



**West Midlands**  
Interchange

**Four Ashes Ltd**



# **The West Midlands Rail Freight Interchange Order 201x**

## **Ecology, Landscape & Visual Impact and Agriculture & Soils - Statement of Common Ground – Natural England**

**Regulation 5(2)(q)**

**February 2019**

**Ramboll / FPCR**

Revision	Date	Authors
1	13/10/17	Ramboll / FPCR
2	13/02/18	Ramboll / FPCR
3	06/02/19	Ramboll / FPCR
4	18/02/19	Ramboll / FPCR
5	25/02/19	Ramboll / FPCR

# Contents

- 1. GLOSSARY ..... 1
- 2. INTRODUCTION ..... 1
- 3. BACKGROUND ..... 2
- 4. GENERAL MATTERS AGREED ..... 4
- 5. DETAILED MATTERS AGREED ..... 4
- 6. MATTERS NOT AGREED..... 9
- 7. CONCLUSION ..... 9

# 1. GLOSSARY

1.1.1 The terms used in this document are as follows:

DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DCO	Development Consent Order
ExA	Examining Authority
NE	Natural England
SoCG	Statement of Common Ground
SRFI	Strategic Rail Freight Interchange
WMI	West Midlands Interchange

## 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1.1 This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared by Ramboll Environment and Health UK Ltd (Ramboll) and FPCR Environment and Design Ltd (FPCR) on behalf of Four Ashes Limited (FAL, the Applicant) and Natural England (NE). It sets out common ground between the two parties (FAL and NE) in respect of the West Midlands Interchange (WMI) application (the Application).
- 2.1.2 This statement sets out the matters of interest to NE on which there is full agreement between the Applicant and NE.
- 2.1.3 The purpose of this statement is to assist the Examining Authority (ExA) in making its recommendation on the Application. It has been prepared in accordance with DCLG Guidance<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.1.4 The Applicant and NE have corresponded though the consultation period of the Application. This has shaped the technical inputs to the Application as submitted. The Consultation Report (Document 7.10), as prepared by Copper, catalogues the dialogue between the two parties leading up to the submission of the Application.

---

<sup>1</sup> Planning Act 2008: Guidance for the examination of applications for development consent, DCLG, March 2015

2.1.5 This SoCG covers the following matters:

- Ecology and Biodiversity – specifically the elements under the remit of NE;
- Landscape and Visual Impact; and
- Agriculture and Soils.

## 3. BACKGROUND

3.1.1 The Application is for a Development Consent Order (DCO) under the Planning Act 2008, for a proposed strategic rail freight interchange (SRFI) in South Staffordshire District (the Site).

3.1.2 The Site comprises approximately 297 hectares (ha) of land.

3.1.3 The Site, located at Four Ashes, Staffordshire, is approximately 10km north of Wolverhampton and lies immediately west of Junction 12 of the M6.

3.1.4 The Site is broadly bounded by the A5 trunk 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 trunk road (Stafford Road), from the Gailey Roundabout to Station Drive to the west. The south-eastern area of the Site is bisected by Vicarage Road.

3.1.5 The Site is characterised by a mix of uses including a large area of sand and gravel mineral extraction within the east known as Calf Heath Quarry and a patchwork of agricultural fields with hedgerows and trees to the west and south of this, with an area of mixed woodland known as Calf Heath Wood in the centre of the Site. The current use of the Site is mainly arable farming and the mineral extraction area covers approximately 40ha, with almost the entirety of this area currently open-cast.

3.1.6 There are no international or national designated sites for nature conservation located within or directly adjacent to the Site. There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest ('SSSI') located approximately 140 m south of the Site (Four Ashes Pit). The SSSI is designated for its geological value. Two further SSSIs have been assessed for air quality impacts owing to their

proximity to road routes subject to increases in HGV traffic predicted to arise from the scheme. These are:

- Belvide Reservoir SSSI – notified for its breeding and over wintering populations of wild birds.
- Doxey & Tillington Marshes SSSI – notified for the breeding wild bird snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) and for its fen, marsh and swamp wetland habitats.

3.1.7 There are no Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites within 10km of the Site. The following Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are located within 10 km of the Site: Cannock Chase SAC (7.4 km north-east); Mottey Meadows SAC (7.5 km west, north-west); and Cannock Extension Canal SAC (10 km east).

3.1.8 The Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies at its nearest point approximately 3km to the east of the Site.

3.1.9 In summary, the development proposals include the following:

- 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.

3.1.10 NE are a Consultee for the Application.

## 4. GENERAL MATTERS AGREED

4.1.1 The Applicant and NE agree on the following areas of interest to NE:

- The nature and extent of the development.
- The need for the development.
- The general mitigation methods to be applied during construction of the development.

4.1.2 The Applicant and NE have worked positively to ensure the above level of agreement. The Applicant and NE agree that all assessment works relating to: Ecology and Biodiversity; Landscape and Visual impact; and Agriculture and Soils which are included in the Application are based on a reasonable and appropriate methodology.

## 5. DETAILED MATTERS AGREED

### **Ecological Designated Sites**

5.1.1 FAL and NE, as Statutory Nature Conservation Body, agree to the scope and methodology adopted in the No Significant Effects Report (NSER, document reference UK15-22821\_NSER, dated 19<sup>th</sup> July 2018) (ES Technical Appendix 10.3), including how a likely significant effect is defined and the baseline data used in the NSER.

5.1.2 FAL and NE agree that the 10km study area used in the NSER is appropriate.

5.1.3 FAL and NE agree that the scope of impacts used in the NSER (as per the impact matrices) are appropriate.

5.1.4 FAL and NE agree that the three European Sites scoped in the NSER are appropriate.

5.1.5 FAL and NE agree that the NSER appropriately considers cumulative (in combination) effects with respect to the three European Sites assessed in the NSER.



- 5.1.6 FAL and NE agree that the NSER is appropriately evidenced in determining the effects concluded in the impact matrices included within the NSER.
- 5.1.7 FAL and NE agree with the findings of the NSER in that no likely significant effects have been identified for the three European Sites scoped in the NSER and therefore an appropriate assessment is not required.
- 5.1.8 With regard to Four Ashes Pit SSSI FAL and NE agree with the assessments and findings in the final Environmental Statement (ES) in that no significant negative effects are likely to occur in relation to the groundwater regime of the Four Ashes Pit SSSI.

### **Ecological Surveys**

- 5.1.9 FAL and NE agree that the scope and methodology of the ecological baseline surveys included in the final ES are appropriate and accord with recognised guidance. This data is used in the final ES issued with the Application.

### **Protected Species**

- 5.1.10 FAL and NE agree that all issues relating to the following protected species / habitats have been satisfactorily addressed and appropriate mitigation measures are set out in the final ES (to be secured through a Requirement of the DCO):

1. Amphibians including great crested newts.
2. Bats.
3. Otters.
4. Nesting birds.
5. Reptiles.
6. Badger.
7. Water vole.
8. Polecat.
9. Invertebrates.
10. White clawed crayfish.
11. Brown Hare.
12. Hedgerows.

## **Ecological Enhancement**

- 5.1.11 FAL and NE agree that ecological enhancement measures are outlined in the final ES, which will have a positive effect on biodiversity and accord with relevant guidance.
- 5.1.12 FAL and NE consider that proposed Ecological Mitigation and Management Plan (EMMPs) for each phase of development comprises an appropriate mechanism for securing ecological enhancement and mitigation.
- 5.1.13 The parameters plans included as part of the Application indicate earth bunds up to 8 m in height in certain locations on-site. The earth bunds have been devised taking account of biodiversity, visual impact and noise issues. The proposals are considered to balance these three elements and have been developed in consultation with Staffordshire County Council. The height of the earth bunds provides benefit in terms of noise mitigation. The design of the earth bunds has been developed to avoid 'uniform' imposing structures and have been 'softened' by landscaping proposals. The width of the earth bunds (over 40 m in many places) enables the bund to take an asymmetrical shape; being steeper on the 'inward' face (to provide noise attenuation) and comprising shallower slopes on the 'outward' face which enables opportunities for significant landscaping. FAL and NE agree, if implemented as proposed, these earth bunds can have a valuable biodiversity function. These measures can be secured in the proposed EMMPs.

## **Comment on the Ecological Mitigation and Management Plan**

- 5.1.14 FAL and NE agree that NE should be consulted on the EMMPs as per a Requirement of the DCO.

## **Landscape Designations**

- 5.1.15 FAL and NE agree that the Site does not lie within a designated landscape. The Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies at its nearest point approximately 3km to the east of the Site. The AONB generally stretches to the north and east of this point.

## **Landscape Character Assessment**

5.1.16 FAL and NE agree that the Site lies within the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain National Character Area (NCA) (No. 61). The Cannock Chase and Cank Wood NCA (No. 67) lies generally to the east and the Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau NCA (No. 66) generally to the south of the Site.

## **Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment - Methodology**

5.1.17 FAL and NE agree that the scope and methodology of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) included within the final ES is appropriate and in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd Edition) (GLVIA3).

5.1.18 The assessment of the construction phase of the proposed development is based upon a 15 year phased process and this constitutes a long term duration. This is taken into account in the assessment of effects as one factor within the magnitude of change assessment. It is agreed that the construction effects will vary for the receptors during this period. The construction phase assessment of effects is based upon the 'worst case' effect during this period.

5.1.19 FAL and NE agree that the assessment takes into account mitigation measures incorporated into the design of the scheme as a result of an iterative design process.

## **Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Protected landscapes**

5.1.20 On landscape and visual impact matters, NE limit their advice and comments to the likely landscape and visual effects of the proposed development on Cannock Chase AONB.

5.1.21 FAL and NE agree that where views towards the proposed development are available for users of Shoal Hill the likely visual effect (during construction and upon completion) will be Moderate Adverse.

5.1.22 NE are satisfied that the statements made at paragraphs 7.5.12-7.5.27 within the Design and Access Statement (Document 7.5) will be sufficient to ensure that the visual effects of the new structures on the statutory purposes of the Cannock Chase AONB will be mitigated for as far as is reasonably possible. In particular NE welcome the comment at 7.5.16.

5.1.23 NE are satisfied with the indicative colour palette on page 90 of the Design and Access Statement (Document 7.5) and confirm that none of the colours shown nor the proposed patterning on these indicative elevations would cause NE concern. NE are content with the indicative designs for the east and south elevations i.e. those elevations visible from Shoal Hill.

### **Agriculture and Soils**

5.1.24 FAL and NE agree that the final ES indicates a phased loss of best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land at the Site.

5.1.25 FAL and NE agree that the loss of BMV agricultural land is unavoidable given the development proposals, however the effects of this loss will be mitigated by the following:

- The loss of BMV agricultural land will be phased over the construction period (estimated to be 15 years), with existing agricultural land to be retained and protected until development occurs in a specific area;
- The soils will be re-used on-site within proposed landscaping;
- During construction works soils will be managed in accordance with Defra guidance 'Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Management and Use of Soil on Construction Sites' (Defra, September 2009); and
- Approximately 18.4 % of the South Staffordshire District comprises Grade 2 agricultural land, which is higher than the national average (14.2 %). The majority (i.e. 69.4 %) of agricultural land in the District is in Grade 3 (not differentiated between Subgrade 3a and 3b), which is also higher than the national average (48.2 %). Therefore, the presence of Grade 2 and Grade 3 agricultural land at the Site is to be expected, as these grades of agricultural land are widespread in the District.

5.1.26 FAL and NE agree that a Soils Resource Plan (SRP) will be prepared for each phase of the proposed development (as per section 6.0 of the Outline Demolition and Construction Environmental Plan (ES Technical Appendix 2.3) as secured by a DCO requirement). Each SRP will be based on specific proposals and include final soil volumes to be managed as part of each development phase.

5.1.27 As a basis for each SRP, the soil type data included the Agricultural Land Classification report (ES Technical Appendix 6.1) will be used as the basis of a soil inventory, where soils of a similar type will be managed accordingly.

5.1.28 The project engineer (Waldeck) is confident that sufficient soil volumes exist for development proposals. FAL also confirm the use of on-site soils for creation of the landscaping bunds will provide some flexibility in terms of the soil volumes used in their construction if needed.

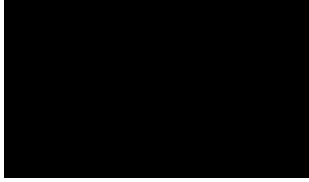
## 6. MATTERS NOT AGREED

6.1.1 There are no matters not agreed, however at the time of writing FAL and NE were in discussion about the relevance and limitations of potential enhancement options for an off-site SSSI. Noting it is agreed between FAL and NE that, based on assessments undertaken, the proposed development does not generate significant air quality effects at the off-site SSSI.

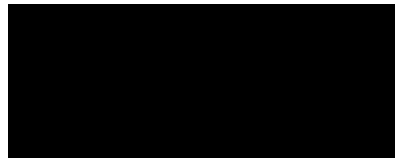
## 7. CONCLUSION

7.1.1 This statement sets out a record of the issues of interest to Natural England and the extent to which these are agreed with Four Ashes Limited.

7.1.2 It sets out the general circumstances surrounding each issue and the position reached at the time of writing.



Matt Royall on behalf of the Applicant  
Principal, Ramboll Environment & Health UK Ltd, Cornerblock, Two Cornwall Street,  
Birmingham, B3 2DX  
Date: 25 February 2019



Hayley Fleming on behalf of Natural England  
Worcestershire County Hall, Spetchley Road,  
Worcester, WR5 2NP

Date: 25 February 2019