



Stage 1 Consultation: Summary of Key Themes & Issues Report

On behalf of
Oxfordshire Railfreight Limited

Prepared by Oxalis Planning Ltd
Revision A
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1.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE STAGE 1 CONSULTATION SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This summary report sets out a summary of key themes, issues, and queries arising from the Stage 1 non-statutory consultation for the proposed Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (“OxSRFI”) held from May through to early July 2022. The Stage 1 consultation was the non-statutory consultation for the proposed development. A further consultation is planned before the proposals are finalised and this will be the statutory consultation (Stage 2). Further details on the Stage 2 consultation will be publicised in due course. The summaries provided here are based on comment forms filled out during the exhibition events supplemented by verbal discussions held during exhibition events, comment forms received via the project website, and comments received via e-mail. The opportunity to provide comments via post was provided but none have been received.
- 1.1.2 This report summarises themes and issues arising from responses submitted by a range of stakeholders including residents, local businesses, community groups, statutory and non-statutory consultees, and other businesses.
- 1.1.3 Oxfordshire Railfreight Limited (“the Applicant”) is now actively reviewing and considering all comments received as part of the ongoing assessment and design processes in progressing the proposals. Whilst this report summarises the issues raised; it does not seek to provide a detailed response to them at this stage. A final and comprehensive Consultation Report will be prepared after all the stages of consultation have been completed and will be submitted with the application for the development. That report will include any details of how the scheme was revised in response to issues or suggestions raised during the consultation process.
- 1.1.4 This report begins by setting out the Stage 1 Consultation process before quantifying the responses received, and then describing key themes, issues, and queries arising.

1.2 Engagement prior to Stage 1 Consultation (background)

- 1.2.1 Initial informal dialogue and engagement on the emerging proposals for the OxSRFI was first undertaken in 2019 with various bodies. This first focused on briefings provided to officers and members of Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council, and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OXLEP) with informal briefings held in 2020 and 2021.
- 1.2.2 A project Transport Working Group was established in 2020 which involves representatives from the County and District Councils as well as National Highways. A wide range of technical highways matters have been discussed throughout the development of the emerging scheme, including key technical methodology, data and

assumptions to underpin the Transport Assessment which will form part of the final application.

1.2.3 Initial contact was made in early 2021 with the local MP for North Oxfordshire, and following that, with individual Parish Councils. A briefing document was prepared and used to inform discussions with local Ward Councillors and Parish Councils. This was shared with nearby Parish Councils in June 2021 to provide an overview of the emerging proposals and followed a letter and site location plan sent to them in May 2021 to give notice of the Environmental Statement (“ES”) Scoping process. The briefing document was also sent to the Chair of the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan Forum which represents 11 Parish Councils including a number within the core consultation area for the proposed development. The Parish Councils contacted directly by the Applicant are:

- Ardley with Fewcott
- Bucknell
- Middleton Stoney
- Heyford Park
- Stoke Lyne
- Upper Heyford

1.2.4 The project website was created and launched in June 2021 with initial project information including that relating to the ES Scoping process. The website provides a way for comments and questions to be submitted by interested parties, including local residents. Its content will be expanded as work to prepare the application progresses and as more information is available, including information regarding public consultation and engagement.

2.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STAGE 1 CONSULTATION

2.1 Stage 1 Consultation Strategy

2.1.1 In accordance with section 47 of the Planning Act 2008 and relevant guidance the proposed approach to community consultation sought to ensure that information and opportunity to comment was provided to those '*most likely to be affected*' by the proposed development. The Applicant identified a 'Core Area' for the community consultation. This area was shared for comment with the District and County Council in advance of the Stage 1 consultation, as referred to in the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) adopted by the Applicant. The County Council were satisfied with the area presented as a Core Area for postal communications, however the District Council suggested a wider Core Area to include some additional communities. The Applicant agreed to this wider area and accordingly, the Core Area was increased. This agreed Core Area is shown on the map at **Appendix A**.

2.1.2 The Core Area for Stage 1 is extensive and includes all or part of the communities of the following parishes:

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ardley with Fewcott• North Aston• Middle Aston• Steeple Aston• Bucknell• Fritwell• Heyford Park• Lower Heyford and Caulcott• Middleton Stoney• Upper Heyford• Somerton | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stoke Lyne• Chesterton• Hardwick with Tunsmore• Souldern• Fringford• Caversfield• Bicester Town• Kirtlington• Hethe• Deddington• Tackley• Rousham |
|--|--|

2.1.3 Where the Core Area boundary is adjacent to a Parish boundary, the Parish Council was still included as part of the consultation to ensure widespread awareness.

2.1.4 Parish Councils within the Core Area were used as a key point of contact to help ensure wider awareness within the local communities in addition to measures and activity to engage directly with local people and communities. As part of this approach, the project team informed local elected members, District and County Councillors whose divisions include part of the Core Area, and Parish Councillors within the Core Area of key dates and information about the consultation process. This was largely through e-mail correspondence (but with some letters and newsletters posted where email was not an option).

2.1.5 Whilst the Stage 1 consultation was non-statutory, the Stage 1 consultation strategy also included consultation with all parties who are required to be consulted for statutory consultation under the Planning Act 2008. This included:

- a. writing to the prescribed bodies pursuant to the Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009;
- b. writing to the relevant local authorities pursuant to section 43 of the Planning Act 2008;
- c. writing to persons with an interest in the land pursuant to section 44 of the Planning Act 2008 and erecting site notices for any unknown or unregistered interests; and
- d. publishing newspaper notices in the Bicester Advertiser and Oxford Mail and the London Gazette.

2.2 Stage 1 Consultation process

2.2.1 In advance of Stage 1 commencing, leaflets were distributed by post to 4,011 addresses in the vicinity of the SRFI site across the consultation area and posters with details about the exhibition events were also attached to posts around the vicinity of the site. In addition, as mentioned above, letters were sent to interested parties and consultees replicating a statutory (Section 42) consultation process. This ensured wider awareness of the process and increased the chances of the Applicant receiving responses from a range of bodies at this early, non-statutory stage.

2.2.2 The Stage 1 consultation for OxSRFI involved a series of public exhibition events held across May and June 2022 as follows:

- Exhibition 1: Thursday 12th May 2022 (13:30 – 19:30) at Heyford Park Chapel, OX25 5TE;
- Exhibition 2: Saturday 14th May 2022 (12:00 – 17:00) at Ardley with Fewcott Village Hall, OX27 7PA;
- Exhibition 3: Friday 20th May 2022 (13:30 – 19:30) at Heyford Park Chapel, OX25 5TE;
- Exhibition 4: Wednesday 25th May (13:30 – 19:30) at Upper Heyford Village Hall, OX25 5LB; and
- Exhibition 5: Tuesday 21st June (13:30 – 19:30) at Middleton Stoney Village Hall, OX25 4AN.

- 2.2.3 Originally 4 exhibition events were planned at the venues in Ardley with Fewcott, Heyford Park and Upper Heyford. These above venues were chosen given their proximity to the application site, as well as their size, suitable parking arrangements and available on-site amenities. The hall at Middleton Stoney was slightly more constrained in size and with regard to car parking but on request by Middleton Stoney Parish Council, the Applicant agreed to an additional exhibition (Exhibition 5) targeted at people who live in the village.
- 2.2.4 There were also 2 Webinars hosted on Tuesday 17th May (18:00 – 20:00) and Monday 23rd May (18:00 – 20:00). The full recording from the second webinar was posted on the project website for residents to review.
- 2.2.5 The documents consulted on for the Stage 1 consultation focused on Preliminary Environmental Information Reports (PEIR), in the form of draft Environmental Statement (ES) chapters which were all available for review and comment on the project website. Draft plans of the proposed development, including the Illustrative Masterplan and Parameters Plan, amongst others were also on the project website. The draft ES chapters did not contain full impact assessments for Stage 1 as further work is ongoing at this stage. The full list of consultation documents are listed in **Appendix B**. Additional information and detail will be made available for the Stage 2 consultation.
- 2.2.6 The Applicant raised awareness in advance of the planned consultation period and events in updates to local Parish Councils by email. Similarly, key local Ward and County Council members were also informed of the consultation process in advance.
- 2.2.7 The project website was updated to provide details well in advance of the consultation period beginning with information about the consultation process, including exhibition dates and venues. All the material used as part of the Stage 1 consultation was made available via the website from the beginning of the formal consultation period, including PDF copies of the exhibition boards. Social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) were used to advertise the consultation and direct any residents to the project website.
- 2.2.8 The exhibitions were manned by a team of representatives of the Applicant, including many of the consultant team to ensure it was possible to provide technical information and explanation about the emerging proposals, and planned or ongoing technical and assessment work, as required.
- 2.2.9 Members of the public were able to make their representations and comments on the proposals via the following methods:
- Online via the project website which contained an electronic comments form: www.oxsrfi.co.uk;

- By e-mail: oxsrfi@havingyoursay.co.uk;
- By telephone using the project phone line: 0333 358 0502
- By post to a dedicated Freepost PO Box address
- Social media platforms: Facebook (@OxSRFI or www.facebook.com/OxSRFI), Twitter (OxSRFI or www.twitter.com/OxSRFI), and Instagram (OxSRFI or www.instagram.com/OxSRFI).
- In person (verbally) at the public exhibitions in dialogue with the team and applicant.

2.2.10 The consultation period was held over an 8-week period from Monday 9th May 2022 until Monday 4th July 2022. Although not a 'statutory' consultation, this exceeded the minimum requirement of a 28-day period to ensure local people, groups and bodies had time to review and comment on the consultation material.

2.3 Exhibition Event attendance and responses

2.3.1 The total number of people that attended the 5 public exhibition events was 330 (please note this number will include some individuals more than once who attended more than one event). The following table shows the split of that total across each venue, and the number of comments forms submitted at each.

| Venue and date | No. of attendees. | Comments received |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| Heyford Park Chapel on Thursday 12 th May 2022 (13:30 – 19:30) | 69 | 8 |
| Ardley with Fewcott on Saturday 14 th May 2022 (12:00 – 17:00) | 89 | 5 |
| Heyford Park Chapel on Friday 20 th May (13:30 – 19:30) | 52 | 10 |
| Upper Heyford Village Hall on Wednesday 25 th May 2022 (13:30 – 19:30) | 66 | 6 |
| Middleton Stoney Village Hall on Tuesday 21 st June 2022 (13:30 – 19:30) | 54 | 6 |
| Total | 330 | 36 |

2.3.2 The total number of people that attended the two online webinars was 16: 7 attended the first on Tuesday 17th May and 9 attended the second on Monday 23rd May.

Response Overview

2.3.3 The table below summarises the number of responses received, between the date the leaflets were posted out to addresses within the core consultation area and up until the time of writing this Summary Report, against each consultation opportunity offered.

| Source | No. of responses |
|---|-------------------------|
| Public Exhibition Events (x5) – hard copy forms | 36 |
| Online comment forms | 26 |
| E-mails | 68* |
| Post | 0 |
| Calls | 4 |
| <i>Total</i> | 134* |

**Please note – this is the total number of emails received and includes multiple emails by some of the same correspondents. In total 58 individual correspondents generated the emails recorded here. Many emails were not providing comment about the draft proposals but were raising other queries such as seeking opportunities regarding future employment, or regarding business and supply chain opportunities.*

3.0 KEY THEMES AND TOPICS RAISED

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The themes and topics raised in the consultation responses have been split into two broad categories below: residents/public, and consultees/other stakeholders.

3.2 Resident/public response

3.2.1 This summary of issues draws largely on the written responses received (comments forms and letters or emails), but also on verbal discussions had with visitors to the exhibitions, not all of which resulted in comments being submitted in writing.

3.2.2 The summary of the key themes and topics raised below sets the issues out in an approximate order which represents the frequency with which they were referred to:

- Traffic impacts and transport issues (including proposed highways works);
- Loss of countryside / industrialisation of area;
- Greenfield / farmland development;
- Need for the proposed SRFI;
- Location of the proposed development;
- Impact on wildlife/ecology;
- Noise impact; and
- Landscape and visual.

Traffic and Transport

3.2.3 Traffic impact and transport was the most dominant theme within the responses. The most frequently raised issue, including some concern, within this theme was the potential for the proposed development to cause an increase in road traffic in the area, both in terms of at M40 Junction 10 but also on local roads, particularly through the villages of Middleton Stoney and Heyford Park. However, many respondents also acknowledged existing traffic problems in the area, particularly at Junction 10 which many local people feel needs improvement, and as a result a notable proportion of respondents were generally welcoming of the proposed improvements to it. A few people did however note that Junction 10 has been subject to a number of previous alterations in the past, conveying a lack of confidence that the proposed works will solve the problems.

3.2.4 In terms of local transport effects and issues, a high number of respondents expressed specific concern about the proposed 'Bus Gate' element of the proposed highways works. Several respondents either stated that there is not a need for it or questioned the case or justification for it. Many raised concerns that it would make journey times longer for local residents, and that it didn't make sense for the area.

Loss of Countryside / Industrialisation of Area, and Principle of Greenfield Development

- 3.2.5 A significant number of respondents objected in principle to, or raised concern about, the loss of countryside and/or industrialisation of the area as a result of the proposed development. This concern was further explained by some in terms of losing access to the countryside (e.g., for walking), concerns about a transformation of the area from rural to urban, general environmental impacts of development, and concerns relating to climate change and/or landscape impact.
- 3.2.6 Some also referred to other, unrelated proposals for warehouse development in the vicinity of the site around Junction 10 and expressed concerns relating to the potential for cumulative impacts from these other schemes.
- 3.2.7 There were also a number of concerns raised about the principle of developing greenfield / farming land, and subsequent questions about why the scheme cannot be developed on brownfield land – an example given being the redundant runways and buildings associated with the adjacent former RAF Upper Heyford airfield.
- 3.2.8 A notable number of respondents were significantly opposed to the principle of developing farmland in the context of concerns about food security and the need to be self-sufficient from a broader political and environmental perspective.

Need for an SRFI

- 3.2.9 Another question or concern within the public responses was around the evidence of need for the proposed development of an SRFI. The majority of people did not accept the need for the development as set out in the consultation material or considered that more explanation to justify the scheme was required. A few inferred that the need argument did not make sense; for example, some viewed the introduction of a rail freight interchange as likely to increase HGV traffic on the roads rather than reducing HGV travel.
- 3.2.10 A smaller number of people were however explicitly in agreement that there was an identified need for the development in terms of the benefits of moving freight from road to rail, and recognised that the site has the required access to both road and rail. Some respondents who accepted the need for SRFIs in general did question whether the application site is the right place for it. A few comments asked about alternative sites considered for a potential new SRFI in the area (also see below re: alternatives).

Impact on wildlife/ecology

- 3.2.11 General concern or questions were raised about the impact of the development on local wildlife and ecology. Some respondents described their understanding of existing

wildlife on or around the site. Some highlighted concern about loss of habitats and the impact of noise, light, and air pollution on flora and fauna.

Noise and Light pollution

3.2.12 A number of respondents expressed general concerns about potential noise and light pollution arising from the SRFI, with examples of the sorts of noise of particular concern including HGVs, movement of containers, and trains.

Visual and landscape impacts

3.2.13 Landscape/visual impact was another concern raised through comments received. A number of people commented that the proposed mitigation measures would be insufficient or not make a meaningful difference. However, several people also left positive comments about the proposed landscaping strategy which seeks to substantially screen the site and much of the proposed new building from outside view.

Alternatives or other SRFIs

3.2.14 A few responses asked what assessment has been undertaken of alternative sites, with a small number of people specifically asking what other sites had been assessed and wanting detailed information on the outcome of that process and why they were not more suitable.

Other issues raised

3.2.15 Various other comments were raised within the responses, albeit less frequently than the issues set out above, including:

- Concern about construction impacts on the local area
- Positivity/support for the choice of location given access to rail and road networks
- Positivity/support for the concept of an SRFI here
- Positivity about the need for the scheme and the benefits of enabling freight to move to rail
- Positivity about the walking routes/footpaths proposed as part of the wider 'green infrastructure' and transport strategies
- Concern about lack of benefit for Heyford Park residents
- Positivity about new job creation
- Concern about scale of development
- Concern about current lack of public transport to the site and questions over the future strategy
- Concern about impact on property values

3.3 Consultee/Other Stakeholder Responses

3.3.1 A range of consultees provided responses and comments on the Stage 1 consultation material. This section provides a list of those bodies which commented, and provides a summary of key issues or questions raised.

3.3.2 Responses were received from:

- Oxfordshire County Council
- CPRE (Cherwell District)
- British Horse Society
- Berks, Becks & Oxon Wildlife Trust
- Forestry Commission
- Dorchester Living
- Albion Land (AL)
- Severn Trent Green Power
- Historic England
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
- Royal Mail
- Middleton Stoney Parish Council
- Upper Heyford Parish
- Kirtlington Parish Council
- Lower Heyford Parish
- Chesterton Parish
- Steeple Aston and Middle Aston
- Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan Forum

3.3.3 A range of issues and topics are covered by the comments or queries received, and some of the key questions and issues include the following:

Need and 'case' for the SRFI as proposed

3.3.4 Consultees were keen to better understand the case for the proposed SRFI and the evidence of market demand for large-scale distribution operations in this location, including detail of any potential alternatives considered. Further explanation of why and how the proposals are 'strategic' were sought by one consultee.

3.3.5 Some offered scepticism that a rail terminal would be delivered or used, and see the proposals as a being only about warehousing.

3.3.6 While the potential economic benefits (employment, GVA, etc) are recognised by some, the scale of the proposals, and the 'case' for the infrastructure (particularly new road building) proposed requires further justification and evidence that it is required or

essential. Others are keen to better understand the assumptions and likely labour/workforce implications, including regarding likely travel to work.

Accessibility and transport, including rail

- 3.3.7 There were concerns raised about the impact on nearby roads and communities, focused on the B430, and M40 Junction 10. Some welcomed the emerging highways mitigation proposals in general, and require more detail as it becomes available. Others with development interests nearby are keen to understand the interaction with other parts of the network, and other sites, as the Transport Assessment work progresses. Some local consultees were frustrated by the current lack of detail regarding the transport and traffic effects at this stage in the process, but have concerns that the mitigation measures emerging will not be adequate.
- 3.3.8 Questions about how the site would be accessed by employees, and where those employees are coming from, were raised by some consultees in the context of the ongoing Transport Assessment. This included interest in whether the scheme could help safeguard a future passenger rail station nearby, and whether that may form part of a longer-term public transport strategy for employees to access the site.
- 3.3.9 How the emerging transport strategy fits with the OCC LTCP5 headline targets for reduction of car trips was raised a specific query for further work, as well as further explanation of how an SRFI helps deliver a reduction in HGV traffic. Further detail regarding the Chiltern Line's capacity to accommodate freight traffic was also sought from a number of consultees.
- 3.3.10 There were a range of views on the proposed new or diverted footpaths and bridleways, with a general welcoming of extensions proposed to the bridleway network, but with details sought about specific routes, surfaces, and crossing points to ensure safe and useable routes.
- 3.3.11 Several consultees indicated an interest in seeing and commenting on the next stages of the Transport Assessment once complete and available.

Local and environmental potential impacts

- 3.3.12 There were general comments and concerns about the impact on local wildlife, and on existing habitats or wildlife sites and species located in the area, including how proposed foot or cycle routes may interact or effect existing sites or species. The relationship with, and impact on, the Conservation Target Area and the neighbouring SSSI was also raised as an area of concern and where further detail will be required.

One respondent urged the Applicant to deliver a 20% net gain in biodiversity beyond emerging national policy.

- 3.3.13 The loss of greenfield and of agricultural land was raised as a concern by some local consultees. Others welcome the delivery of new woodland and are keen to see existing woodland within the site retained and protected within the development, with opportunities taken to enhance the landscaping and buffers provided.
- 3.3.14 The potential for harm caused on nearby heritage assets, local visual impacts on nearby existing or planned communities, and the wider landscape was raised by some local consultees. Neighbouring landowners, developers and businesses are keen to fully understand the interactions with and any potential impacts on their planned or existing operations. Other local bodies were interested in better understanding the scope for noise, air quality and lighting effects and any potential impact on local health or amenity.
- 3.3.15 Many consultees indicated an interest in seeing and commenting on the next stages of the ES and the further developed assessments across a wide range of topics, including landscape and visual, heritage, and ecology, as well as air quality, noise and lighting.

3.4 Follow up to consultation comments

- 3.4.1 This report provides a summary of the key themes and issues raised during the Stage 1 consultation. The Applicant will be fully addressing the issues and themes raised during both the Stage 1 and Stage 2 consultations in the final Consultation Report which will be submitted along with the application to the Secretary of State.

4.0 SUMMARY COMMENTS ON KEY THEMES AND ISSUES RAISED

- 4.1 The Stage 1 Consultation responses have ensured that the Applicant is fully aware of the concerns and issues from the perspective of local communities and other stakeholders. The Parish Councils in particular have been effective in raising issues regarding the potential effects of the development on the local communities.
- 4.2 As set out in this report, there have been some common themes and issues raised by the comments received. For example, it is clear that existing traffic and transport impacts, and the level and type of highways works proposed, are of particular interest to, and - ahead of the ongoing Transport Assessment process having progressed further - are currently of some concern to local communities and other stakeholders.
- 4.3 Many of the comments received by both residents and statutory consultees or bodies reflect the fact that this initial, non-statutory consultation was undertaken relatively early in the application preparation (and Environmental Impact Assessment) process. Many of the queries or concerns raised relate to the current relative lack of detail or to the current draft or incomplete nature of the material which formed the basis of the consultation. The Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) provided draft ES chapters which did not contain full impact assessments. As is necessarily the case with consultation material at this stage of a proposed development, the PEIR was produced using information available at that time. As the ES and other key elements of the application progresses, additional information and detail will be made available for the Stage 2 consultation. For example, many of the key issues raised during Stage 1 relating to transport and traffic will be addressed as the work of the Transport Working Group progresses.
- 4.4 The concerns and objections raised by nearby residents and communities have focused on a relatively limited number of issues. Naturally, many of the issues and concerns raised through local consultation have focused on the site-specific characteristics and effects of the proposals, for example the development of greenfield fields, loss of agricultural land and landscape/visual impact.
- 4.5 It is also clear that many respondents are doubtful of the need for the scheme. Although the signs and evidence of strong market interest from the logistics and distribution sector in and around Oxfordshire and across the wider area has not been challenged or questioned, there have been questions about the need for, and benefit of, a SRFI in this location. These will be addressed as part of the ongoing work to prepare a 'Market Report' as well as the wider ongoing ES assessment work referred to above.
- 4.6 A Stage 2 consultation is being planned for Quarter 1 of 2023 when the proposals and supporting evidence base will have progressed further. The full Consultation Report required to accompany the eventual application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) in due course, will set out the ways in which the final proposals are amended

or designed to respond to issues and comments raised throughout the consultation process (Stages 1 and 2).