

HS2 welcomes planning approval for green tunnel in Burton Green

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HS2 welcomes Schedule 17 planning permission from Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council for the design of the green tunnel at Burton Green.

The designs respond to community feedback, focusing on bigger and better green spaces around the railway, following public engagement events in October 2019 and March 2022.

The plans for the southern end of the structure have already been approved by Warwickshire District Council, where the railway will travel in a 400-metre green tunnel, which means the railway will be hidden, and the roof will be covered with landscape planting and new footpaths to sensitively integrate the railway into the surrounding landscape and enhance local biodiversity.

Solihull Council's approval of the northern section of the structure, where the railway exits the tunnel north portal in a 1.4 kilometre cutting with retained walls, completes the planning approvals for this stretch of HS2.

A key feature for this area is the realignment of the Kenilworth Greenway, which provides a link from Balsall Common to Kenilworth via Burton Green for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders. The new Greenway will cross under Cromwell Lane and then cross the roof of the green tunnel and run alongside the railway cutting, with noise barriers further minimising impacts on the local community.

Large-scale planting of native trees and shrubs will provide biodiverse habitats for wildlife, shield the Greenway visibly from the new railway, and re-establish vegetated connections to Black Waste Wood and Little Poors Wood which are both areas of ancient woodland.

Alan Payne, HS2's Senior Project Manager said: "We're delighted to receive Schedule 17 planning consent for the northern section of the green tunnel from Solihull Council. We're committed to maximising green space around the new high speed railway, and have worked with residents and authorities to ensure our tunnel design conserves, enhances and transforms the landscape in this area.

"The design for the permanent realignment for the Kenilworth Greenway and the landscape infrastructure created over the green tunnel is central to how we deliver this, linking the local community and railway with the wider landscape."

The green tunnel in Burton Green was designed by the Mott MacDonald SYSTRA Design Joint Venture working for HS2's main works contractor for the West Midlands, Balfour Beatty VINCI (BBV), who are constructing 90km of HS2 between Long Itchington in Warwickshire to the centre of Birmingham and on to Staffordshire.

Shaun Ruffles, Mott MacDonald SYSTRA Design Joint Venture (MMSDJV) Landscape Director said: "We are really pleased with the outcome of the green tunnel and Kenilworth Greenway realignment at Burton Green. It highlights the importance of listening to the local community in terms of delivering on their aspirations for greater permeability for active travel routes, whilst recreating the subtle characteristics of the original greenway in the wider landscape masterplan."

This is one of five 'green tunnels' being built on the project. As well as Burton Green in the West Midlands, there are green tunnels at Cophthall in Hillingdon, Wendover in Buckinghamshire and Chipping Warden and Greatworth, both in Northamptonshire.

Construction of the underground elements of the tunnel has already started, including the widening of the old historic railway cutting to the width of the new tunnel, construction of the wall panels to the north of Cromwell Lane, and completion of the diversion of Cromwell Lane to facilitate the start of construction of the tunnel's southern section.

The south portal and tunnel wall panels have been constructed, along with the solid tunnel roof to the north of the original Cromwell Lane bridge, and work is progressing on the Cromwell Lane underpass to facilitate the diversion of Cromwell Lane.

The tunnel roof slab to the north of Cromwell Lane and excavations in this section have started. Over the coming months, work includes continuation of the main tunnel excavation, construction of the tunnel base slab and internal mid-wall, demolition and removal of Cromwell Lane bridge, work to join the northern

section to the south portal, and construction of the tunnel roof slab to the south of Cromwell Lane.

The bowl-shaped landscape around the south tunnel portal and the portal services building will eventually be planted with trees and shrubs so that the structures are not easily visible from the surrounding area and have been designed to guide bats around the portal and away from the trains. This will help maintain the tranquillity of the Greenway, which runs parallel to the new railway alignment.

Once the tunnel is built, the cutting will be back filled with soils as the basis for recreating the landscape, and soil will conceal the tunnel roof to support new native woodland planting, reconnected wildlife corridors and new public footpaths. New ecological features such as wildflower species found locally, and bat and bird boxes will create bigger and better wildlife habitats.

While the railway is being built, HS2 has created a temporary route for the Kenilworth Greenway that is safe for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders, which starts at the site of the new Burton Green Village Hall and then follows the existing field boundaries linking with Berkswell Station in the northwest.