

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) welcomes the Government's commitment to invest in rail rather than seeking to promote new roads or air travel. But there is a long way to go before we can be sure that High Speed 2 (HS2) will not have an unacceptable impact on the landscape and local communities.

Secretary for State for Transport, Justine Greening, has today announced that HS2 will proceed, with some welcome changes to the proposed route, with more tunnelling and mitigation, and a commitment to further local consultation [1].

Shaun Spiers, CPRE Chief Executive, says: "We are pleased the Government has shown its commitment to Britain's railways while being sensitive to the impact that HS2 will have on communities and the countryside.

"It appears that Ministers really have engaged with the consultation responses. So we welcome the changes that have been announced, notably the further tunnelling in the Chilterns and alterations to the route to avoid important heritage sites. Justine Greening is right that in delivering this important scheme we must safeguard the natural environment and our beautiful countryside.

"Today's announcement is just one step in a very long process. There is still much more work to be done. The route proposed today requires detailed study and it is likely that further changes will need to be made. In particular, CPRE would like to see flexibility on the maximum design speed to allow more sensitive routing with greater curvature of the track. This will allow for necessary alterations following further local consultation.

"But the Government deserves congratulation for showing commitment to the future of our railways and to addressing regional economic imbalances, rather than concentrating development in the south east. We are particularly pleased that this appears to have been a genuine consultation and that legitimate concerns about the likely impact of HS2 on the landscape have been heard.

"CPRE has branches and member parish councils across the country and we will continue to

engage closely with the Government and HS2 Ltd to ensure that the new railway is as environmentally sensitive and beneficial to local communities as possible.”