



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt. Hon Heidi Alexander MP
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange Application

6th December 2024

Sent by email to: hinckleySRFI@planninginspectorate.gov.uk
CC: transportinfrastructure@dft.gov.uk, heidi.alexander@dft.gov.uk

Dear Heidi,

We write regarding the proposed Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange development and the Planning Inspectorate's recent report highlighting significant concerns about the project. As the Members of Parliament representing the constituencies directly affected by this proposal, South Leicestershire and the Hinckley and Bosworth constituencies respectively, we feel compelled to address several unresolved issues and seek clarification on why further evidence is not being sought in critical areas.

We note your department is requesting further information about key areas that we and others have raised - including Highway Safety and Traffic Impacts, Noise and Vibration and the impact on ambulatory impacted pedestrians at the Narborough Level Crossing. We will await the Applicant's responses on these issues and respond within the allocated time along with other Interested Parties.

These very concerns were highlighted by residents living in the surrounding villages and despite considerable time and opportunity, the applicant has been unable to justify the level of disruption and adverse environmental impacts from the proposed development, nor has the applicant offered adequate mitigations. We remain of the view that this is a wholly inappropriate development and that the harms far outweigh the potential benefits.

As a result of the concerns raised by the Planning Inspectorate, we note that your predecessor was minded to refuse the application. This is a view shared by a majority of our constituents - in fact in 2023 a survey conducted by the Office of Alberto Costa MP found that of the 1,631 respondents, 94.5% stated that they were opposed to the plans for the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI) as proposed by the developer Tritax Symmetry.

The Examining Authority (ExA) has identified numerous concerns, which your predecessor, as the secretary of state, did not request to seek further information on, despite the fact that these concerns individually represent adverse impacts ranging in magnitude, but taken together amount to a considerable cumulative impact. The ExA noted that the cumulative effect of such harm must still be factored into the planning balance and despite the proposed mitigations "*significant adverse cumulative effects would remain*" (3.13.6).

Whilst the applicant has been asked to provide more information on some of the most damaging impacts of the proposals, there are key areas that we believe further consideration ought to be given



by you, the Secretary of State due to the considerable cumulative effects they will have. These include:

Environmental and biodiversity including impacts on Burbage Common

According to the Planning Inspectorate's report, the development would cause "*substantial residual harm*" to the rural and tranquil character of Burbage Common due to visual intrusion, noise, and increased activity from construction and operation (3.4.62). Visual intrusion from large-scale warehousing and rail operations would significantly alter the rural character of the area.

The ExA concluded that this would affect recreational users of the area and diminish its ecological and social value. Combined effects of operational noise and visual intrusion were noted to "*detract from the sense of peace and isolation that visitors currently enjoy at Burbage Common*" (ER 3.4.62). This will affect many of our constituents and local groups and we are concerned by the concerns raised by the Planning Inspectorate about the adequacy of mitigation for impacts on biodiversity corridors and the potential for some species to lose habitat connectivity. Is the Department confident that environmental protections and biodiversity commitments are sufficient under current proposals?

Impact on Access to Public Open Space

The severance of Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) would exacerbate the impacts highlighted above, and again the Planning Inspectorate specifically highlighted the significantly increased distances for equestrians and pedestrians traveling between Burbage Common and Elmesthorpe (3.3.604).

The severance of PRoWs would reduce access to recreational areas like Burbage Common, potentially discouraging outdoor activities and limiting opportunities for physical exercise: The ExA noted that this could harm mental well-being by diminishing residents' ability to enjoy natural spaces and tranquil areas (3.3.604). We feel that the applicant cannot adequately address this matter yet it would present serious harm to the lives of residents.

Health Concerns (particularly mental health)

The ExA highlighted significant health concerns for the residents of the Aston Firs Travellers site due to the proposed acoustic barrier, which would create an "*oppressive and visually dominant*" effect (ER 3.6.81). However, the ExA also noted health concerns tied to air quality and noise, although these were assessed as "*limited harmful impact*" for most receptors (ER 3.6.70). It is clear, and should be of serious concern that the applicant's noise modelling is still incomplete and shows adverse impact in excess of acceptable levels. The lack of information and consultation from the applicant continues to exacerbate concerns and affect the well-being of residents.

Furthermore, given the questions raised about the applicant's sound modelling, what steps are being taken to ensure that noise, vibration, and air quality impacts are accurately assessed and mitigated?

Total number of major developments in area and identity of local villages

Our Constituents continue to write expressing major concerns about the overwhelming industrial development in the area. Magna Park, one of Europe's largest logistics parks, is just 10 miles away from the proposed site, alongside numerous other developments. Our constituencies already bear a disproportionate share of large-scale commercial projects and housing. The balance between homes



and warehousing is at a tipping point, risking the area's appeal as a place to live, work, and raise families.

The East Midlands has become a hub for large-scale logistics developments, including multiple rail freight interchanges. Within a short radius of the proposed HNRFI site are 4 Daventry terminals (18 miles away), 4 national rail hubs (within 45 miles), and the under-construction Northampton Gateway (31 miles away). In a recent survey, 92% of respondents felt this proposal would further harm the identity of their villages. Given the existing infrastructure, another rail freight interchange in South Leicestershire is unnecessary and detrimental.

Cultural Heritage

On top of the detrimental impact the proposed development will have on Burbage common, the ExA found "*less than substantial harm*" to several designated heritage assets, including the Grade II listed Church of St Catherine at Burbage and the Grade I listed Church of St Mary at Barwell (ER 3.9.90). While these impacts were not severe enough alone to outweigh the need for the project, the ExA noted that the cumulative effect of such harm must still be factored into the planning balance. The harm to these assets contributed and weighed against the development.

The Planning Inspectorate's recommendation to withhold consent until these matters are resolved reflects the gravity of these issues. However, we note that despite these significant concerns, the Department has not requested additional evidence or clarification in some areas that could influence the outcome of this proposal.

Given the significant implications of this project, it is vital that these concerns are addressed comprehensively before any decision is made. We would be grateful if you could provide a detailed response to these points and confirm whether the Department plans to seek additional evidence on these matters. We look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Alberto Costa
Member of Parliament for South Leicestershire

Dr Luke Evans
Member of Parliament for Hinckley and Bosworth