

Cabinet – 29 March 2022 – Agenda Item 13

Comments on Hinckley Rail Freight Interchange Consultation

Mrs Maggie Wright – County Councillor Stoney Stanton and Croft Division

I completely agree with this report's findings and recommendations. I commend Officers for their work on this NSIP pre-application to the Planning Inspectorate as a statutory consultee as the Local Highway Authority and recognise the significant draw on resources. A "blackhole" would be a fair description. I welcome this robust reply and recognise from my own experience and that of my residents how difficult it has been to engage with the developer Tritax and have transparent and open debates. Particular and unnecessary anguish has been caused by the unsympathetic and unprofessional issue of notices under the compulsory purchase act.

Highways issues, poor mitigation plans and raised pollution levels are major concerns for my residents associated with this enormous proposed Rail Freight Interchange development. This report and appendices capture and highlights these concerns. However, as Divisional Member I must stress that this project carries other major areas of concern other than Highways matters. The loss of an extensive green field site next to the amenity of Burbage Wood, localised health implications (the close proximity of LCC's Aston Firs residential caravan park 90m away, the adjacent settlement of Elmesthorpe 300m away and the larger settlements of Sapcote, Burbage, and Stoney Stanton a mile. Concern is of exposure to 24/7 light, noise and emissions pollution). There are no plans to electrify the Nuneaton, Leicester and Peterborough rail line which will increase localised pollution from trains being loaded and unloaded on the site in addition to overwhelming HGV movements. This will impact our carbon neutral ambitions. The scheme is pursuing carbon offsetting but providing no attempt to reduce localised pollution. There are also the many concerns associated with the level crossing at Narborough and the conflicting information coming out of the Rail Report in relation to other consultation material. When will the trains actually run, through the day or night? Imagine the impact of noise on residents in addition to highway implications. There is also major impact on Ecology, flooding and drainage, heritage and social economic factors. And, the lack of multi-modal commuting plans to ensure the proposed 8,400 employees don't all drive to work.

The overarching impact of this development will be colossal and straddles several District Council areas, County Council Divisions, National Highways and the National Rail network with far reaching serious consequences. Partnership working and engagement is therefore essential.

The words "totally inadequate" sum up this consultation and justifies the County Council letter sent to Tritax on 23 December 2021. Expressing concerns that "the material was extremely limited and skirts around the major issues to the extent it is of little use to residents wishing to form a view on the scheme". This was also backed up by similar letters sent by Blaby DC and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council. This has indeed proven to be the case.

To quote my residents, “There are huge discrepancies and contradictions within the consultation materials”. “Limited or no evidence to back up questionable conclusions”. “Not yet modelled, awaiting findings or not yet planned”. How can any consultee make informed decisions or comments when fundamental information about the function of the site is not made available? We know the proposed design but not the actual function or markets. It raises the frequently asked question, is this a genuine Rail Freight Interchange or a way of circumnavigating local planning systems to get an extensive Warehousing Distribution Centre on a green field site?

Tritax have provided the bare minimum of information at this first stage meaning there could be a massive difference between consultation and submission documents if a second consultation does not take place. We cannot trigger or challenge this because it lies solely within the developers remit.

To emphasise we could be faced with an application submission that bears little resemblance to that consulted on. This itself does not align with Government guidelines (Planning Act 2008 Guidance on the pre-application process – points 19/20 page 6) for pre-applications on nationally significant infrastructure projects. I quote “to be of the most value, consultation should be based on accurate information that gives consultees a clear view of what is proposed including any options. Shared at an early stage so that the proposal can still be influenced, sufficiently developed to provide some detail on what is being proposed” The public have not been given this clear view therefore Tritax must undertake a further round of public consultation on a revised PEIR (preliminary Environmental Impact Report).

I acknowledge point 9 of the report which makes reference to the Warehousing and logistics in Leicester and Leicestershire (managing growth and change study April 2021) However, I would point out that these are high level studies and it must be remembered that they are subject to site specific review of actual proposals so not conclusive that a Rail Freight Interchange is needed or appropriate at this site. It is imperative to get the location right. Especially with Rail Interchanges already being established at Dyrft and SEGRO Logistics Park East Midlands Gateway in close proximity. The proposed HNRFI is at least 30 miles from its nearest major marketplace so fails to meet paragraph 4.84 of the NPSNN. The site also lies less than 10 miles from Magna Park (the largest distribution centre in Europe growing up to 16 m sq. ft., employing 15,000 people). It also has direct access to the M1 and A5. With over 70 million sq. feet of warehousing within a 50-mile radius of the proposed HNRFI, how can such a development on a green field site be justified?

I ask Cabinet members to note and acknowledge these comments and concerns so the Planning Inspector is aware of them at this early stage of the Planning process.

Thank you, Leader and Cabinet members, for listening to my comments.