

21st July 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to take part in the Stage 1 (Non Statutory) Consultation. This development will be one of the largest that my constituency will have seen in many years. It is also a proposal near a number of quiet local villages and outstanding countryside. Having looked at the draft plans for the proposed rail freight interchange and given the matter considerable thought, I cannot support them for the following reasons.

1. Many of my constituents and I are very concerned about the impact this proposal will have on the local road network, which is already under strain. Penkridge, Gailey and other communities on the A449, A5 and local roads already experience heavy traffic when there are problems on the M6 (which is frequently). I have seen no evidence that the substantial traffic that the interchange will produce has been properly quantified and proper provision made. I am also concerned that the proposals for this hub do not seem to include improvements to the road network (in particular direct access to the M6) in order to mitigate the added congestion that will be caused.
2. This development will be substantially on the South Staffordshire green belt which is in place precisely to prevent the over development of areas. There have to be over-riding reasons of national importance before development on a substantial area of green belt can be considered. Only in the most exceptional of circumstances should green belt be considered for development and I do not believe that this current proposal meets those criteria. The very least that could be expected is for every other possible site to be considered before we turn to developing more green space (see point 3).
3. This proposal is for a rail freight hub for the North Midlands. It is vital, therefore, that all possible sites across the region, especially brown field sites, are considered. As far as I am aware, a proper analysis of all such sites has not been carried out. I am aware of sites in and around Stoke on Trent, which would be on brownfield land. Contacts with whom I have spoken within the City Council would be keen to explore the possibilities of a rail interchange in the city and such sites would seem in principle to be a more attractive and environmentally acceptable option than Four Ashes given that it would be situated on brownfield land rather than green belt.
4. This proposal would, as I understand it, allow businesses to lease or buy the facilities, even if they will not be using the rail hub. This risks turning the site into a large warehouse park, rather than the specific rail interchange that is proposed. Clearly, any proposal of this type would need to be exclusively rail based.

In conclusion, as this consultation is only at the initial stage, I will not go into further details. I would appreciate the opportunity at the earliest possible stage to discuss the proposals. I would also need to see further details about the compensation that is proposed for local residents. It is they who will pay the highest price for this proposal and they must be properly compensated, should this proposal go ahead.

Jeremy Lefroy