



O  **SRFI**
| | | | OXFORDSHIRE | | | |
STRATEGIC RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE

Programme Document

April 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 is underway and depending on the results may show highways mitigation is required in adjoining authorities (i.e. West Northamptonshire Council). Early modelling results expected in May will help inform judgements about the likelihood of off-site highways improvement works outside Cherwell District.
- 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 which will remove key traffic flows from the centre of the village;
 - 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 a 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 (SoCC) was prepared and made available during the non-statutory consultation. An updated SoCC is being prepared ahead of the statutory consultation being planned for summer 2025.

1.5 This Programme Document summarises the key steps being 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, with key updates and progress reported at a high-level through updates to this Programme Document over time;
- Proposals for, and updates regarding, engagement 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 key risks to achievement of the Pre-application stage and the process by which these risks are being 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. As suggested by PINS, the applicant will produce and maintain an Issues Tracker throughout the pre-application stage of the DCO process informed by dialogue with statutory consultees. 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. While the Applicant's intention remains to try and resolve as many 'issues' as possible prior to submission of the Application, the Issues Tracker is expected to evolve into a list of 'Potential Main Issues for the Examination' (PMIE) which PINS require to 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 NO₂ diffusion tube monitoring, and updated survey and data collection was instigated in March 2025.
- 3.3 Overall, air quality is known to be 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 and other measures to minimise air pollution. At the strategic level, the shift of freight from road to rail which is enabled by SRFIs reduces long-haul HGV mileage, playing a direct and positive role in reducing transport related air pollution and road congestion.

Archaeology

- 3.4 Archaeological trial trenching has taken place across the majority of the site and some archaeological significance has been identified. The proposed scheme design includes measures to avoid features where feasible (for example on proposed highways corridors), and a programme of further mitigation for features which would be lost is being prepared. Engagement is ongoing with Oxfordshire County Council's archaeologist to agree the mitigation scheme.

Built Heritage

- 3.5 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. The proposals will seek to balance consideration of any impacts on nearby heritage 'receptors' with the potential for impacts on other more sensitive (human) 'receptors' – for example with regard to bunding and screening around the Main Site.

Climate change

- 3.6 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

- 3.7 Having undertaken a full suite of surveys in 2021 and 2022, updated surveys are underway (from late 2024) to ensure we have an up to date evidence base to support the application. Key surveys underway or planned include bird, badger, bats, reptiles, water vole, otter and Great Crested Newt. 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.

Health Impact, and Equalities Impact Assessment

- 3.8 The Applicant now proposes to include a specific Health Impact Assessment (HIA), and a separate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA), within the scope of the DCO Application. Although not 'scoped in' earlier in the process, this is to reflect best-practice, and PINS guidance since the project began. The HIA will relate to a range of elements of the ES, including with regard to socio-economic impacts, but also air quality and noise. The HIA will consider the implications of green infrastructure and 'active travel' and the opportunities to support and enable positive health impacts through measures linked to walking and cycling.
- 3.9 The EqIA will also consider, and may help inform, the proposed Framework Travel Plan, as well as give consideration to wider socio-economic issues, to assess how the site will contribute to addressing inequalities, and ensuring equality of access to the opportunities and benefits offered by the proposed development.

Landfill

- 3.10 Part of Ardley landfill needs to be remediated to deliver the principal highways access and eastern rail sidings. As referred to below, following on from good engagement earlier in the application preparation process, engagement is continuing with the Environment Agency (EA) to agree the remediation design and variations to the

existing waste permit. The applicant has instructed an enhanced pre-application process to structure ongoing discussions with the EA.

Landscape

- 3.11 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, and the Applicant submitted representations on the draft CDC Local Plan in February 2025.

Noise

- 3.12 Noise will be generated during the construction and operation of the proposal given the nature of the proposed use. From February 2025 work began to update the baseline noise data for the area to ensure we are working with a robust and up to date starting point for the assessment of impact. Engagement has been ongoing with Cherwell's Environmental Protection Officer to agree the approach to the surveys, and once complete we will discuss the likely impacts and proposed mitigation prior to finalising and submitting the DCO application.

Rail

- 3.13 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. We are again working with Network Rail to revisit the earlier pathing and gauging assessments to ensure the evidence base is robust and up to date. While previous work with Network Rail confirmed that the proposed OxSRFI can meet (and exceed) the requirements of the Planning Act 2008 and NPSNN regarding rail freight capacity, we are refreshing that work to ensure it remains valid and up to date.
- 3.14 Our design of the rail terminal is also being finalised to demonstrate the deliverability of an operationally efficient rail freight terminal, tied into our wider earthworks and access strategies for the site. These details will form part of the material on which we will consult later this year.

Traffic and Highways

- 3.15 Highways modelling for a scheme of this scale is complex and agreeing likely impacts and appropriate mitigation can be challenging and time consuming. A Transport Working Group was set up with Statutory Consultees in 2021 (National Highways, Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council and West Northamptonshire Council) and although paused during 2023 until mid-2024, regular meetings have again been held since Autumn 2024. The significant work to date has ensured we have a good and shared understanding of the likely impacts and of the likely mitigation required, but detailed highways modelling began in early 2025 to fully assess the proposals. Analysis of the modelling results with the TWG will help resolve issues and agree mitigation prior to the finalisation of the Transport Assessment and submission of the DCO.

4.0 ENGAGEMENT

Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire District Council

- 4.2 The Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) is being updated with Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire District Council to continue to assist during the Pre-application stage of DCO preparation. The consultant team are engaging with Officers from both Councils to finalise an updated PPA which will ensure there are sufficient resources and capacity to discuss the proposals, the assessment of likely impacts and appropriate mitigation. There is regular dialogue with Council Officers, and it is expected that there will be briefings to wider representatives of the Councils as the application preparation progresses, and in anticipation of formal, statutory consultation planned for the summer (2025).

Parish Councils

- 4.3 The Applicant had engaged with Parish Councils through update emails to Clerks before the project pause in 2023, and some briefing meetings were held around the time of the (non-statutory) consultation in 2022. Following the restart in 2024, the Applicant wrote again in September 2024 to Parish Councils in the vicinity of the proposals, and followed up with further contact in March 2025. This has included contact with the wider Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Forum of Parish Councils. The intention of this contact is to ensure Parish Councils are aware of the broad programme, and to enable dialogue should there be questions or queries outside of the more formal and statutory consultation processes. The Applicant will write again once details of the statutory consultation process are fixed.

Network Rail

- 4.4 A Basic Services Agreement is in place with Network Rail. Engagement will continue with Network Rail throughout the Pre-application stage of the project. Regular (approx. monthly) meetings have been underway since late 2024.

Transport Working Group

- 4.5 The TWG has reviewed and agreed methodological and other technical elements of the emerging Transport Assessment which has enabled the detailed modelling to begin. The TWG is meeting approximately monthly, and will continue to meet throughout the Spring and Summer of 2025 ahead of submission planned late in the year.

Landowners

- 4.6 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 now under the applicant's control, with dialogue about other areas of land also well progressed.

Natural England

- 4.7 Our ecologists are continuing to engage with Natural England throughout preparation of the application to agree impacts and mitigation, and with updated survey information (referred to above) will revisit draft agreements and statements prepared earlier in the process.

Historic England

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

Environment Agency

- 4.9 The Applicant has already engaged with the Environment Agency (EA) on the project in respect of the landfill and waste issues. A site investigation was required in the landfill to inform our landfill remediation design which required approval from the EA before taking place. The Applicant will continue to engage with the EA about the scheme generally but also particularly in relation to the remediation design to agree matters and resolve issues, and is now exploring wider engagement through the new NSIP focused team within the EA.

Statutory Undertakers

- 4.10 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 one of the main risks to meeting pre-application timetables for schemes of this nature. In order to manage this, the Transport Working Group is based around collaboration and communication, and meets regularly to try and mitigate the risk of major delays. The detailed modelling is now underway following sign-off and agreement of required technical and methodological issues, and will continue through the Spring 2025. The Applicant is covering costs associated with resourcing the TWG.

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 are working closely with consultees to agree 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, an updated PPA with Cherwell and Oxfordshire will enable these authorities to meet reasonable costs associated with feeding in comments and reviewing documents as part of the DCO preparation process.

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			17/03						***		****	*****	
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

* First consultation held between May – July 2022

** Project paused to review highways infrastructure proposals

*** PINS meeting to be held post statutory consultation

**** PINS meeting to discuss draft documents

***** PINS meeting to be held ahead of DCO submission