

Councillor backtracks over Osborne HS2 claim

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By Andy Carswell

CLAIMS Chancellor George Osborne helped ensure a detour of the controversial HS2 line through his constituency led to council bosses making a hasty retraction.

The plans released this week show the line missing much of Mr Osborne's affluent Tatton constituency in Cheshire, with the cost of this section being estimated at £600m.

Confirmation of the route was followed by Cheshire East Council Leader Michael Jones claiming the Chancellor himself had influenced the decision.

But within hours the Tory councillor was forced to backtrack and release a second statement denying Mr Osborne had played any part in the discussions.

The first statement reportedly quoted Cllr Jones as saying: 'Your MPs George Osborne, Edward Timpson and I have fought hard to keep the line away from Knutsford and Tatton, which we have been successful in achieving.'

"Throughout the process we raised concerns about the line of the route and raised the profile for a commonsense solution, which I believe we have achieved."

But this was subsequently taken off the council's website and replaced with another statement that read: "In a press release, Cheshire East Council stated that George Osborne had fought hard to keep the HS2 rail link out of his constituency in Knutsford and Tatton."

"In fact, this is not the case and MP George Osborne had no say whatsoever over the proposed route of the HS2 link. We are happy to set the record straight."

Andrew Garnett, Chiltern District Council's Tory group leader, said he had no qualms over Mr Osborne lobbying for a better deal for his constituents.

But he added: "How can it be right for £600m to be spent on avoiding wealthy villages in the north west when an AONB - a national treasure - cannot get a yes to a cost neutral tunnel through it?"

"No one could argue with George Osborne fighting for his constituents - it's what MPs do all the time. I see no need for the obfuscation."

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