

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

DECISION PROPOSED BY A MEMBER OF THE CABINET

STRATEGIC RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE (SRFI) – FOUR ASHES, SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (PLANNING & STRATEGIC SERVICES)

I propose to make the following decision set out below in accordance with the powers vested in me by Part 3 of the Constitution of the Council approved by the Council pursuant to Section 37 of the Local Government Act, 2000.

The decision will be made by me on or after 09 June 2016 unless called in for scrutiny before that date.

COUNCILLOR R.J. McCARDLE - CABINET MEMBER, STRATEGIC SERVICES

Date: 27 May 2016

PART A – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 The Council has been advised that a company has formed (Four Ashes Ltd) to promote the development of a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) at Four Ashes, South Staffordshire.
- 1.2 On 12 April 2016 the SRFI Project Team briefed Members of South Staffordshire Council on their intentions to submit a Development Consent Order (DCO) application to the Planning Inspectorate (PINs) - in Autumn 2017. Prior to this date there would be an initial period of non-statutory consultation, commencing June 2016, followed by a statutory consultation in Spring 2017. The application would be determined by the Secretary of State for Transport, following receipt of a recommendation from a Panel of Inspectors – appointed by PINs. South Staffordshire Council would be a consultee in the process.
- 1.3 This report sets out the interim position statement of South Staffordshire Council in this matter.

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2. PROPOSED DECISION BY MEMBER OF CABINET

- 2.1 I propose that paragraphs 4.1 - 4.13 in this Report be communicated, through appropriate channels, as the Council's Interim Position Statement in respect of a proposed Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) at Four Ashes, South Staffordshire.

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	Council Plan 2016-2020 A Safe and Sustainable District

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the Green Belt • A Skilled and Prosperous District • Attracting and Supporting New Businesses
	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) been completed?	
	No	
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	Yes	
KEY DECISION	No	
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	N/A	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	Yes	There are no direct financial implications. The current costs of the Strategic Development and Planning service are contained within the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The adoption of a Council position in respect of the future Development Consent Order (DCO) application that was announced to Members on 12 April 2016, falls within the general duties of the Strategic Planning Service.
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	Yes - It is important that the Council adopts a position in respect of the future Development Consent Order (DCO) application that was announced to Members on 12 April 2016. The proposals could have a potential impact on the implementation of the Council's policies and objectives set out in the adopted Core Strategy, and also on the review of the local plan for South Staffordshire.
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	An alternative option would be to adopt no Council position with regard the impact of a Development Consent Order (DCO) application for a rail freight interchange in South Staffordshire – however this would create uncertainty in local communities about the Council's position in this matter.
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	Immediate Impact on Penkridge South-East, Brewood & Coven and Huntington & Hatherton. Potential impact on Wards beyond this geography particularly with regard to traffic impact.

PART B – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4. INFORMATION

Background

- 4.1 South Staffordshire Council has been advised that a company has been formed (Four Ashes Ltd) to promote the development of a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) at Four Ashes, South Staffordshire. The Project is at an early stage of inception and is known as West Midland Interchange (WMI). A Project Team has been formed and is led by planning consultants Quod.
- 4.2 Members of South Staffordshire Council were briefed by the Project Team on Tuesday 12 April 2016. The following day a new website was launched for WMI and the press were informed. Individual letters were sent by WMI to local residents living within 0.5 miles of the site.

- 4.3 The area of the site is approximately 250 hectares and it is located to the south west of Junction 12 M6; to the south of the A5 and east of A449. The land is adjacent to the West Coast Mainline (WCML). This is a branch of the WCML with twin-track. The scale of the development would comprise 6-8 million sqft of warehousing and could create between 6,500 and 8,500 jobs.
- 4.4 The nature and scale of the proposal means that the decision will be taken by the Secretary of State for Transport. The decision will be made following receipt of a recommendation from a Panel of Inspectors appointed by the Planning Inspectorate (PINs).
- 4.5 This type of application, known as a Development Consent Order (DCO) application, falls to be considered under the Planning Act 2008 and not the Town & Country Planning Act 1990. Accordingly, in this case South Staffordshire Council is a consultee in the process and has a critical role in advocating issues/concerns on behalf of the local communities of South Staffordshire.
- 4.6 The applicants plan to carry out an initial phase of non-statutory consultation – commencing in June 2016. This would be followed by a statutory consultation commencing in Spring 2017. Submission of the Development Consent Order (DCO) application is programmed for Autumn 2017. There would then be a period of Public Examination by the Panel of Inspectors and it is anticipated that the Secretary of State for Transport would make his decision in Spring 2019.

Interim Position Statement

- 4.7 The Council considers that it would be appropriate to issue an interim position statement during this initial non-statutory period prior to the submission of a Development Consent Order (DCO) application to the Planning Inspectorate (PINs). As the process moves forward then we shall consider the need to revise/amend our interim position statement, as necessary.
- 4.8 South Staffordshire Council's opposition to a rail freight interchange in this general location is well documented. In particular, the Council made submissions raising strong objections through the preparation of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the West Midlands. RSSs were then abolished by the Government in 2011 and have no relevance in current planning decisions.
- 4.9 A report was published in 2012 – Black Country & Southern Staffordshire Regional Logistics Sites Study. One of the main conclusions of the Study was that Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges (SRFI) should be considered on a wider spatial scale than Southern Staffordshire and the Black Country. The geography should be at least on the scale of the West Midlands as a whole. Indeed, there is a strong argument that the geography should extend to that of the Midlands as a whole. The geography of the 'Midlands Engine' could be a useful reference point. Attached, at Appendix 1, is a helpful fact sheet with information about the 'Midlands Engine'.
- 4.10 The decision in the matter of the emerging Development Consent Order (DCO) application for a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) at Four Ashes – now referred to as West Midlands Interchange (WMI) – will be taken by the Secretary of State for Transport. South Staffordshire Council will be an important consultee in the process. We shall be using this period of non-statutory consultation to gather information from our local communities across South Staffordshire so that

we are in the best position possible to articulate the local issues/concerns that have been raised.

- 4.11 To recap, our position historically has been to raise serious concerns about the scale of incursion into the Green Belt caused by this type of development. One of the key priorities in the Council Plan 2016-2020 is to protect the Green Belt. This development is 'inappropriate' in the Green Belt, by definition, and this means that the applicants will be required to demonstrate the existence of 'very special circumstances' that are sufficient to outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt in this location, and any other harm.
- 4.12 The Council is aware of the National Policy Statement (National Networks NPS) that seeks to create a network of Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges (SRFIs) across the country. Shifting freight from road to rail and supporting economic growth are key strategic aims of the Government. The Council also recognises the importance of securing jobs for local people and this is expressed as a priority in the Council Plan 2016-2020.
- 4.13 The Council will be asking the Secretary of State for Transport, when making his decision, to consider very carefully whether or not there exists alternative sites that perform at least as well as, if not better than, Four Ashes in meeting the Government's aim of creating a national network of SRFIs. In particular, whether there are alternative sites that are brownfield in character and ideally not located in the Green Belt. The 250 hectares of land at Four Ashes is predominantly a greenfield site within the Green Belt.

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

5.1 N/A

6. PREVIOUS MINUTES

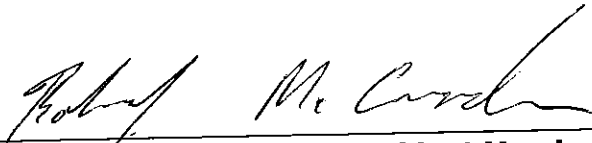
6.1 N/A

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Appendix 1 – Midlands Engine Factsheet.

8. CONFIRMATION OF DECISION

8.1 This proposed decision has not been called in for scrutiny and was not a Key Decision subject to scrutiny before being formally made. Accordingly, I made this decision on 21 June 2016 for the reasons and having regard to the alternative options and circumstances set out above.


Councillor R.J. McCardle - Cabinet Member (Strategic Services)

Midlands Engine Briefing Note

April 2016

The purpose of this note is to set out what the Midlands Engine is (and isn't), its aims and ambitions, how it is organised and its successes to date.

Geography

The geography of Midlands Engine was set by government in 2015. It covers 86 local authorities and the following 11 LEPS:

- Black Country LEP
• Coventry and Warwickshire LEP
• D2N2 (Derby & Derbyshire, Nottingham & Nottinghamshire) LEP
• Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP
• Greater Lincolnshire LEP
• Leicester and Leicestershire LEP
• Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership
• The Marches LEP
• South East Midlands LEP
• Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP
• Worcestershire LEP



Key facts

- The region covers 17.9% of the UK population and an economy worth £222bn, 14.6% of the UK total. It contains two core cities, 11.5 million citizens, 27 universities, 23 science parks and three international airports.
• It accounted for 16% of the UK's overall exports in 2013, selling to over 178 countries worldwide. It provides university education to 533,000 students and employment through nearly 460,000 SMEs.
• Major employers include; Walgreens Boots Alliance, Alstom, Barclays, Bombardier, HSBC, Jaguar Land Rover, JCB, Mondelez, PepsiCo, Rolls-Royce and Toyota.

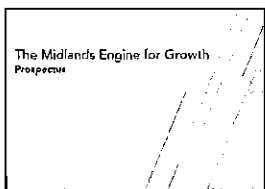
As a brand, the aims and ambitions of Midlands Engine are to:

- Collaborate with Government, business, local authorities, skills and training providers, universities, 11 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), community and voluntary groups to grow the economy, identify and promote best practice and comparative advantage, and embrace our strengths and diversity.
• Close the productivity gap (the GVA per employee is £7,000 lower than UK average) and put skills at the heart of economic revival (current working age with NVQ4+ is 30.6%, lower than national average of 35.8%). For example, it aims to deliver a 100% increase in the number of apprenticeships by 2020, 40% of which will be higher level skills.
• Create 300,000 extra jobs by 2020 and boost the UK economy by £34 billion by 2030.
• Connect existing centres and networks more effectively both physically and virtually, developing a business visitor and tourism offer and producing a regional strategic transport strategy to help save businesses nearly £500 million.
• Communicate our ambition and attractiveness as a place in which to work, study, live and grow.
• Compete in global markets and attract foreign investment. 20 trade missions over the next three years will showcase the region's strengths, capacities and comparative advantages of its goods, services and location.

The Midlands Engine is not designed to:

- Be a separate independent authority or instrument controlled by central government
• Re-invent or re-establish Regional Development Agencies (abolished in 2012)
• Usurp local democracy or devolved powers
• Create a super-LEP

Business Secretary Sajid Javid MP is the Midlands Engine ministerial sponsor. He officially launched its Prospectus at Birmingham University in December 2015. Midlands Engine is accountable to the Secretary of State for Business for delivering its aims and ambitions.



Key areas of work and organisation

The Midlands Engine has a Strategic Leadership Group overseeing work in seven theme areas. The ~28 members of the Group are senior leaders drawn from universities, further education, local authorities and LEPS from across the East and West geographies. Each theme group has a range of detailed activities:

- 1. Economic planning - develop economic analyses, comparative metrics and integrated benefit analyses for the region
2. Finance for Business - oversee the Midlands Engine Investment Fund of £250 million and other sources of finance to support SMEs
3. Innovation - deliver the government's Science and Innovation Audit to identify future opportunities for investment and strengths to promote
4. Midlands Connect - develop a long term transport investment strategy by 2017 that will identify the major infrastructure priorities needed to improve the region's connectivity and reduce journey times
5. Promotion - promote and support the Midlands Engine brand, bring investable sites to market, develop compelling propositions of the region's strengths, assets and opportunities to key target domestic and overseas audiences and to build a business visitor and tourism offer
6. Skills - develop and oversee a Midlands Manufacturing Skills Investment Plan and a manufacturing Apprenticeship proposition
7. Supply chain - develop and implement a multi-sector staged approach to improving operational performance, competitiveness, and strategic clarity to 1,000 SMEs, for example in the automotive, aerospace, rail and nuclear industries

Successes to date

Though early in its evolution, the Midlands Engine has:

- Attracted total funds of £180m for the Energy Research Accelerator - an innovative partnership between the six Midlands research universities and the British Geological Survey, set to deliver a step change in the nature and impact of energy research in the UK. This partnership will support the development of new technologies through the High Value Manufacturing Catapult programmes.
• Established a JEREMIE funds of funds totalling £250m (£50 million more than first envisaged). This is a financial instrument, run by the British Business Bank, whose Investment Strategy will be overseen by a local group of Midlands' financial experts. This fund-of-funds will combine ERDF and BBB funding with matched lending from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and legacy returns from previous programmes to establish a comprehensive range of financial support for the SME growth ambitions of the Midlands. These sub-funds will be launched by 5 December 2016.
• Successfully became one of five regions working with BIS to pilot Science and Innovation Audits. Our ambitious expression of interest involved universities, LEPS and other key business partners working collaboratively across the region. By the end of summer 2016 this audit will collect evidence and assess the region's capabilities and opportunities for research and innovation excellence. This will attract and drive future investment across transport technologies; advanced manufacturing and engineering; energy and low carbon technologies; healthcare, life sciences and translational medicine; creative digital and design; and agri-food and drink manufacturing and production.
• Secured support for 20 future trade missions beginning in April 2016 with a three day visit to the USA and Canada led by Sajid Javid focusing on Advanced Manufacturing, Automotive and Food and Drink.
• Launched the first ME pitchbook in March 2016 at MIPIM (where the leading property developers meet annually). It contained 33 projects worth £14.4 billion, with the potential to help create 170,000 jobs.

What do we want in the future?

To provide the fuel for future investment, Midlands Engine needs resources, time and continuing trust in our collective strengths. With private and public sector support, delivery of our prioritised investments will transform the economic and living landscape of the region, accelerate productivity and further employment opportunities. It also needs support to communicate with its partners, stakeholders and government and to use its existing networks and build more, so it can share its successes and learn from each other in a rapid and proactive manner.

