

Nick Boles MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Planning)
Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
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Our ref: SA24902/CM

27 January 2014

Dear Minister,

I am writing to apprise you of the latest developments regarding the proposed Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) at Radlett.

In a recent meeting with Spencer Gibbens of Network Rail, we were finally given a costing of part of the development. This has been the first time since the proposals were put forward that we have been quoted any sort of figure for the site. Moreover, this is the first time that any modelling has been done, which seems improbable given how long ago the proposals were originally made.

We now know Network Rail require a junction speed of 45 mph, a considerable increase from the 25mph speed proposed by the developer. You will note that this was first considered in the 2010 Planning Enquiry by St Albans District Council's rail consultant, but subsequently rejected by the inspector.

In the attached letter, my constituent, Doug Hirst, makes clear the significant material changes in circumstance that have taken place since the Secretary of State's 'minded to' decision in December 2012. In particular, the case for an alternative site at Sundon Quarry is very compelling.

- An SRFI has now been recognised in Central Bedfordshire Council's Development Strategy
- The mooted site at Sundon has been excluded from the Green Belt boundary.
- The recently completed Sundon freight loop will provide seamless access for trains entering and leaving the network at speeds greater than can be achieved at Radlett.
- A more suitable workforce exists close to Sundon Quarry, giving valuable rejuvenation to the area. This should be an economic imperative.
- A new junction 11A will give direct access to the M1 motorway from Sundon Quarry; something that Radlett will not have.

I am extremely perplexed as to why a new connection was left out of the Radlett plans when the original application was made. A junction off the M25 would have made the decision less injurious for my constituents: heavy-freight lorries accessing the Radlett site will have to enter through village roads that are entirely unsuitable for that use, greatly inconveniencing and upsetting local residents.

The opening of London Gateway (LG) in November 2013 changes things greatly for Radlett.

- As Radlett is under 120 miles from a deep sea port, rail is not ‘cost effective against road movements’. A 75-mile road journey puts LG in reach of any part of the M25, and thus, London and the South East.
- The proposal of 12 inbound trains per day is looking increasingly unlikely, due to the economic advantages that London Gateway will be offering over Felixstowe and Southampton, calling into question the need for a site at Radlett.
- That fewer trains would use this interchange undermines the development’s ‘very special circumstance’ to build on the Green Belt.
- 10 years ago it was thought that there should be 3 or 4 SRFIs to serve the need for London and the South East. Needless to say not one has been built since. The emergence of London Gateway further undermines this argument.

There has been a groundswell of public opposition to the SRFI at Radlett, attracting over 10,000 signatories – the first ever Hertfordshire County Council petition to exceed that number. Mr Hirst’s final point is salient: when the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government proclaimed that “residents, not remote Whitehall officials, decide where new homes and the new businesses go”, my constituents viewed this as empowering language. SRFI at Radlett has the opposite effect.

Given the immanency of this matter, I would like you to incorporate these issues into the decision-making process. These new material planning considerations suggest overwhelmingly that Radlett is the wrong site for SRFI. I would be extremely grateful if you could answer the individual points that I have been made.

I look to your response on this very important matter.

With best wishes,

Anne Main MP

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