SMZ Meeting

SMZ stands for Special Management Zone and is a forum for HS2, their main contractor BBV, regional HS2 impacted communities, local government agencies, our MP Rachel Taylor, and other key stakeholders to discuss issues in an informal way.

Steve Stuart and I, Feli Freeman, represent Water Orton villagers.

Meetings are held every 2 months.

January issues included

- Flooding on Birmingham Road, Plank Lane and Attleboro Lane,
- The shocking state our roads and pavements are in along Plank Lane and Birmingham Road
- Traffic impacts
- Graffiti prevention
- HS2 complaints process being broken and villagers not being heard or listened to by HS2
- Persistent odour complaints
- Updates on Works Packages in and around Water Orton.

A representative from HS2 explained the workings of the Enquiries and Complaints process and gave assurances that Complaints by villagers will be given fullest attention. Villagers need to lodge complaints by phone or email and request a complaint reference number to be allocated.

The odour lingering over our village according to Matt Glover of BBV relates to the spoil being dug out from the Tunnel. A representative from HS2 gave comfort to villagers affected by the strong smell by stating that the Tunnel dig itself should be complete by the summer.

Facilitated by County Councillor Watson, Sir Mark Worthington, independent HS2 Construction Commissioner, came to Water Orton on 15th January 2025 along with our MP. Steve Stuart accompanied them on their walkabout along Attleboro Lane. At Steve Stuart's request Sir Mark then proceeded to look at the sorry state of Plank Lane and the deteriorating Birmingham Road.

I had the pleasure of meeting Sir Mark at a later SMZ meeting where I took the opportunity to describe the extraordinary sacrifices exacted from our village. I explained the stress villagers are experiencing in their daily lives, traffic disruption, endless

queues, Birmingham Road being of particular concern. Sir Mark promised yo look at the issues highlighted and emphasised how important the complaints process is. He further advised of the Special Cases panel which he is part of that gives particular attention to individuals with aggravated circumstances.

Our MP Rachel Taylor told of her growing casework and how she engages with HS2 and holds them to task.

A heartfelt thank you goes to Councillor Watson for facilitating Sir Mark's visit and him seeing and hearing of the profound challenges experienced by Water Orton residents.