

Divisions Affected - Ploughley

REPORT FOR CABINET

19 July 2022

OXFORDSHIRE STRATEGIC RAILFREIGHT INTERCHANGE

Report by Corporate Director for Environment and Place

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to** approve Oxfordshire County Council's response to a non-statutory public consultation on the proposals for the Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange.

Executive Summary

2. A strategic rail freight interchange, with an accompanying 600,000 sqm of warehousing and distribution space, is being promoted by Oxfordshire Railfreight Ltd, south of Ardley village and adjacent to Heyford Park. Whilst the concept of SRFIs is supported by Government policy and by the emerging Oxfordshire Freight and Logistics Strategy, due to its scale and rural location, the proposals are likely to generate significant local opposition.
3. As it meets the criteria for a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, permission for the development will be sought via a Development Consent Order (DCO), determined by the Secretary of State under Planning Act 2008. The council is a statutory consultee in this process, and while responding to a consultation on a planning proposal would fall under matters delegated to the Corporate Director, given the scale and significance of the development, officers consider that Cabinet should have the opportunity to approve the council's response to the first public consultation by the promoter. Cabinet may also wish to approve the response to the later, statutory consultation.

The proposed development and its impact

4. Oxfordshire Railfreight Ltd. is proposing a rail freight interchange close to the site of the former Ardley railway station, with associated container storage and up to 675,000 sqm of warehousing (storage and distribution) including ancillary office accommodation south of the railway, plus additional floorspace in the form of mezzanines. HGV access would be taken from the B430 and a new Ardley by-pass road leading to M40 Junction 10. The proposals also include a relief road for Middleton Stoney between the B430 and B4030, the closure of the

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unnamed road linking Heyford Park and the B430 and its replacement on a new alignment, and the relocation within the site of the Ashgrove Farm in-vessel composting plant. Significant changes are proposed to M40 Junction 10 to accommodate the traffic.

5. Plans and other information about the proposals can be found on the promoter's website at [Document Downloads | OXSRFI](#).
6. The site would operate 24 hours a day and provide around 9,500 jobs, and the predicted total daily traffic movements generated by the site are over 20,500, of which almost 5,000 would be HGVs. HGVs would be routed directly to M40 J10. The freight terminal is intended to handle up to 12 trains per day, taking containers off lorries and onto trains and vice versa. However, the capacity of the rail network to provide this number of train paths is not yet established, and the minimum requirement for an SRFI is 4 trains per day.
7. There are other significant warehousing and employment sites proposed close to M40 Junction 10. Officers are seeking to ensure that the cumulative impacts of the proposals are assessed and are working closely with National Highways.

Public Consultation

8. A first stage, non-statutory public consultation was carried out by the promoter between 9 May and 4 July 2022. The consultation materials can be found at <https://oxsrfi.co.uk/document-downloads/> Exhibitions were held in Ardley, Heyford Park and Middleton Stoney, along with webinars open to the public. The promoter's planning consultant wrote to local county councillors within their letter drop area, which included parts of adjacent divisions, and provided briefings where requested. A further, statutory consultation is expected later in 2022, ahead of the DCO application to the Planning Inspectorate in early 2023, with a decision by the Secretary of State expected in 2024.
9. A draft response to the public consultation has been prepared by officers and is attached at Annex 1.
10. A key part of the response is that there is insufficient evidence provided in the consultation materials of the demand for a rail freight interchange at this location. Although the rail freight terminal is aiming to handle up to 12 trains per day, the minimum requirement is for it to be capable of handling 4 trains per day, which would be equivalent to approximately 368 HGV trips transferred to/from rail. These would be mainly removed from the strategic road network, between the site and ports. If there is only very limited demand, the stated environmental benefits of the development in reducing carbon emissions by transferring freight onto rail, will not be realised, and the development could in effect become largely a standard logistics park in a rural area.

Furthermore, it is stated that the Environmental Statement will include a section on the how other locations were considered, but this has yet to be provided. Therefore, there is incomplete evidence at this stage to demonstrate that this is

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the most suitable location. Other sections of the Environmental Statement have yet to be completed, and work on the transport assessment is still ongoing. Our response stresses the importance of completing this work prior to the next, statutory consultation.

11. Another key element of the response concerns the large amount of new road building proposed. Traffic impact assessment has not yet been completed, so it remains to be seen whether the additional road building is truly necessary to provide capacity for the development, and whether it will induce traffic demand. The rural location of the site, and the likely dispersed nature of the workforce, mean that it is likely to be highly dependent on car travel, thereby undermining the challenging LTCP5 headline targets for the reduction of car trips.
12. Nevertheless, the Ardley Bypass and Middleton Stoney Relief Road proposed as embedded infrastructure would provide relief for those villages, and the public rights of way, walking and cycling measures proposed will improve connectivity, and restore links that were severed by the M40 at Ardley.
13. A public transport strategy for the site is being developed, and our response asks the promoters to consider the potential for modal interchange at the site. The development does not include a passenger rail station, but our response asks for land for a possible future rail station to be safeguarded.
14. The investment into the site and construction of the proposed development will create substantial temporary employment opportunities and contribute Gross Value Added (GVA) during the build period. There will also likely be training and apprenticeship opportunities for local residents. Once operational, the proposed development could provide over 9,600 Full Time Equivalent direct jobs on site, across a wide range of skills. The draft Environmental Statement states that the development could generate around £333.2 million in GVA per annum to the economy, and an estimated £20.6 million in business rates. It estimates that the multiplier effects of the development (indirect jobs and supply chain) could generate a further £344.5m in GVA.
15. Notwithstanding the above mentioned benefits, the lack of evidence in respect of demand for the freight terminal, consideration of alternative locations, and the necessity of new road infrastructure will need to be addressed in order for the county council to be supportive of the proposals.
16. To ensure that, in the event that the development is approved by the Secretary of State, its impacts are adequately mitigated, officers will continue to work with the applicant to seek appropriate mitigation for traffic and other environmental impacts and will aim to ensure that these are secured through conditions and legal agreements.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

17. SRFIs are supported by Government policy in the form of the National Policy Statement (NPS) on National Networks, which can be found at [National policy](#)

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[statement for national networks - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk). They are also supported in the county council's emerging Freight and Logistics Strategy, subject to caveats concerning suitability of location. The proposals are not within the Cherwell Local Plan (CLP) 2015-2031.

18. Notwithstanding the local concentration of traffic, SRFIs in principle fit with the council priority to tackle climate change, because transferring freight from road to rail results in significant reductions in carbon emissions.

Financial Implications

19. There are no financial implications of the recommendations in this report.

Comments checked by: Rob Finlayson, Finance Business Partner
(Environment & Place), rob.finlayson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

20. Unlike section 20 of the Transport and Works Act 1992, which requires the Council to put a report to full Council if it proposes to raise concerns about a proposed Transport and Works Act Order, there is no such equivalent provision in the Planning Act 2008 or in the Infrastructure Planning (Examination Procedure) Rules 2010 requiring a report to be put to full Council in respect of an application for a Development Consent Order for a nationally significant infrastructure project.
21. In addition to its role as a statutory consultee on the proposals for the DCO application under section 42 of the 2008 Act, by virtue of section 60 of the Act the Council will be invited to submit a Local Impact Report giving its view of the likely impact of the proposed development on the Council's area.
22. As part of the negotiations with the promoter the Council should seek to conclude a section 106 agreement to secure contributions and/or works to mitigate the impact of the proposals, such as for highway improvements and improvements to bus services.

Comments checked by:
David Mytton, Solicitor david.mytton@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

23. There are no new staffing or human resource implications of the recommendations of this report.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

24. There are no equality and inclusion implications of the recommendations in this report, because this does not relate to a county council proposal.

Sustainability Implications

25. There are no direct sustainability implications of the recommendations in this report. As the report is not proposing a policy, procedure, service change, project or programme, it is not relevant to complete a Climate Impact Assessment. However, the scheme promoter's environmental impact assessment will include an assessment of climate change impacts.

Risk Management

26. The only risks arising from the recommendations of the response would be political.
27. If the OxSRFI is granted permission, its proposed works to M40 J10 would result in the majority of the Growth Deal scheme at the junction being superseded. There is the opportunity to revisit our plans and possibly feed the money back into the capital programme.

Consultations

28. No consultations have been carried out by OCC in respect of the development proposals. Public consultation has been carried out by the promoter and this report seeks Cabinet approval of the county council's response to that consultation.

Bill Cotton, Corporate Director Environment and Place

Annex: Annex 1 – draft OCC response to public consultation.
Annex 2 - Plans

Background papers: Consultation documents are available on the promoter's website at <https://oxsrfi.co.uk/document-downloads/>

[National policy statement for national networks - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Contact Officer: Joy White, Principal Transport Planner, Telephone 07554103522, email joy.white@oxfordshire.gov.uk