

Case Officer: Nick Wyke

Applicant: Oxfordshire Rail Freight Limited.

Proposal: Strategic Rail Freight Interchange and associated road improvement works - Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP)

Wards: Fringford & Heyford

Councillors: Cllr Grace Conway-Murray, Cllr Nigel Simpson, Cllr Barry Wood

Reason for Referral: Major development

Expiry Date: 04 November 2025

Committee Date: 06 November 2025

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION: To approve Cherwell District Council's Written Response to the Stage 2 OxSRFI Consultation.

MAIN REPORT

1. APPLICATION SITE AND LOCALITY

- 1.1. This report has been prepared in conjunction with the stage 2 consultation on the Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (OxSRFI). A full description of the proposals is contained below but in summary it constitutes an intermodal freight rail interchange terminal with sidings and associated works to the rail line, associated warehousing development (805.133m²) and significant highways works to M40 J10, a new Ardley bypass, relief road around the north-eastern side of Middleton Stoney, link road connecting B430 to Camp Road, Heyford Park, stopping up the existing B430 south of Ardley, widening the A43 north of M40 J10 to the B4100 at Baynards Green, improvements to the A43/B4100 junction and improvements to M40 Junction 9.
- 1.2. The main site for the Strategic Rail Freight Interchange extends to 241 Ha and mostly comprises agricultural land used for the growing of crops and grazing of livestock.
- 1.3. It is located to the west of the B430 and is bound by the existing Chiltern Railway line to the north and the B4030 to the south.
- 1.4. Within the site there is Ashgrove Farmstead (Ashgrove Farm) which includes farm buildings and farm- house. The on-site threshing barn is Grade II Listed.
- 1.5. Also within the main site is the In Vessel Compositing Facility that is operated by Biffa. The lease on the facility is due to expire in 2030 at which point the owner will vacate the site. There is also an underground reservoir in the south-eastern part of the site which will remain in place.
- 1.6. Within the site to the south of Ashgrove Farm is a deciduous woodland which is designated as a priority habitat. Adjacent to the site to the south of Camp Road is another area of deciduous woodland. The site is divided into field parcels by mature hedgerows within which are mature trees.

- 1.7. The Ashgrove Brook flows through the application site and is identified by the Environment Agency as being at risk of surface water flooding. The remaining parts of the site fall within flood risk zone 1.
- 1.8. To the north of the site and running parallel with the Chiltern Railway Line is the Ardley Cutting Site of Special Scientific Interest. To the east of the site on the opposite side of the B430 is the Ardley Trackways Site of Special Scientific Interest. This SSSI is split into northern and southern parcels. Figures 1 below shows the areas of SSSI. To the west of the site is RAF Upper Heyford Local Wildlife Site.

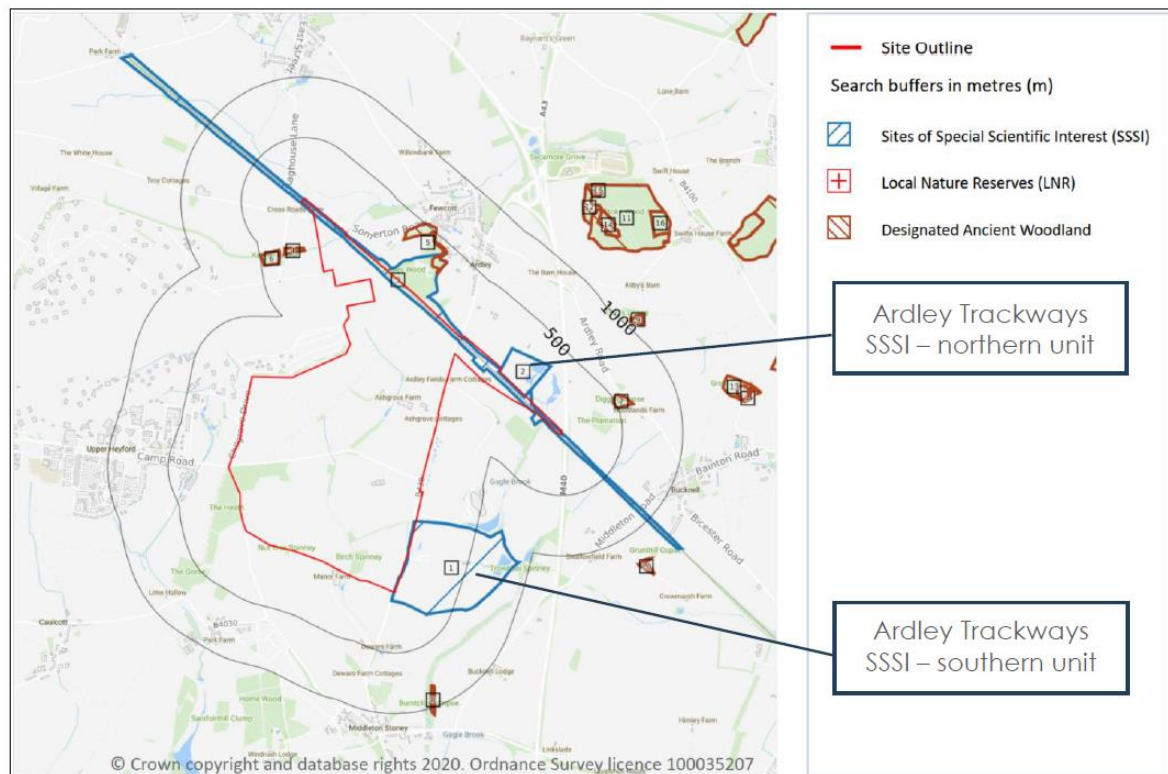


Figure 1 showing the two SSSI Areas. The red line shown denotes the application boundary for the main site.

- 1.9. To the west of the application boundary is the former RAF Upper Heyford Airfield which is a designated Conservation Area. Within the former airfield are two Scheduled Monuments in the form of the northern and southern bomb stores.
- 1.10. The site is within the Ardley and Upper Heyford Conservation Target Area.
- 1.11. Two public rights of way (PROW.109/30/10 and PROW 109/29/20) cross the site connecting Ardley with Upper Heyford.

2. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 Due to the scale of the proposals, the scheme is classified as a Nationally Strategic Infrastructure Project (NSIP) and so are subject to the 2008 Planning Act. This is a separate process to ordinary planning applications which are assessed under The Town and Country Planning Act 1990. It is currently anticipated that the OxSREI will include three NSIP's. Two of the three will be for the associated highway works including the motorway construction works to M40 Junction 10 and the alteration of a trunk road (A43). The third NSIP will be for the rail infrastructure works and associated warehousing.

2.2 The key proposals for this project are:

- An intermodal rail freight terminal, including rail connections and improvements to the Chiltern Main Line including works to Ardley Tunnel, rail sidings, container storage, HGV parking and associated buildings;
- Up to 603,850 sqm (approx. 6.5 million square feet) of warehousing and ancillary buildings, plus up to 201,283 sqm of additional floorspace in the form of mezzanines.
- A secure, dedicated HGV Parking area including driver welfare facilities;
- New road infrastructure and works to the existing road network, including improvements to M40 J10 and junctions on the A43 provision of the principal site access and associated works on the B430, a bypass to the village of Ardley linking the site directly with M40 J10, a relief road around the north eastern side of the village of Middleton Stoney, a link road connecting the B430 to Camp Road, improvements to M40 J9 and other highway improvements at junctions on the local highway network and related traffic management measures;
- New and improved pedestrian and cycle infrastructure both on the Main Site and in the surrounding area connecting the Main Site to local communities;
- Demolition of existing structures and earthworks to create development areas,
- Construct the rail freight terminal and connections to the Mainline and form landscape screen mounding each of around 10m in height and 100m in width;
- Landscape bund around the perimeter of the site (excluding access points) extending between 8.5m-10m in height and between 75m-100m in width.
- Once operational the proposed development is expected to generate up to 1000 car trips and 300 HGV trips during the morning and evening peak hours.

Key benefits arising from the development are as follows:

- The applicant claims the scheme could remove over 53 million HGV miles per year saving an estimated £61 million annually in environmental costs.
- Fund new and enhanced bus services to and from Heyford Park, Bicester, and Banbury.
- New pedestrian and cycle facilities along the B430, Middleton Stoney Relief Road, and Heyford Park Link Road.
- A 10% net gain in biodiversity
- Approximately 56ha of new native woodland, 7.6ha new scrub, 1.9ha new tree planting and 0.28ha orchard planting, significantly in excess of the existing trees/ woodland to be lost. Equates to in excess of 150,000 new native trees and other plants;
- In excess of 13km of new native and species rich hedgerows – equates to over 50,000 new native plants;

- Over 110ha of native species grassland, comprising a mix of calcareous grassland, lowland meadow, and neutral grassland – significantly in excess of the area to be lost.
- Over 6ha of wetland and waterside habitats including sustainable drainage basins and swales designed and managed for biodiversity benefit
- Extensive new off-road footways/ cycleways/ bridleways – connecting up and extending existing surrounding routes – including circuitous trails
- The provision of over 50% of land on the Main Site dedicated to landscape and habitat related proposals;
- Expected generation in the region of 9,600 jobs once operational based upon the following:
 - 8% driving roles;
 - 25% in office based roles including Information Technology, customer service, sales, and engineering support;
 - 12% in managerial roles;
 - 6% other roles.
- Estimated GVA of around £361 million per annum.
- 20% EV Charging provision for cars.
- Warehouse buildings to be constructed to BREEAM Excellent rating targeting outstanding rating.
- Warehouses designed to accommodate up to 100% solar PV on useable warehouse roof space.
- Targeted 90% recycling of construction waste materials.
- Cut and fill of the land to reduce the height of the land by up to 7m below current ground levels.

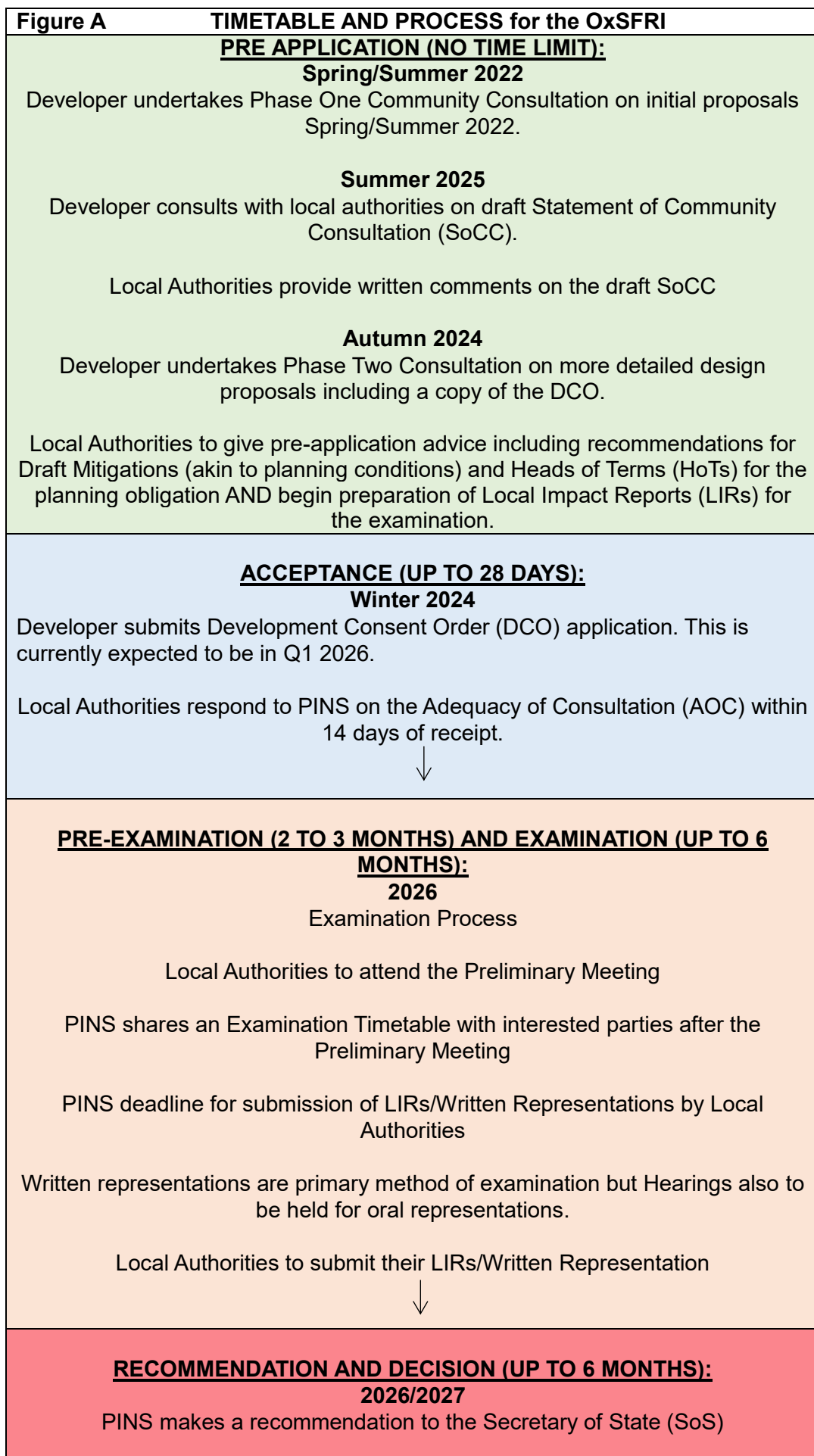
The above works would be phased over a 7 – year period.

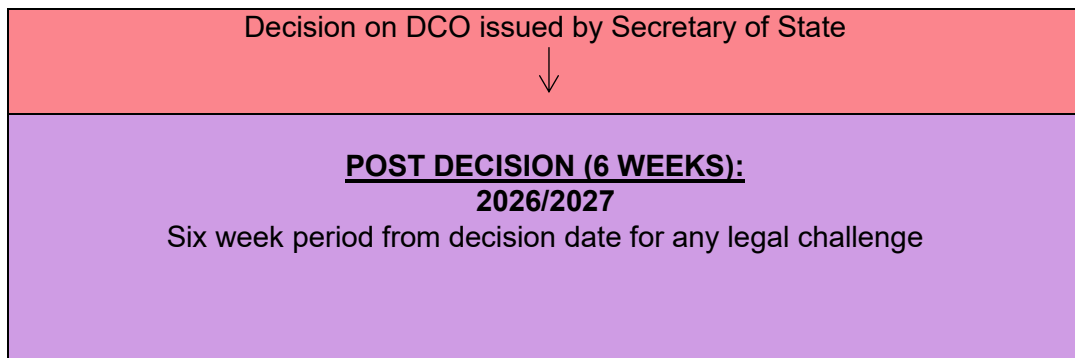
3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 The stage 2 consultation which is currently being undertaken follows a stage 1 consultation that was undertaken in the Spring/Summer 2022.

4. PROCESS AND TIMELINE

- 4.1 The scale of this application means that it is defined as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). Developments of this type are determined by the relevant Secretary of State (SoS) with the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) acting as the examining authority who make a recommendation to the SoS as to whether a Development Consent Order (DCO) should be granted. Local Authorities (LAs) are consultees in this process and are not determining authorities.
- 4.2 Figure A below is a table summarising the process so far and going forward for the OxSRFI. The next stage is for the DCO to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate after which a public examination into the proposals will commence.





- 4.3 As the application boundary is all within the jurisdiction of Cherwell District Council they are the host authority along with Oxfordshire County Council for the purposes of this NSIP application. Neighbouring authorities including West Northamptonshire District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse will all being consulted as part of the NSIP process.
- 4.4 Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council have until the 04th November 2025 in order to provide a response to the Stage 2 Consultation. The attached joint response has been prepared on behalf of Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire District Council.

5. PRINCIPLE

- 5.1 Both CDC and OCC have declared has declared a climate emergency and is committed to tackling climate change. CDC recognise the government's goal of increasing rail freight by 75% by 2050. CDC accepts that there is a compelling need, as a matter of principle to reduce carbon emissions. Both OCC and CDC are therefore supportive of projects such as this which seek to reduce road base freight transport movements and use rail-based alternatives. There is however concern over the environmental impacts caused by the scale of the proposals and the adequacy of the mitigation being proposed. Changes are also needed to the DCO.
- 5.2 The applicant considers that the SRFRI would serve markets in London, Birmingham along with connections to the UK's key seaports, many of which are connected to the rail freight network. Further evidence is required in the form of a Marketing report in order to be clear what markets the SRFI will serve.
- 5.3 The National Networks National Policy Statement prescribes a number of criteria that a SRFI must meet in order to be considered a NSIP project. These include the ability to accommodate 4 freight trains per day each of a length of 775m and the ability for the rail network to accommodate a minimum of W8 guage which is required for freight rail transport. Oxfordshire County Council have requested further evidence to demonstrate that 4 trains per day can be achieved and there is capacity within the rail network to accommodate this increase in movements from identified markets.
- 5.4 The National Networks National Policy Statement does not however prescribe a minimum or maximum floorspace figure for the warehouse logistics space required to be provided as part of the rail freight terminal. The proposal is for in the region of 6.5 million sqft of warehouse space with a further 1.5 million sqft in the form of mezzanines. These units will be set into the site through the proposed cut and fill exercise but will extend up to 25m in height. Given the scale of the

proposals and identified harm caused by such scale, further justification is required as to why this level of floorspace is required.

- 5.5 In terms of changes to the DCO, requirement five of the DCO seeks to allow occupation of 2.5 million sq ft of warehouse floorspace on the main site prior to a fully functioning rail freight terminal capable of accommodating a minimum of 4 trains per day being completed. Both CDC and OCC do not consider that the wording of this restriction is sufficient. It does not explicitly reference providing a connection to the rail freight terminal to the Chiltern Main Line. A situation could therefore arise whereby the terminal is constructed but is not able to be used as it is not connected to the freight network. This could potentially allow warehousing to come forward that is reliant on road rather than rail-based transport for movement. Both OCC and CDC consider that this requirement should be re-drafted to make it more explicit that the connection to the Chiltern Main Line is included in the associated rail infrastructure. Similar approaches have been taken on other SRFI's such as that at Northampton Gateway.
- 5.6 Paragraph 4.83 of the National Networks NPS makes clear that SRFI's may not be considered suitable adjacent to residential areas. With Heyford being identified by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as a potential location for a 13,000-home new town further evidence is required that the proposed SRFI would not adversely affect potential future occupants of these dwellings.
- 5.7 Each of the topics contained in the draft Environmental Statement have been reviewed by the relevant service within OCC/CDC. A response on the adequacy of the mitigation proposed and level of impact is contained within the draft response.
- 5.8 Due to the lack of internal landscape expertise, LUC were appointed on behalf of CDC and OCC to review the landscape chapter of the Environmental Statement. They have provided 25 recommendations as part of their response on changes that are required to scheme and where further information is required.
- 5.9 Following the discovery of evidence of dinosaurs at the Ardley Quarry on the opposite side of the B430, and further evidence having previously been uncovered at the Ardley Trackways SSSI, details of a geological watching brief are recommended to be agreed as part of the DCO for any works on site should further remains be found.
- 5.10 Further details on the recommendations and views of those consulted within Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council are contained in the attached formal response.
- 5.11 It is Officer's recommendation that members agree to submission of the attached response as part of the stage 2 consultation.

6. RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE THE PHASE 2 CONSULTATION JOINT RESPONSE TO THE APPLICANT.