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| | | | **OXFORDSHIRE** | | | |  
STRATEGIC RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE

Programme Document

March 2025

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Oxfordshire Railfreight Limited is proposing a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) on land east of the former Upper Heyford Air Base, south of the Chiltern railway line, and southwest of Junction 10 of the M40 motorway known as OxSRFI.
- 1.2 The proposals are located within the administrative boundaries of Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council. However, detailed highways modelling may result in highways mitigation being delivered in adjoining authorities (i.e. West Northamptonshire Council).
- 1.3 The proposed development currently comprises a number of elements, described in brief below:
- An intermodal rail terminal served via new connections to the Chiltern Main Line (part of the Strategic Rail Freight Network), including container storage;
  - Up to 603,850 sqm (approx. 6.5 million square feet) of warehousing, including ancillary office accommodation, plus up to 201,283 sqm of additional floorspace in the form of mezzanines. Maximum building heights are proposed at 25m;
  - Improvements to Junction 10 of the M40 involving works on the A43 east of the M40, new slip roads to and from the M40 an Ardley Bypass to the east of Ardley;
  - Improvements to Junction 9 of the M40 involving a dedicated slip road for vehicles travelling between the A43 and M40 northbound;
  - A Heyford Park Link Road which runs from Camp Road south-east of Heyford Park and south of the proposed development to a new junction on the B430;
  - A Middleton Stoney Relief Road around the north-eastern side of the village connecting from a new junction on the B430 to the existing B4030 which links over the M40 to Bicester;
  - The Principal Access to the Main Site will be from a new roundabout on the B430 in the north-eastern corner of the Main Site, south of the railway line. This primary access will serve all HGV and car traffic accessing the site;
  - A Secondary Access into the Main Site will be provided from the Heyford Park
  - Link Road for bus, pedestrian, cyclists and emergency vehicles only;
  - Retention of the Grade II listed Threshing Barn at Ashgrove Farm as part of the Central Hub of estate management and communal facilities for the other development on the Main Site;

- Retained key landscape features and new landscaping and planting, including on the proposed earthwork bunds within the Main Site.

1.4 A non-statutory consultation was held with the community, landowners and statutory stakeholders between 9th May – 4th July 2022 and comprised of 5 public exhibitions and two webinars. 330 people attended the exhibitions and 16 people attended the webinars. A Statement of Community Consultation was prepared and made available during the non-statutory consultation. An updated Statement of Community Consultation will be prepared ahead of the statutory consultation.

1.5 This Programme Document summarises the key steps to be taken during the Pre-application stage of the OxSRFI project. It summarises the following:

- A timetable of the project's Pre-application process, the main events with dates and milestones demonstrating how the Pre-application process will be completed;
- The main issues for resolution and activities that will address them;
- Proposals for engaging with statutory consultees and local authorities during the pre-application period and any intended financial support agreements, such as Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs); and
- Identification of risks to achievement of the Pre-application stage and the process by which these risks are tracked and managed.

## **2.0 TIMETABLE**

2.1 A timetable of the project's Pre-application process is provided at Appendix 1.

## **3.0 MAIN ISSUES AND RESOLUTIONS**

3.1 The following section sets out some of the main ongoing issues and areas of active work and investigations or design, including brief references to proposed resolutions to them – these are presented in alphabetical order. The applicant will produce and maintain an Issues Tracker throughout the pre-application stage of the DCO process. The Issues Tracker will be available for regular review by the Inspectorate, affected statutory bodies and local authorities in order to encourage dialogue and, where possible, achieve resolution. The Issues Tracker will evolve into a list of Potential Main Issues for the Examination (PMIE) which will be entered into the examination as an application document.

### Air Quality

- 3.2 Detailed assessments of the likely effects on air quality will be undertaken once transport modelling is complete. To understand existing Air Quality in the area the assessment is making use of data collected by the Local Authority as well as project-specific NO<sub>2</sub> diffusion tube monitoring. Overall, air quality is generally good in the area around the application site and the Proposed Development is not located within, or in the vicinity of, any Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA). The proposals will include a package of measures to minimise effects on air quality. Many measures will focus on transport as one of the main sources of pollutants, and will include specific Travel Plan measures relating to use of public transport, walking and cycling, as well as enabling use of electric vehicles.

### Archaeology

- 3.3 Archaeological trial trenching has taken place across the majority of the site and some archaeological significance has been identified. Engagement is ongoing with Oxfordshire County Council's archaeologist to agree mitigation.

### Built Heritage

- 3.4 The site is located near to heritage assets (RAF Upper Heyford and Ashgrove Farm) which the proposals could impact upon. Engagement has and will continue to take place with Cherwell District Council's conservation team and Historic England to agree impacts and mitigation.

### Climate change

- 3.5 As an SRFI, the proposals will play a direct role in enabling the transition towards a more sustainable economy with rail freight being around 73% more carbon efficient than road freight, and so through enabling a further shift of freight from road to rail, the proposals will play a direct role in reducing the effect of transport and economic activity on climate change. In addition to this, the design approach for OxSRFI is based on key design principles focused on the creation of a high-quality built and natural environment for employees and visitors to the site, including delivering highly efficient buildings with minimised carbon footprints during both construction and in operation. A sustainability strategy will form part of the final application, tied in part to the mitigation of effects on climate change.

### Ecology

- 3.6 Having undertaken a full suite of surveys in 2021 and 2022, we are now revisiting and updating them to ensure we have an up to date evidence base to support the application. The application site consists largely of agricultural land, but there are areas known to contain some ecological interest, and a package of mitigation measures is being devised. This includes retention or enhancement of key features wherever possible, but also creation of new habitats as part of a comprehensive

green infrastructure strategy which will form part of the proposal. The proposed development will deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain.

#### Landfill

- 3.7 Part of Ardley landfill needs to be remediated to deliver the principal highways access and eastern rail sidings. Engagement will continue with the Environment Agency (EA) to agree the remediation design and variations to the permit.

#### Landscape

- 3.8 Given the strategic nature of the proposals, the scheme has the potential to give rise to landscape impacts. Engagement has and will continue to take place with Cherwell District Council to agree impacts and mitigation.

#### Noise

- 3.9 Noise will be generated during the construction and operation of the proposal given the nature of the proposed use. Engagement is ongoing with Cherwell's Environmental Protection Officer to agree impacts and mitigation prior to the submission of the DCO application.

#### Rail

- 3.10 Having worked closely with Network Rail since 2021, we have a good understanding of the relevant rail capacity and infrastructure context on the Chiltern Line and beyond. Working with Network Rail, we will revisit the earlier pathing and gauging assessments previously started or begun to ensure the evidence base is robust and up to date as part of the application to confirm that the proposed OxSRFI can meet (and exceed) the requirements of the Planning Act 2008 and NPSNN. Our design of the rail terminal will also be finalised to demonstrate the deliverability of an operationally efficient rail freight terminal, tied into our wider earthworks and access strategies for the site.

#### Traffic and Highways

- 3.11 Highways modelling for a scheme of this scale is complex and agreeing impacts and mitigation can be challenging. A Transport Working Group was set up with Statutory Consultees (National Highways, Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council and West Northamptonshire Council) in 2021 and regular meetings are held to resolve issues and agree matters prior to the submission of the DCO. A significant amount of work has been undertaken in respect of Traffic and Highways and we have a good understanding of the likely impacts and mitigation required.

## 4.0 ENGAGEMENT

### Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire District Council

- 4.2 A Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) is in place (and at the time of writing is being updated) with Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire District Council to assist during the Pre-application stage of DCO preparation. The consultant team will continue to engage with Officer's to discuss the proposals, agree on the assessment of likely impacts and appropriate mitigation.

### Network Rail

- 4.3 A Basic Services Agreement is in place with Network Rail. Engagement will continue with Network Rail throughout the Pre-application stage of the project.

### Transport Working Group

- 4.4 A Transport Working Group was set up with National Highways, Oxfordshire County Council and West Northamptonshire Council in 2021 and regular meetings are held to agree highways matters prior to submission of the DCO.

### Landowners

- 4.5 The Applicant will continue to engage with landowners whose land is required to deliver the scheme. Engagement with landowners started in 2021. The majority of the 'Main Site' is under the applicant's control.

### Natural England

- 4.6 Our ecologists will continue to engage with Natural England throughout preparation of the application to agree impacts and mitigation.

### Historic England

- 4.7 Our conservation consultants will continue to engage with Historic England throughout preparation of the application to agree impacts and mitigation.

### Environment Agency

- 4.8 The Applicant has already engaged with the Environment Agency on the project in respect of the landfill. A site investigation was required in the landfill to inform our landfill remediation design which required approval from the Environment Agency before taking place. The Applicant will continue to engage with the Environment Agency about the scheme generally but also particularly in relation to the remediation design to agree matters and resolve issues.

Statutory Undertakers

- 4.9 The Applicant will continue to engage with Statutory Undertakers throughout the pre-application stage of the project to agree diversions required as part of the scheme.

**5.0 RISKS TO PRE-APPLICATION TIMETABLE**

Traffic and Highways

- 5.2 The Applicant is aware that a protracted highways modelling process presents a risk to meeting pre-application timetables for schemes of this nature. In order to manage this, a Transport Working Group is set up to encourage collaboration and communication and detailed consideration of highways and traffic matters has been ongoing since 2021.

Changes to assessment methodologies

- 5.3 Changes to the way consultees expect assessments to be undertaken could risk achieving the pre-application timetable. To manage this, consultants will work closely with consultees to agreement methodologies.

Local Planning Authority (LPA) and statutory body resources and capacity

- 5.4 The Applicant recognises that LPA and statutory body resources are often stretched and their capacity may represent a risk to delivering the Pre-application programme. However, a PPA is in place (and at the time of writing is being updated) with Cherwell and Oxfordshire and the Applicant will meet costs for other statutory bodies.



**Appendix 1 – OxSRFI pre-application timetable**

	2021				2022				2023				2024				2025											
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Inception meeting	02/21																											
PINS project update meetings			07/21	11/21	02/22		07/22								10/24			*						**		***	****	
Scoping Opinion adopted			07/21																									
First consultation						*****																						
Scheme review										*****																		
Engagement with statutory consultees																												
Statutory consultation																												
Submission of draft documentation																												
Adequacy of Consultation Milestone (AoCM)																												
Submission of DCO Application																												21/11

\* PINS meeting to be held to provide an update on the scheme  
 \*\* PINS meeting to be held post statutory consultation  
 \*\*\* PINS meeting to discuss draft documents  
 \*\*\*\* PINS meeting to be held ahead of DCO submission  
 \*\*\*\*\* First consultation held between May – July 2022  
 \*\*\*\*\* Project paused to review highways infrastructure proposals