



The countryside charity
Leicestershire

Charity Number: 1164985

HINCKLEY RAIL FREIGHT TERMINAL

Comments: Environmental and Amenity Impacts

CPRE Leicestershire

Unique Reference: 20038675

(With Sapcote (UR 20039514))

Oct 2023

1. Introduction

1.1 CPRE Leicestershire is concerned that the Rail Freight Terminal would have significant impacts on the local environment and, more widely, on the UK and local climate commitments.

1.2 We have been working collaboratively with Sapcote Parish Council, who jointly, funded work by Gerald Kells, a Policy and Campaigns advisor, who assisted in this submission. To avoid duplication, they will submit specific comments relating to their village.

2 Relevant Representation

6. The impact on the landscape, biodiversity and amenity cannot be adequately addressed.

This includes:

- loss of countryside,
- wider landscape impacts,
- loss of footpaths, access to open space and open countryside,
- increase in light and noise pollution,
- impacts on natural sites, including SSSIs and other local designations,

- impacts on biodiversity, including protected species.

7. Impacts on air quality, noise and vibration.

This includes the impact of additional traffic particularly HGV.

8. The overall impact on climate emissions is likely to be more serious than is being suggested.

This includes the impact of construction and embedded carbon. It also includes the operation of the site, transport associated with the site and additional generated traffic on the network.

9. Cumulative Impacts

This includes the impact of future development facilitated by changes to the highway network, particularly the introduction of new M69 Junction 2 slip roads.

3. Air Quality. Noise, Vibration

3.1 We are not in a position to examine in detail the air quality, noise and vibration evidence but we are concerned about the increase in pollution.

3.2 We have, however, set out our concerns about the transport evidence and, clearly, all these elements rely to an extent on the traffic modelling.

3.3 In particular, the noise assessment models additional noise from vehicles and trains accessing the site. It is not clear to us that the impact of rerouted traffic resulting from the network changes, particularly the M69 Junction 2 slip roads, is assessed. Nor does the assessment consider the noise implications should congestion on the M69 or elsewhere lead to traffic diverting through local villages.

3.4 Furthermore Para 10.148 of the ES Noise and Vibration Chapter (DR 6.1.10) refers to the 'worst-case' hour and says these come from the traffic modelling. However, Para 6.21 of the Transport Assessment (DR 6.2.8.1 Appendix 1) suggests these are based on an average trip rate at other sites. Fig 6-1 of that Assessment shows how the distribution of rail-related movements are also calculated. Para 10.184 of the Noise and Vibration Chapter says the rail movements are subtracted from the B8 movements, which would imply that all the rail movements are associated with B8 units on site which is not the case.

3.5 In other words, we are concerned that the assessment may not have fully considered the worst-case scenario. We also note that the ES Air Quality Chapter (DR 6.1.9) predicts large impacts from dust during construction (Table 9.17) and that a number of

mitigation measures are recommended. It is not clear to us how well those will be monitored and what actions or sanctions would be applied if they were not.

4. Landscape, Ecology and Heritage

a. Visibility

4.1 The proposals involve high-bay warehousing with buildings and gantries as high as 28m, reduced from 33m in previous iterations, with 24-hour lighting. We welcome the reduction in height but we consider that the buildings would still have a significant impact on the surrounding landscape, whether viewed from houses, roads or the network of Public Rights of Way (PROWs).

4.2 The photomontages show significant impacts even in year 15 when it is assumed that some tree cover will have grown up. What is also clear is that the tree cover will not mitigate the presence of the development in many of the locations. What is also noticeable when one looks at Photo-viewpoints 1 and 3, for example, (DR 6.3.11.16) is that the photomontages assume tree-cover will completely hide the buildings.

4.3 In reality there are likely to be gaps. As a result, the buildings will be more visible than suggested, especially when one considers someone moving through the landscape. The fact is that the view of the development, both from the surrounding roads and rail services, as well as for people enjoying the countryside and recreational amenities in the area, will not be static so that the presence of the buildings coming into and out of view will increase their impact.

4.4 The impact at night is particularly difficult to assess from photographs but the change in light pollution could be significant as is evident at many logistics sites.

4.5 Indeed, the ES accepts that mitigation will never be entirely successful. Para 11.187 of the Landscape and Visual Amenity chapter of the ES (DR 6.1.11) admits that:

‘Whilst mitigation has been shown to be effective in creating a softened development and one where Green Infrastructure is an integral part of the design, large-scale built development and a Link Road are so very different in character to a rural agricultural landscape that no amount of mitigation could reduce this effect.’

4.6 Para 11.155/11.156 also admits that landscape impacts for areas close to development will remain high, even with mitigation, particularly in the Elmesthorpe flood plain area.

4.7 Our view is that the site would have serious impacts on the local landscape and longer views and that the mitigation will have a limited benefit compared to the current situation.

b. Loss of Biodiversity

4.8 A further issue which causes us significant concern is the potential impact on the wider environment and on the biodiversity that relies on local nature assets. The ES Ecology and Biodiversity Chapter (DR 6.1.12) acknowledges that Local Nature Sites will be lost as a result of the development as well as the development's proximity of the Burbage Woods and Aston Firs SSSI and the wider woodland setting of the SSSI.

4.9 The Arbicultural Impact Assessment (DR 6.2.11.4) also accepts that a significant numbers of trees and hedgerow would be lost to development (356 lost and a further 32 impacted, of which 105 are in the highest categories A and B).

4.10 Beyond that there would be impacts on protected species, such as bats and badgers.

4.11 To mitigate these impacts the ES Chapter proposes two kinds of mitigation, 'inherent mitigation' within the site and further 'mitigation' where the inherent mitigation is considered inadequate (Para 12.208). In particular Para 12.224 states that:

'There is considered to be a potential risk of negative indirect impacts upon Burbage Wood and Aston Firs SSSI resulting from increased recreational pressure associated with the Proposed Development.'

4.12 The Woodland Access Tree Management Plan (DR 6.2.12.4, Para 3.19-3.21) sets out more detail about both recreational pressure and disturbance. But it is clear that this Management Plan applies solely to land within the development (Para 2.4) and that it does not include work on the key sites in the Zone of Influence of the development (Para 3.5).

4.13 While such mitigation is welcome one can see from the illustrative landscape strategy (DR 6.3.11.20) just how close these sensitive sites are to the development as well as the link road. Parking for lorries and cars would be almost adjacent to these important areas.

4.14 It is hard not to draw the conclusion that, whatever mitigation is put in place, the development will not only have significant direct impacts on specific sites but that it will substantially change the wider biodiversity landscape. The presence of noise and lighting, as well as the natural barriers created by development on the site itself and the new road infrastructure, is likely to seriously impact on local biodiversity.

4.15 We are also particularly concerned about the compartmentalization of impacts. Clearly in the case of Burbage Woods, for example, there are cumulative impacts

relating to landscape, biodiversity and amenity, yet the current assessments do not appear to take this into account or allow for such combined impact being greater than each compartmentalized impact.

5. Amenity

5.1 Taking account of the impacts on the countryside and the industrialization and potential urbanization that would result from this proposal we are particularly concerned about the amenity impact of the proposals. There is no separate amenity assessment that we can find and the topic seems to be largely confined to Paras 7.259-7.260, specifically in relation to Burbage Common, in the Land Use and Socio-Economic Impacts chapter of ES (DR 6.1.7) and to the evidence on PROWs, which paints a somewhat rosy picture.

5.2 For example, the commentary in the Land Use chapter describes the situation as:

Public rights of way and other routes which are used for recreational purposes are closed to communities, but other alternative routes are available, which are longer but provide a link to the wider network. (Page 7-22)

5.3 Notably Para 11.160 suggests that landscaping, once it is in place, will screen the site from the most sensitive areas for users of Burbage Common and Woods Country Park and Smenell Field, although, if those users spread into the augmented areas within the development itself that will be less so. However, the development is certainly still likely to be visible.

5.4 Both undervalue, in our view, the cumulative negative impact on residents close to the proposals as well as the impact on those wishing to utilize and enjoy the countryside, especially the Burbage Common Country Park and the Hinckley/Barwell/Earl Shilton/Burbage Green Wedge whose importance is identified in Policy 6 of the Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan.

5.5 The importance of that area of countryside was underlined by the Open Spaces and Recreational Study of October 2016 which identified the park as one of the two most popular open spaces in the district (along with Bosworth Country Park) (Para 4.3)

5.6 More specifically, Para 8.10 identified its local importance saying that:

The majority of residents, particularly in the south and east of Burbage are outside the catchment of a natural or semi natural open space. Burbage Common (over 10ha) meets some of this deficiency.

5.7 Para 7.7 and 12.10 identified it as a key opportunity area for amenity enhancement:

A significant challenge facing Barwell/Earl Shilton is the lack of natural and semi-natural open space, an opportunity that could be pursued to address this is a Green Wedge Management Plan for the Hinckley/Barwell/Earl Shilton/ Burbage Green Wedge which abuts the western edge of Earl Shilton. This could look into improving accessibility to the green wedge as a recreational resource which is one of the four functions of green wedge. Improving linkages to Burbage Common and Woods would also improve accessibility. The inclusion of natural open space within formal parks should be considered.

5.8 We would argue that this resource has wider benefits and, as set out above, when considering PROWs, also impacts on the amenity for people in villages, such as Stoney Stanton, Sapcote and Sharnford.

5.9 We welcome the fact that, unlike the PIER, the Land Use Chapter in the ES briefly refers to that important study without giving it much weight, (Para 7.88), and nowhere in that report (or elsewhere) can we find consideration of the overall impact of the HNRFI proposals on the amenity of that green wedge or the surrounding countryside (currently linked through the PROW network). This seems to us a very significant omission.

5.10 It is also particularly noteworthy that the Green Wedge coincides with the two landscape designation areas where the development is considered to have the greatest impact, and where that remains substantially the case, even after 15 years of mitigation.

6. Climate Change

6.1 CPRE Leicestershire strongly supports the need to reach Net Zero by 2050 in line with the Climate Change Act of 2008, as amended in 2019 and to, at the very least, reach the interim targets for 2030, and the existing carbon budgets.

6.2 However, it is clear that the impacts of Climate Change are already serious and everything should be done to ensure projects do not jeopardize carbon reduction.

6.3 The NSPNN sets out in Para 2.35 that one reason Government support the principle of SRFIs is precisely because it aims for them to achieve modal shift and reduce emissions through trains replacing lorries. Para 5.18 sets out that refusal should occur not simply because of an increase in carbon emissions, but because the carbon emissions had a 'material impact' on meeting that target.

6.4 Notwithstanding that requirement we would argue that an individual project's impact can only be considered against a reasonable benchmark, especially, as in this case, when the rise in emissions is not only from the site, but from the impact of associated transport infrastructure on wider travel behaviour. Otherwise, any test for a regional site is likely to become meaningless if it is based on overall UK emissions.

6.5 The Environmental Assessment approach is to base its assessment on the IEMA guidance of 2022. The guidance is clear that:

the crux of significance therefore is not whether a project emits GHG emissions, nor even the magnitude of GHG emissions alone, but whether it contributes to reducing GHG emissions relative to a comparable baseline consistent with a trajectory towards net zero by 2050.

6.6 The IEMA guidance gives limited advice on what particular target an individual project should be compared against, rather defining it as either 1. 'business-as-usual', 2. comparable with the 1.5-degree target or 3. going beyond it.

6.7 It suggests comparison should be made with the most appropriate target. Note 37 is clear that this will not just mean the national target but also:

'other science-based 1.5°C compatible trajectory as may be defined for a specific sector or local area, as applicable.'

6.8 In the case of projects which would impact on more than 5% of the UK budget it makes specific comment, but that is all that is in its guidance.

6.9 Nevertheless, the EA (Para 18.3-18.94) adopts the National Target for the overall impact of the proposal, on the basis that the project is defined as a National Infrastructure Project, and then compares it, not with local or regional or even sectoral targets but with the overall National Carbon budget, of which unsurprisingly it would influence only a small part.

6.10 We have deep concerns about whether this is the appropriate measure, even accounting for the NSPNN statement and recognising also that in making the final decision the Secretary of State will need to have regard for current policy and other advice as well.

6.11 According to the Logistics Needs Assessment (DR 16.2) the HNRFI would be serving primarily a Property Market Area of a 20-mile truck drive (See Fig 2.1). Fig 5.1 of the Market Needs Assessment (DR 16.1) shows the concentration of logistics depots in that area.

6.12 By its own admission Saville's Logistics Need Assessment is predicated on growth within the PMA based on a 'business-as-usual' increase in PMA logistics requirements, in particular a continued rapid growth of e-commerce, (as we discuss in our comments on need), which they argue leads to an additional 1,772 hectares of logistics provision (road and rail) up to 2042.

6.13 While it is acknowledged that the HNRFI is located in the East Midlands where demand for logistics premises is higher than elsewhere in the country, it is not being asserted that HRNFI should be considered in a West Midlands/East Midlands context, even though there are other similar proposals being developed which would also

contribute to the overall UK climate budget, including, for example, the West Midlands and Northampton Rail Freight Interchanges.

6.14 In other words, comparing a single HNRFI with the whole UK budget underplays its role and significance at a regional and local level and does not reasonably consider how it contributes to meeting the UK target. Clearly if all similar projects added 1% to the carbon budget across the UK (the test set for this project), one would see very substantial carbon increases across the UK which would not be compatible with meeting that target.

6.15 Moreover, the project includes changes to the highway network, which would have indirect impacts on traffic emissions in Leicestershire which need to be viewed as part of the local and regional impacts.

6.16 We do welcome the fact that the Environmental Assessment has widened the assessment from the previous PEIR, and no longer excludes emissions from the site construction (as set out in PIER Table 18.3).

6.17 However, the latest assessment still compares the impact of the operational traffic within the study area with the total network traffic in 2036. Not surprisingly the operational traffic forms a small part of the overall traffic on the network within the study area. Much of the traffic in the overall study area exists whether or not this development takes place.

6.18 There will also be traffic which is both rerouted and generated by the changes to the network implemented to allow development, as considered in our transport comments, which we do not believe are properly accounted for, as well as a potentially higher level of employee journeys. All those impacts need to be considered as part of the carbon impact of the site.

6.19 But even with that in mind, Para 18.224 of the ES admits a major adverse impact from an operational traffic emission increase of 167kCO₂e when compared to the regional average (-0.3). Para 18.225 seeks to downplay this by concentrating on the sectoral impact of the traffic directly associated with the development (LDVs and HDVs). We note that this second measure does not appear to include traffic which is commuting to the site, so is not in our view the appropriate measure.

6.20 And this major adverse impact is only part of the story. The construction phase would create 341 ktCO₂e, which is not much less than the current total emissions for Blaby District. There would be a further 78.4 ktCO₂e from rail use.

6.21 In the latter case there is a suggestion that the emissions could offset 194.3 ktCO₂e of emissions from 83 million HGVs. However, that seems to us to be the wrong approach. The need reports make clear that the rail depot is to accommodate future sectoral growth. There is, therefore, no certainty that the freight using the terminal would exist without its construction, so many of those supposed HGV trips may well not exist. Furthermore, there is no requirement for Hinckley NFRI to use rail at all and rail is only likely to be used for part of the journey.

6.22 All together the project would create an unmitigated addition of 597.6 ktCO₂e according to Table 18.9 of the ES.

6.23 Mitigation is set out in Para 18.244. Specific emphasis placed on the benefits of removing road transport and replacing it with rail. However, as set out above, much of the site may not be used for rail freight and where it is, that may not replace road travel.

6.24 It is also suggested in Para 18.260 that modal shift will reduce congestion in the East Midlands. However, the transport evidence shows that traffic will largely be redistributed, at best moving congestion around, in some cases making it worse, for example, by adding traffic to highly congested junctions, such as the M1 Junction 21 with the M69 and increasing traffic levels on the M69 more generally.

6.25 Overall CPRE acknowledges the carbon benefits of improving rail freight facilities but considers that because overall, these proposals would increase carbon emissions and because this would be significant, (especially if compared with regional targets and taking account of the impact of other similar projects) it has not been shown that the project is compatible with the National Target Net-Zero target and trajectories.

7. Cumulative Impacts and Future Development

7.1 As we have already set out, we consider the impact of the proposals will be wider than simply the terminal. The ES includes an assessment of cumulative impacts which it bases on the definition in the NPS. Those are listed in Appendix 20.2 of the ES (DR 6.2.20) which includes a number of sites either with or seeking planning permission or allocated in plans.

7.2 However, these developments are not all included in all assessments and this leads to some inconsistency. For example, the ES Table 20.2 reflects the landscape chapter which highlights particularly the landscape impact of the 5,000 homes proposed in the upcoming Blaby Plan¹. This is reflected in the Cumulative Impacts Appendix (DR 6.2.20, page 20-23) where considerable detail is given of the landscape issue of that proposal.

¹ 4.3.11 Well-located, well-designed and well-connected sustainable Strategic Sites that include supporting infrastructure and a wide range of local services should also be considered as key elements of the Locational Strategy where there is a sufficient level of growth. Such sites are considered to be capable of supporting housing-led, strategic-scale development but the size of the site is important in terms of the range of infrastructure and services that can be provided. Four strategic site options (sites over 1000 dwellings) have been submitted to the Council for us to consider: ▫ Whetstone Pastures (estimated between 3,500 to 6000 homes)

▫ Land west of Stoney Stanton (estimated 5,000 homes)
▫ Land at Hospital Lane, Blaby (estimated 1,018 homes)
▫ Land north of railway line, Elmesthorpe (estimated 1,100 homes)

Further details about the sites are set out in the Site Options Paper 2020.

7.3 The Transport Section of Table 20.2 refers to the modelling paper (Appendix 8 .1 of the Transport Assessment. This includes, at Appendix A, a list of sites included in the modelling. These are sites which have current planning status so specifically excludes the proposal for 5,000 homes near Stoney Stanton.

7.4 Commenting on the site (STO026 in the 2019 Blaby SHELAA: Appendix 1) the LCC Highways advised that:

‘Any proposals to upgrade M69 Junction 2 and add south facing slip roads is likely to have a strategic impact on the routeing of traffic in the south west area of the County.’

7.5 In other words, the Blaby site is likely to require the junction upgrade.

7.6 This only confirms our view that, by introducing new slip roads, the current proposals are effectively providing enabling infrastructure for future developments, particularly large-scale residential housing on either side of the HRNFI which is likely to depend on the improvements to Junction 2 of the M69 and could, in effect, create a new settlement around the HRNFI.

7.7 At present this may not be committed, but the Blaby site is included in a draft local plan proposal.

7.8 We question whether such a conglomeration of development would create a sustainable community, what facilities would be provided and what impact this would have on carbon emissions.

7.9 We are also concerned that the additional houses would most likely access the B4669 which is already identified as a road with substantial increases in traffic directly as a result of the current proposals.

7.10 Indeed, the enabling of further development on the other side of M69 to the HRNFI would certainly have significant additional impacts on the setting and amenity of the villages of Sapcote, Stoney Stanton and Sharnford, as well as increasing traffic through those settlements.

7.11 While it is accepted that some workers at HNRFI might wish to live nearby, this needs to be tempered by what is observed elsewhere. New developments often have poor local facilities and most people have little option other than by choosing to travel by road to many dispersed locations. The impact of this is not being assessed.

Regulation 18 Blaby Plan, Para 4.3.11 Consulted on in 2021, Regulation 19 delayed from February 2023)

8. Conclusion

8.1 In conclusion we consider the proposals are unacceptable in terms of their visual impact on the local landscape.

8.2 We are concerned about the impact on the local biodiversity, in particular key assets such as Burbage Common and the wider links across the countryside.

8.3 We consider there would be a significant loss of amenity, including access to the countryside and that this would combine with the other impacts to create cumulative effects.

8.4 We are not convinced the proposals would contribute to meeting out net-zero requirements and that the level of additional emissions may well be higher than estimated.

8.5 And lastly, we are concerned about the cumulative impacts with other developments and, in particular, the enabling of large-scale housing reliant on the changes to the M69 Jn2.

8.6 For these reasons we do not believe these proposals should be approved.