

The West Midlands Rail Freight Interchange Order 201X  
ES - Vol 1 - Chapter 1: Introduction  
Regulation 5(2)(a)  
Ramboll - July 2018

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

- 1.1 Environmental Impact Assessment ('EIA') is a process in which the likely significant effects of certain types of development projects on the environment are identified, assessed and reported upon. The process must be followed in order for such effects to be taken into account before a decision is made on whether development consent should be granted.
- 1.2 Four Ashes Ltd ('the Applicant') intends to make an application ('Application') to the Secretary of State ('SoS') via the Planning Inspectorate ('PINS') for a development consent order ('DCO') under the Planning Act 2008 for the development of a new Strategic Rail Freight Interchange ('SRFI') (including warehousing) (the 'Proposed Development') at land located at Four Ashes, Staffordshire (the 'Site') (see Figure 1.1). The Proposed Development is to be known as the West Midlands Interchange ('WMI'). A glossary of terminology associated with the Proposed Development is presented within this volume of the Environmental Statement ('ES').
- 1.3 To assist with describing and assessing the Proposed Development the Site is divided where necessary into the following key components:
- The 'SRFI Site';
  - The 'Off-site Highways Works'; and
  - The 'Electricity Pylon Works'.
- 1.4 These features are described in further detail in Chapter 4: Proposed Development, of this ES.
- 1.5 The Proposed Development, as a rail freight interchange, constitutes a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project ('NSIP') under Sections 14(1)(l) and 26 of the Planning Act 2008. The Planning Act 2008 (the 'Act') defines what projects constitute NSIPs. Under Section 14(1)(l) of the Act. A 'rail freight interchange' is an NSIP if it complies with the criteria in Section 26 of the Act. Section 26 of the Act requires that the land on which the proposed 'rail freight interchange' will be situated must be in England and must be at least 60 hectares in area. In addition, the rail freight interchange must:
- be capable of handling consignments of goods from more than one consignor and to more than one consignee;
  - be capable of handling at least 4 trains per day;
  - be part of the rail network in England; and
  - include warehouses to which goods can be delivered from the railway network in England either directly or by means of another form of transport.
- 1.6 The Proposed Development fulfils all the requirements set out above and, accordingly, is a NSIP.
- 1.7 This ES has been prepared on behalf of the Applicant in accordance with the requirements of the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 ('EIA Regulations') and relevant EIA guidance, including the National Networks National Policy Statement (2014). A Scoping Opinion was obtained in 2016 (described in in further detail in

Chapter 2: ES Process and Methodology. Nevertheless, the additional elements which are required by the 2017 regulations have been included in this ES. These are described in Chapter 2: EIA Process and Methodology, of this ES.

- 1.8 The Applicant recognises that the DCO application falls within Schedule 2, paragraph 10 of the EIA Regulations, which owing to the Proposed Development's characteristics and location, has the potential to give rise to significant effects on the environment. To ensure that any potentially significant effects of the Proposed Development on the environment are considered and where appropriate, mitigated, the Applicant has therefore commissioned an ES for the Proposed Development.
- 1.9 In accordance with the EIA Regulations, this ES reports on the likely significant environmental effects of the Proposed Development during the construction stage, as well as once the Proposed Development is complete and operational. Decommissioning effects are also considered.
- 1.10 Information on how the scope of the ES was defined, the structure of this ES, and the methodology is provided in Chapter 2: Process and Methodology of this ES.
- 1.11 This ES has been prepared by Ramboll Environment and Health UK Ltd ('Ramboll') and a number of technical specialists. The EIA specialists, in addition to the Applicant's wider design and planning team, are presented in Table 1.1, along with their respective disciplines.
- 1.12 The SoS will determine the Application taking into account the likely significant environmental effects of the Proposed Development as determined through the EIA process, of which this ES forms part.

## Development Context

### Site Location

- 1.13 The Site is approximately 10 kilometres to the north of Wolverhampton and immediately west of Junction 12 of the M6 in South Staffordshire. The Site is approximately 297 hectares (ha) in size and is located within the administrative boundary of South Staffordshire District Council (SSDC), within the Civil Parishes of Brewood and Coven, Penkridge and Hatherton.
- 1.14 Figure 1.1 identifies the Site's location. The area for the Application ('Order Limits') is illustrated in Document 2.4.
- 1.15 The Site is broadly bound by the A5 road to the north (from Junction 12 to the Gailey Roundabout); Calf Heath reservoir, the M6, Stable Lane and Woodlands Lane to the east; Station Drive, Straight Mile and Woodlands Lane to the south; and the A449 (Stafford Road), from the Gailey Roundabout to Station Drive to the west. The south-eastern area of the Site is bisected by Vicarage Road.

Figure 1.1 Site Location



## Site Description

- 1.16 The Site is characterised by a large area of sand and gravel mineral extraction within the east known as Calf Heath Quarry (Application Ref: SS.07/19/681); a patchwork of agricultural fields with hedgerows and trees to the west and south of this; and an area of mixed woodland known as Calf Heath Wood. The current use of the Site is mainly arable farming and the mineral extraction area covers approximately 38 ha, with almost the entirety of this area currently open-cast.
- 1.17 The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal runs roughly north to south through the western part of the Site. The West Coast Main Line (WCML) runs north to south through the Site, near the western edge.
- 1.18 Public access to the Site is limited. A single Public Right of Way exists in the north-west and provides a link between Croft Lane and the A449 via an overbridge to the railway. A towpath also extends along the western side of the canal along its length through the Site.
- 1.19 There is limited public access to the large area of the Site to the east of the canal or to Calf Heath Wood.

## Site Context

- 1.20 The surrounding area is characterised by a mixture of agricultural fields and employment uses. A small number of residential and commercial properties are located along the A5 to the north of the Site, including a petrol filling station and a nursery/garden centre. Calf Heath Reservoir is located adjacent to the north-eastern Site boundary and the area south of Vicarage Road is made up of agricultural fields with trees and hedgerows.
- 1.21 The large chemical works operated by SI Group is located between the western and eastern sections of the Site. The chemical works does not form part of the Site. The existing Four Ashes Industrial Estate is located off-site adjacent to the southern Site boundary and the Veolia energy recovery facility is also located south of the Site. Detailed planning approval was also granted in 2016 for development on land between the chemical works and the east section of the Site. The approval is for the erection of four industrial/distribution buildings (uses B1(c)/B2/B8) along with access and servicing arrangements, car parking, landscaping and associated (further details below).
- 1.22 There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest ('SSSI') located approximately 140 m south of the Site. The SSSI is designated for its geological value.
- 1.23 Saredon Brook is situated approximately 450 m to the south of the Site and flows in a broadly east-west direction. It joins with the River Penk approximately 1.2 km south-west of the Site. The River Penk is situated approximately 1.2 km south-west of the Site at its closest point, although it is generally situated approximately 1.5 km to the west of the Site, and flows broadly in south-north direction.
- 1.24 The key road links within the surrounding area include the A5 directly to the north of the Site; the M6 motorway to the east running north/south and the M6 toll road approximately 2 km south-east of the Site; the M54 approximately 4 km to the south of the Site; and the A449 directly to the west of the Site.

## Proposed Development Summary

- 1.25 The Proposed Development comprises:
- An intermodal freight terminal with direct connections to the West Coast Main Line, capable of accommodating up to 10 trains per day and trains of up to 775m long, including container storage, Heavy Goods Vehicle ('HGV') parking, rail control building and staff facilities;
  - Up to 743,200 square metres (gross internal area) of rail served warehousing and ancillary service buildings;
  - New road infrastructure and works to the existing road infrastructure;
  - Demolition and alterations to existing structures and earthworks to create development plots and landscape zones;
  - Reconfiguring and burying of electricity pylons and cables; and
  - Strategic landscaping and open space, including alterations to public rights of way and the creation of new ecological enhancement areas and publicly accessible open areas.

## Planning Context

### Planning Policy Context

- 1.26 It is necessary to consider the Proposed Development against relevant policies and guidance at national, regional and local levels, as relevant. At the national level, planning policy is contained within the National Networks National Policy Statement (NPS), National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)<sup>1</sup>, and Planning Practice Guidance. Relevant planning policy context is addressed in each individual technical chapter of this ES, and the Planning Statement which accompanies the Application.
- 1.27 There are a wide range of policy documents which have some potential relevance to the determination of the WMI DCO application. However, the regime established by the Act makes clear that the National Networks National Policy Statement (2015) (the NPS) is the primary policy document relevant to the determination of this application.
- 1.28 Section 104 of the Act requires the SoS to determine an application for a NSIP in accordance with the relevant National Policy Statement, except in a limited number of specific circumstances. In this case, the NPS sets out the need for (and Government's policies to deliver) nationally significant projects on the national road and rail networks in England, including SRFIs.
- 1.29 The NPS is a specific policy regime, designed to test, shape and deliver infrastructure which meets the identified national need for improved road and rail networks, containing detailed guidance on a topic by topic basis to guide both applicants and the decision maker in their detailed approach to NSIP projects.
- 1.30 The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) (NPPF) may also be an important and relevant consideration in decisions on NSIPs, but "only to the extent relevant to that project" (paragraph 1.18). At paragraph 3, the NPPF states:

*"This Framework does not contain specific policies for nationally significant infrastructure projects for which particular considerations apply. These are determined in accordance with the decision-making framework set out in the Planning Act 2008 and relevant national policy statements for major infrastructure, as well as any other matters that are considered both important and relevant (which may include the National Planning Policy Framework). National*

<sup>1</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government. 2012. The National Planning Policy Framework. HMSO.

*policy statements form part of the overall framework of national planning policy, and are a material consideration in decisions on planning applications."*

- 1.31 Unlike in the determination of planning applications, there is no statutory requirement for the decision maker to attach weight to development plan policy. Regional and local policy can be "important and relevant" to the determination of a DCO, but the weight attached to it is likely to depend upon its consistency with the policies of the NPS.
- 1.32 The current Development Plan for South Staffordshire is the South Staffordshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2012).
- 1.33 Other documents that are a material consideration for Town and Country Planning Act applications in South Staffordshire and may be important and relevant to the determination of this development consent application include:
- The Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire (2015-2030) (2017);
  - The South Staffordshire Green Belt and Open Countryside SPD (2014); and
  - The emerging South Staffordshire Site Allocations Plan.
- 1.34 In parallel with planning policy, consultation has been a key part of the design evolution and the views of statutory consultees and stakeholders have served to help identify specific issues, as well as highlighting the existence of any information in their possession, or of which they have knowledge, which may be of assistance in progressing the EIA.

## Planning History

- 1.35 A number of planning permissions have been granted by Staffordshire County Council (SCC) relating to a sand and gravel extraction quarry which is currently operational on a large area of the Site. The current permission (Ref No. SS.12/08/681) allows the phased extraction of sand and gravel to a depth of 4 metres and subsequent restoration of approximately 38 hectares of land in the north-east of the Site.
- 1.36 SSDC approved an outline planning application in March 2008 for the erection of 84,000 sq m of warehousing (Use Class B8) and associated offices, parking, and access arrangements at a roughly 25 hectare site located between the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and Calf Heath Wood, directly adjacent to the Site (Ref No. 07/01363/OUT). This development was never commenced, however, a similar application was submitted in May 2016 which sought detailed consent for the erection of four industrial/distribution buildings (Use Class B1(c)/B2/B8) along with access and servicing arrangements, car parking, landscaping and associated works (Ref No. 16/00498/FUL). The application was approved and the development has been implemented (the 'Bericote Development').

## Project Team

- 1.37 The Applicant has appointed a project team. The key members of the team including their respective roles in relation to the EIA, as relevant, are presented in Table 1.1.

Company	Role
Four Ashes Ltd	The Applicant
Chetwoods	Architect- masterplanning
Eversheds Sutherland	Project lawyers
Quod	Planning Consultant

Company	Role
	Socio-economics and Human Health Lead
Ramboll	EIA Project Manager and Co-ordinator Author of the non-technical chapters of the ES Air Quality, Ecology and Nature Conservation, Ground Conditions and Water Environment and Flood Risk Leads.
FPCR Environment and Design	Landscape Architect, Arboricultural and Landscape and Visual Lead
WSP	Transport Lead
Waldeck	Structural and Civil Engineer
Wessex Archaeology	Archaeology Lead
Montagu Evans	Heritage Lead
Askew Land & Soil	Agriculture Lead
Resound Acoustics	Noise and Vibration Lead
Savills	Project Manager
Intermodality	Rail specialist
Copper Consultancy	Community Relations

## Environmental Statement Environmental Statement Structure

- 1.38 The ES comprises the two volumes:
- Volume 1: ES Main Report, comprising the following chapters:
    - Table of Contents
    - Chapter 1: Introduction
    - Chapter 2: ES Process and Methodology
    - Chapter 3: Consideration of Alternatives and Design Evolution
    - Chapter 4: Description of the Proposed Development
    - Chapter 5: Demolition and Construction
    - Chapter 6: Agriculture and Soils
    - Chapter 7: Air Quality
    - Chapter 8: Archaeology (Buried Heritage Assets)
    - Chapter 9: Cultural Heritage
    - Chapter 10: Ecology and Nature Conservation
    - Chapter 11: Ground Conditions
    - Chapter 12: Landscape and Visual Impact
    - Chapter 13: Noise and Vibration
    - Chapter 14: Socio-Economics and Human Health

- o Chapter 15: Transport and Access
  - o Chapter 16: Water Environment and Flood Risk
  - o Chapter 17: Cumulative Effects
  - o Chapter 18: Summary of Residual Effects and Mitigation
  - o Glossary
  - Volume 2: Technical Appendices (full listing on Volume 2 Contents Page).
- 1.39 The two volumes of the ES will be summarised within a Non-Technical Summary (NTS), which will outline the key findings of the ES, presented in non-technical language to assist the reader.

## Environmental Statement Good Practice

- 1.40 Good practice in the preparation of an ES is defined in a number of sources, with more specific issues covered by ES review checklists. In terms of widely applicable and practical guidance, the IEMA Quality Mark indicator check will be referenced when producing the final ES.
- 1.41 Ramboll is a Registrant of the IEMA Quality Mark.

## ES Availability and Comments

- 1.42 CD versions of the ES are available for purchase at a cost of £25 from Ramboll.
- 1.43 The Application and ES are also available for viewing by the public at:  
<http://www.westmidlandsinterchange.co.uk/>