



# Narborough Parish Council

The Local Council for Narborough and Littlethorpe

**ID 20038407**

## **WRITTEN REPRESENTATION FROM NARBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL TO THE EXAMINING AUTHORITY RE APPLICATION BY TRITAX SYMMETRY FOR A RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE AT HINCKLEY**

### **About Narborough Parish**

1. The Parish of Narborough is situated to the southwest of Leicester and three miles from Junction 21 of the M1. The Parish itself comprises two discrete communities - Narborough and Littlethorpe - separated by the main Birmingham to Leicester rail line and the River Soar. The Parish had a population of 8,448 at the last census.

### **Our primary interest in the proposal**

2. The main road connecting Narborough and Littlethorpe crosses the Birmingham to Leicester railway between the two villages over a level crossing - the only level crossing on this main line railway through a built-up area between Birmingham New Street and Peterborough. Whilst Narborough itself sits outside of the proposed Development Consent Order area, the Council's primary concern is about the impact additional rail traffic may have on down time at the level crossing.

### **General observations**

3. As a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, this application will be judged against the policy framework set out in the National Policy Statement for National Networks. Whilst the long-term need for Rail Freight Interchange capacity is a given in the Statement, this does not automatically mean that any and every application should be consented. There are a number of factors set out in the NPS which the Secretary of State will have to take into account deciding if this particular proposal is the most appropriate means of meeting that need for any new capacity. We believe that the nature and location of the proposal means that it fails a number of key tests.
4. The NPS states that strategic rail freight interchanges should have good rail and road connectivity and be located near the markets that they serve, advocates a network of large hubs which offer economies of scale, and operating efficiencies, offer the ability to handle increased capability in the



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longer term, and reduce community severance.

5. We are of the opinion that that other locations are more suitable, offer greater opportunities for longer term expansion of capacity and would cause less disruption to communities and environmental impacts. Expansion of the existing RFIs in the area would avoid costly and extensive road improvements as the infrastructure to support those facilities is already in place. Added to this, the lack of refuge loops and sidings on the main Leicester to Birmingham track in this vicinity will be a limiting factor especially if planned passenger service improvements on that route are made (it is reported that savings from the cancellation of HS2 Phase II will be used to double the number of passenger services between Birmingham and Leicester) and will also be a major constraint for future expansion to meet rising demand.

## Specific concerns

6. As mentioned above, down time at the Narborough level crossing is a major problem; at peak times the main road route between Littlethorpe and Narborough can be closed for as much as 20 minutes<sup>1</sup> or more in an hour with vehicles queued in both directions, the resultant congestion having an impact on air quality, journey time to Leicester and Coventry, access to services and local businesses. However it is not just a problem at peak times; the barrier can be down for significant periods outside of those times in the non-peak daytime and evening. A recent survey<sup>2</sup> found the barrier was down for an average of more than 16 minutes an hour. Planned increases in passenger rail services, other rail freight journeys (including proposals to bring HS2 Phase I spoil to Croft Quarry through Narborough by rail) and the inevitable increase in car journeys from additional housing in the area during the period covered by the next Blaby Local Plan (which will look to Narborough as one of the main areas to absorb additional housing quotas) will exacerbate an unacceptable situation that both rail and highways bodies have ignored for too long. Some estimates suggest the impact of all these proposals in combination could double the existing closure times<sup>3</sup>. Photographs in the Annex show the scale of the problem.

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<sup>1</sup> This figure comes from a residents' survey conducted in response to a planning application made in 2019. The Parish Council does not have the full survey data.

<sup>2</sup> This figure comes from a residents' survey conducted in response to a planning application made in 2019. The Parish Council does not have the full survey data.

<sup>3</sup> See the consultation response from the Friends of Narborough Station.



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7. The Parish Council readily acknowledges that the impacts with the level crossing down time are already an issue and not necessarily of Tritax Symmetry's making. The RFI proposal with a planned maximum of 12 additional closures of 2 minutes (a figure we dispute and which we believe to be over 6 minutes<sup>4</sup>) will, however, make a difference and a significant one. Its proposals have not been assessed to include longer term and cumulative impacts in respect of this issue as the NPS requires or their impact in combination with other likely changes, nor are there any measures to avoid or compensate for adverse impacts or to reduce community severance. This proposal is, in our opinion, the 'straw which will break the camel's back'.
8. Again, we acknowledge that it is problematic to quantify air quality impacts as there is no local baseline data as no monitoring currently takes place. The NPS requires the Secretary of State to consider air quality impacts over the wider area likely to be affected as well as in the near vicinity of the scheme and this should include Narborough and Littlethorpe and an assessment by the applicant should also cover this aspect. If the Secretary of State is minded to approve the Development Consent Order, we would request that he requires long term air quality monitoring to be put in place so any future intensification can be more readily assessed.
9. The adverse impact of down time at the level crossing is significant for those who live and work in our community. Traffic congestion effectively closes the whole of Narborough village centre making access to local services and shops difficult and, for the latter, has an economic cost in terms of lost trade. Even without monitoring, it is impossible to argue that queues of vehicles with engines running do not have a significant and adverse impact on air quality and, if the DCO is approved, this will only get worse. The Parish Council regularly receives representations from residents on this issue.
10. Station Road, where the level crossing is situated, is the main road connection between Narborough and Littlethorpe. It is a vital link to the residents of Littlethorpe as all the main services such as GPs, pharmacies, schools, and shops are all located in Narborough. Whilst there is a bridge over the railway, it has steep steps and no lifts so not an option for the elderly, infirm or those with prams or buggies. There is no local alternative route. Whilst we understand that most freight trains would run outside peak hours, the impact would, nonetheless, still be significant as it would, in effect,

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<sup>4</sup> Friends of Narborough Station



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reduce the differential between peak and non peak periods. If the Secretary of State is minded to grant the Development Consent Order, the Parish Council requests that provision be made to fund a scoping study to look at options for eliminating the community severance caused by the level crossing.

## **Other concerns**

11. Narborough in common with other smaller local stations on the Birmingham to Leicester main route has narrower platforms than the bigger main line stations and is not currently connected to a voice warning system. Freight trains passing through the station at speed by virtue of their size would cause significant turbulence and a potential health and safety concern. Were this proposal to be consented, it should be a requirement of any Development Consent Order that such voice warning systems be put in place.
12. The Parish Council also considers that a development of this size presents greater opportunities for positive biodiversity measures and the aim of compensatory measures should be to deliver significant net gain for biodiversity. It should be a requirement that any such measures remain in place throughout the life of the development. We concur with the view of Blaby DC that the biodiversity interests present on the site have been undervalued by the applicants.
13. The Parish Council also has some concerns that surface water run-off from such a large development might also exacerbate the tendency of the River Soar to flood in the vicinity of Littlethorpe. We will be interested to see the comments of the Environment Agency and Leicestershire County Council in respect of this issue.
14. The Parish Council shares the concerns voiced by Blaby DC and others about the adequacy of consultation, lack of engagement by the applicant on issues raised by consultees and the lack of meaningful data on some aspects of the proposal and its impacts.

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October 2023