

With regard to the West Midlands Interchange. Deadline 6 – 19th July 2019

Dear Paul Singleton,

I would like to submit the following comments following Hearing 5 on 10th July 2019.

I am rather dismayed, although not greatly surprised, at how much the West Midlands Interchange Development is being driven by the needs of the Black Country rather than those of South Staffordshire.

My understanding is that the Black Country can only identify land available within its own boundaries that is significantly less than required. In the Black Country Development Needs Assessment (EDNA) of May 2017 it shows a requirement of 800 hectares, 70% of which is a need for logistics and warehousing. Looking to other authorities to meet the shortfall my impression is that South Staffordshire was the only authority which may consider meeting that need. Much discussion took place at this hearing quoting several documents that were supposed to support the verification for this project to only progress in the South Staffordshire area when the Black Country has other boundary neighbours. I was led to believe there are ambitious targets set for the Black County that South Staffordshire are not a part of.

My understanding is that Wolverhampton Authority will request a large contribution from South Staffordshire of the 800 hectares required, 70% of which will be for logistics and warehousing. The outcome of this request is uncertain. 99% of residents who responded to a referendum circulated by South Staffordshire MP Gavin Williamson in 2017 were against this development going ahead. (1) Local residents will be urging their council representatives not to support this project.

The Green Belt review is not due for publication until the autumn of this year. Hopefully South Staffordshire will take this into account when considering the request for land from the Black Country as well as the fact that they have already pledged 36 hectares to ROF Featherstone and additional land for i54, a total I believe of 62 hectares.

Land is available elsewhere in the West Midlands, Stoke-on-Trent for example which is brownfield, but the applicant claim that demand in that area is not as great. A site at Dunston which I believe is served by the same rail link, is close to the motorway network and has similar landscaping issues to the Four Ashes site has been rejected. One reason given is that in the applicant's view the detriment to the landscape would be greater than that at Four Ashes. It would appear that the applicants are determined to reject any other possible sites on questionable evidence.

It is unclear to me whether the applicant is claiming that the WMI is meeting national or regional needs. They appear to swing from one view to another. They state that 60% will remain in the West Midlands with 40% distributed to the rest of the UK. Surely this 60% will see a substantially large increase of HGV's on the highways in the area?

In response to the question of the large size of the Four Ashes site and the warehousing within, the applicant states that such existing buildings of 10 years ago would have been deemed large but are now no longer in terms of efficiency. My question is how large do we go? Will we regard these proposed monstrosities as not large enough in another 10 years time or will we be more reflective and regard them as having already become too large? I acknowledge that we do have to look to the future but in doing so we must be mindful of the nation's green belt and the regional landscape for future generations. Plenty of architectural mistakes were made in the 1960s/70s in the name of progress.

The applicant is looking to past trends to predict the market needs of the future. In these unsettled economic times and the yet completion of Brexit, how reliable may these trends prove to be for the future? We must continue to move forward even though the economic future is uncertain but on such a large scale on this new site when there are 3 other intermodal freight terminals within a 40 mile radius of the Black Country and at the sacrifice of green belt land that can never be reclaimed? I feel this WMI development is a bit of a gamble.

Thank you for taking my comments into consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Janis Bradshaw

Parish Councillor for Brewood and Coven with Bishops Wood and Coven Heath

Reference:

(1) Gavin Williamson MP's website. Article posted 24th June 2019.