

**Public Inquiry into Appeal by Helioslough Ltd into a proposed
Strategic Rail Freight Interchange on land in and around Former
Aerodrome, North Orbital Road, Upper Colne Valley,
Hertfordshire**

Summary of Proof of Evidence by Douglas Hirst on behalf of STRiFE

**Compatibility of the Proposed Development with the
Strategic Rail Authority
Policy Document**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. My name is Douglas Hirst. I am a retired Local Government Officer and have no experience or qualifications in the rail industry. I am a member of STRiFE and have undertaken reading and research on their behalf leading to the production of this proof of evidence.
- 1.2. STRiFE is a local community group opposed to the development.

2. SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

- 2.1. The evidence focuses on the criteria contained within the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Rail Freight Interchange Policy (SRFIP) published in March 2004 and assesses whether the appellant's proposals are compatible with these criteria
- 2.2. The evidence comprises the following sections:

3. ROAD NETWORK

SRFIP Criteria: "Location requires high quality links to motorway and trunk road network".

- 3.1. Since the first Inquiry the Butterfly World attraction has opened with the main entrance and exit being via the A405 and Noke Lane some 400m to the east of Junction 21A of the M25. Visitor numbers are predicted between 700,000 and 1 million each year. In addition, plans have also been produced to build a new hotel and conference centre 400m east of the Butterfly World entrance.
- 3.2. The Highways Agency has raised new concerns on the impact of traffic from the proposed development on junctions 21A and 22 of the M25 motorway.
- 3.3. STRiFE presented statistical and photographic evidence to the first Inquiry in relation to the chaotic circumstances referred to in the Inspector's report questioning how a terminal would operate when roads were gridlocked. As this evidence carried little weight STRiFE have considered the comments and challenge the conclusions contained in the Inspector's Report.

4. RAIL CONNECTIONS

SRFIP Criteria: "SRFI have quite particular locational requirements in terms of rail connections" ... "which will enable main line access for full length trains in either direction".

- 4.1. The appeal site cannot be served by 775m long trains and the appellant only proposes access in a single direction.

- 4.2. The proposal is for direct access to and from the south only. There is the reference to a passive northerly connection although there is no scale plan or overview design provided or any other details explaining how this would be achieved. STRiFE would wish to see such a design in order to confirm that no further 'land take' would be required.

5. RAIL CAPACITY AND LOADING GAUGE

SRFIP Criteria: "Rail links need high capacity and good loading gauge"

- 5.1. In respect of capacity the Inspector concluded." Critically, they (Network Rail) could see no reason why Helioslough's anticipated requirement for 12 intermodal freight paths to the site should not be met"
- 5.2. The evidence examines Network Rail's role before and during the first Inquiry and reaches the following conclusions:
- 5.2.1. Rail capacity issues were not properly evaluated before the first Inquiry
- 5.2.2. The first Inquiry was not presented with the full facts concerning rail capacity
- 5.2.3. The Inspector's conclusions on rail capacity were therefore undermined
- 5.2.4. That the above support the LPA's reason for refusal number 6
- 5.3. The evidence also considers the representations from a number of railway groups.
- 5.4. At the first Inquiry, rail loading gauge was covered by conditions which STRiFE believes are not sufficiently robust. Drawing on precedents from the Alconbury Inquiry, the evidence offers alternatives.

6. MIDLAND MAIN LINE and the NATIONAL RAIL NETWORK

SRFIP Criteria: "They represent 'major gateways' to the national rail network"

- 6.1. This section considers the role of the MML and in particular that it is not a core intermodal freight route (IR16.67) and that given the lack of direct access to and from the north and dependence on congested cross- London lines as the main access route, the proposal cannot be considered a major gateway to the national rail network.

7. RAIL VIABILITY

SRFIP Criteria: "SRFI will operate in the role of consolidating freight to and from other rail facilities such as ports, Channel Tunnel and other SRFI in the UK and Europe" and

7.1. *“for sustainability reasons, it is therefore critical that SRFI are developed such as to enhance the competitive position of rail relative to road”*

7.2. This section considers the proposal in light of the origins of freight predicted to arrive at the terminal in particular that of the Channel Tunnel where freight volumes continue to remain low in comparison to the peak in 1988. The volume of Channel Tunnel traffic has been over estimated casting doubts on the predicted HGV related savings as well as the overall volume of rail related freight that the site will handle.

7.3. In a written reply to Anne Main MP, Freightliner stated that they “did not consider a freight terminal at Radlett would be ideally suited to the movement of deep sea containers as a longer haul is needed from ports in order to compete with road haulage”. This illustrates that the proposal will not enhance the competitive position of rail relative to road.

8. WORKFORCE

SRFIP Criteria: “ the economics of access to a reliable and skilled workforce, employable at economical cost, is of high importance”.

8.1. The SFRIP described proximity of workforce to be not just an important factor but a determining factor. Yet, in the Inspector’s Report reasons are set out to revise this criteria to that of simply ‘important’. Given that the policy describes the criteria as determining, there are questions as to whether the Inspector correctly interpreted and applied the policy.

8.2. The Inspector’s Report also states there was no direct challenge to the availability of workers rather the concern that they would need to travel to the site from areas beyond St Albans and only a small proportion would live locally whereas the purpose of the evidence was to illustrate that the proposal would not support regeneration and sustainability.

9. LOCATION – RESIDENTIAL ISSUES

SRFIP Criteria: “Locationally, SRFI may not be considered suitable adjacent to uses such as residential”.

9.1. Most residential properties on either side of the A5183 in Frogmore and Park Street are within 500m of the proposed development. More than 500 residential dwellings located in Napsbury village to the east of the proposed development. Since the first Inquiry a further 183 residential properties have been built in Park Street village between the A5183 and the proposed development site.

10. LOCATION – SITE CHARACTERISTICS

SRFIP Criteria: “A valuable characteristic, however, is the need for expansion potential”.

- 10.1. The SRFIP states that SRFI sites should have the capacity to expand in order to meet natural growth. The Radlett site has boundaries that cannot be expanded.

11. ALTERNATIVE SITE ASSESSMENT

SRFIP Criteria: “The characteristics of SRFI in Section 4 and Appendix B must be recognised in such assessment criteria”

- 11.1. The appellants’ new assessment is based upon that used in the Howbury Park application which was allowed on appeal. Whereas it has been suggested otherwise, that decision does not render the new assessment a proven methodology as this topic was not examined with the same rigour during the Howbury Inquiry, unlike that of the first Radlett Inquiry.
- 11.2. The Inspector’s Report included a critique of a number of alternative sites that had been suggested during the course of the Inquiry. This evidence comments on some of the sites mentioned, reflecting important changes in circumstance since the first Inquiry.
- 11.3. Colnbrook is of particular significance as this is not only in the same geographical area as the appeal site but also that an application is about to be submitted for a similar development to that proposed by the appellant. Furthermore, when assessed against the SFRIP criteria, the site is clearly superior to Radlett.
- 11.4. Alconbury is also of significance given that planning permission was granted on appeal but the site has not been developed due to insufficient capacity on the East Coast Main Line. STRiFE believe this is clear indication of how the appellant’s proposal could ultimately result in a predominantly road based facility.

12. LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

SRFIP Criteria: “The government promotes the re-use of urban and brown field sites... non-compliant locations must be fully justified and supported in submissions to the local planning authority”.

- 12.1. The subject site is neither urban nor brown field and hence can be seen as ‘non-compliant’. On the basis of SADC’s refusal of planning permission, the support that STRiFE has received and the level of objections to the appellant’s proposal, it is apparent that the appellant has self evidently not fully justified and supported this non-compliant site in their submission to the local planning authority.

13. PREMATURITY

SRFIP Criteria: "Regional planning policy and regional transport policy must, therefore, set the policy context for the guidance of local level policies for SRFI."

- 13.1. The Inspector's Report concluded that there was no case for refusing the appeal on grounds of prematurity based on local or regional planning issues. However, STRiFE believe there are other reasons as to why this latest application is premature
- 13.2. The application was submitted before the Highways Agency had been fully able to verify traffic statistics.
- 13.3. The application was submitted without a full and proper rail capacity study by Network Rail.
- 13.4. The application was submitted in advance of a forthcoming National Network Policy Statement which will include a consultation draft that will set out the case for the establishment of a network of SRFIs in the regions and that this will supersede the SFRIP.
- 13.5. That the appellant should have submitted an application and subsequently lodged an appeal prior to the publication of such a highly relevant consultation draft is a clear and unarguable case of prematurity.