaduct is further integrated through its reflection in local water features and in the polished acoustic parapets which will reflect the skyline, lightening the structure further."

BBV will construct a total of 16 piers to carry the viaduct 10m above ground, crossing over Station Road, Bayleys Brook, Heart of England Way Walk and the local floodplain. Construction refinements have reduced the size of each pier by as much as 17 per cent for single piers and 28 per cent for double piers, giving the structure a lighter appearance. Responding to feedback about the look of the viaduct, a section at Station Road will be finished with a bespoke pattern, referencing the local history of the area.

People can register to attend an event on Thursday 16 February at Balsall Common Village Hall to view the latest plans and talk to the team: www.hs2.org.uk/balsall-common

Photo credit: HS2 Ltd