

Tritax Symmetry (Hinckley) Limited

HINCKLEY NATIONAL RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE

Preliminary Environmental Information Report

Chapter 2: Site description

January 2022

This document forms a part of a Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) for the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange project.

A PEIR presents environmental information to assist consultees to form an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects of a proposed development and provide feedback.

This PEIR has been prepared by the project promoter, Tritax Symmetry (Hinckley) Limited. The Proposed Development is described in Chapter 3 of the PEIR and is the subject of a public consultation running from 12 January to 9 March 2022.

Details of how to respond to the public consultation are provided at the end of Chapter 1 of the PEIR and on the project website:

<http://www.hinckleynrfi.co.uk/>

This feedback will be taken into account by Tritax Symmetry (Hinckley) Limited in the preparation of its application for a Development Consent Order for the project.

Chapter 2 ◆ Site description

INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. This chapter of the PEIR describes the land and surrounding area of the Proposed Development and identifies the principal environmental designations in the locality.

Definitions

- 2.2. Figure 2.1 shows the boundary of the land within which works are currently proposed. The boundary is shown as a red line and is referred to in this document as the **'draft Order Limits'** or **'the DCO Site'**. The Order Limits are shown in draft because, in the light of consultation feedback and other considerations, the Applicant might amend the boundaries before submitting the DCO application.
- 2.3. The land between the M69 motorway and the Leicester to Hinckley railway on which the proposed Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI) would be developed is identified as the **'Main HNRFI Site'**, as shown in Figure 2.1.
- 2.4. The draft Order Limits that contain the Main HNRFI Site also include contiguous areas to the north-west, south and east, respectively to contain the corridor of a proposed link road that would cross the Leicester to Hinckley railway and connect to the B4668/A47 Leicester Road (the **'A47 Link Road'**), the proposed works to M69 Junction 2 and a section of the B4669 Hinckley Road towards the village of Sapcote. These are called the **'Main Order Limits'** in this PEIR.
- 2.5. The draft Order Limits also include additional non-contiguous areas of land at roads and junctions for which highway enhancements and traffic management measures are proposed. The Order Limits also include some pedestrian level crossings on the Leicester to Hinckley railway that are subject to proposed works and restrictions.

Local government jurisdictions

- 2.6. All of the land inside the Main Order Limits is in Blaby District in Leicestershire except for the north-western end of the A47 Link Road corridor, which is in the Borough of Hinckley and Bosworth in the same county. Supporting highway works are proposed in Blaby, Hinckley and Bosworth and Harborough Districts in Leicestershire and in the Borough of Rugby in Warwickshire.

LAND INSIDE THE MAIN ORDER LIMITS

2.7. In detail, the principal elements and features of the land inside the Main Order Limits are as follows.

Railway

- 2.8. The HNRFI would be situated on the south-eastern side of the railway. The railway has two tracks and for most of its route past the Main HNRFI Site is either at grade or slightly above or below surrounding ground levels. The line is not electrified. Burbage Common Road crosses the railway by means of a single-lane hump-backed bridge.
- 2.9. The closest passenger stations to the Site are Hinckley, approximately 2.7km to the south-south-west, and at Narborough, approximately 9km to the east-north-east.
- 2.10. This railway forms part of Network Rail's strategic freight network, linking the west coast and east coast main lines and forming a primary link between Felixstowe and the Midlands and North. Network Rail has already undertaken substantial capacity enhancements under its Felixstowe to Nuneaton freight capacity scheme.
- 2.11. The Main Order Limits cross the railway and include some land on its north-western side. This is to accommodate works to the railway and Burbage Common Road overbridge, landscape works and the closure of three pedestrian level crossings on the Leicester to Hinckley railway that are scheduled for closure. These level crossings serve footpaths in Elmesthorpe (footpath reference T89/1) and from the direction of Earl Shilton (footpath references U50/3 and U50/4) and from Barwell (footpath reference V23/1).

Roads

- 2.12. The Main Order Limits extend across and along a section of the M69 motorway, to the north-east and south-west of M69 Junction 2, in order to include land for a reconfiguration of M69 Junction 2, the addition of a northbound off-slip and a southbound on-slip and temporary construction compounds. This section of the M69 motorway comprises a six-lane dual carriageway with hard shoulders and steel crash barriers.
- 2.13. M69 Junction 2 comprises an oval roundabout that crosses the motorway on overbridges with the motorway in a cutting. The junction connects the single-carriageway B4669 Hinckley Road east-west route to the M69 motorway by means of a northbound on-slip and a southbound off-slip only, with no slip roads to or from the south. The roundabout encloses areas of woodland on both sides of the motorway.
- 2.14. The Main HNRFI Site is crossed by Burbage Common Road, a rural lane running between B4668 at Burbage Common and the B581 Station Road near Elmesthorpe. It crosses the central-northern area of the Main HNRFI Site and provides access to Woodhouse Farm and Langton Farm.

- 2.15. The northern stretch of Burbage Common Road, connecting the proposed HNRFI to the B581 Station Road in Elmesthorpe, is included in the draft Order Limits because it would be required for access by pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and emergency service vehicles in connection with the Proposed Development. This road is not proposed for routine use in connection with the construction or operation of the HNRFI.
- 2.16. Access to other residential properties in the Main HNRFI Site, including Freeholt Lodge and Hobbs Hayes to the north of M69 Junction 2, is from a track that extends from Smithy Lane, which branches from the B4669 Hinckley Road.
- 2.17. As noted above, Burbage Common Road crosses the Leicester to Hinckley railway by means of a single-lane, hump-backed bridge. Areas of land around the Burbage Common Road overbridge and two pedestrian crossings over the railway are included in the Main Order Limits to allow for the proposed demolition and replacement of this bridge.
- 2.18. To the north-west of the existing Burbage Common Road railway bridge the Main Order Limits include the A47 Link Road corridor.

Landform

- 2.19. Chapter 11: *Landscape and visual effects* of this PEIR describes the local landform in detail. The DCO Site lies in National Character Area (NCA) 94 'Leicestershire Vales', which comprises an open landscape of gentle clay ridges and valleys used for a mixture of pasture and arable agriculture, bisected by small watercourses.
- 2.20. Figure 11.6 in Chapter 11 shows the topography or the shape of the land inside and beyond the Main Order Limits. Although to casual inspection the Main HNRFI Site appears broadly level, it slopes gently downhill from a high point of 110m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD – i.e. above sea level) adjacent to M69 Junction 2 to a low point of 83m AOD beside the railway at the northern end of the Main HNRFI Site.
- 2.21. South-west of M69 Junction 2 the M69 motorway falls gently to a height of c. 96m AOD at the southern extremity of the DCO Site.
- 2.22. To the west of the railway the A47 Link Road corridor falls from 99m to c. 93m before rising gently to 96m where it joins the A47 Leicester Road. This gentle valley is associated with an unnamed watercourse.

Watercourses

- 2.23. An unnamed stream flows north-eastwards through the southern portion of the Main Site before running alongside the M69 motorway. Several field drainage ditches and small ponds are also present inside the Main Order Limits. These discharge into an unnamed tributary of the Thurlaston Brook which is referred to in the PEIR as Thurlaston Brook Tributary, a tributary of the River Soar, to the north of the Site.

Land use and landscape

- 2.24. Most of the Main HNRFI Site and the land inside the Main Order Limits to the west comprise a regular pattern of fields used for arable farming and grazing. The fields are defined by hedgerows and interspersed with deciduous trees. Interspersed amongst the fields are a small number of agricultural dwellings and outbuildings with a cluster of buildings at Woodhouse Farm in the centre of the Main HNRFI Site.
- 2.25. Businesses in and immediately adjacent to the Main HNRFI Site include a farm shop at Woodhouse Farm, close to the centre of the Main HNRFI Site, and the Wentworth Livery Stables on Burbage Common Road to the south of Elmesthorpe. Burbage Common Road serves as an equestrian route to Burbage Common for riders from the stables.

THE SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.26. Areas immediately outside of the Main Order Limits are generally similar in character, comprising level or gently undulating farmland interspersed with farmsteads, smallholdings and free-standing dwellings. Disused stone quarries are a noteworthy feature in the local landscape to the east of the Main HNRFI Site.
- 2.27. The closest settlements to the Main HNRFI Site are the village of Elmesthorpe along the B581 Station Road to the north and a mobile home park and a separate gypsy and traveller settlement off Smithy Lane to the south-west of M69 Junction 2. In the wider area and generally at a range of 2-3km from the Main HNRFI Site are the settlements of Stoney Stanton and Sapcote to the east, Earl Shilton and Barwell to the north and north-west, Hinckley and Burbage to the west and south-west and the village of Aston Flamville to the south.
- 2.28. Elmesthorpe has been settled since the Roman era and has a population of just over 500. Village landmarks include the 13th century St Mary's Church, partly ruined but restored at a smaller scale. Elmesthorpe railway station closed in the 1960s but the village retains a hotel and a pub.
- 2.29. Off Smithy Lane to the south of the Main HNRFI Site are two residential enclaves in fenced compounds – the Aston Firs Gypsy and Traveller site managed by LCC and the Castle Fields mobile home site, which is privately owned.
- 2.30. The village of Sapcote to the east has a population of c. 2,700. The village is a focus for community activities with a social club, pub and neighbourhood retail facilities. Stoney Stanton to the north of Sapcote has a population of almost 4,000 and includes neighbourhood-level retail, pub and dining facilities. Between Sapcote and Stoney Stanton lies Stoney Cove, a diving adventure centre in a former stone quarry with a waterside pub and restaurant.
- 2.31. Burbage Common and Burbage Wood to the south-west of the Main HNRFI Site are a

popular recreational resource managed by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, providing woodland and open meadows for informal recreation, with car parks and a visitor centre. Hinckley Golf Course lies beyond Burbage Common, on the edge of Hinckley itself.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNATIONS

Landscape

- 2.32. Land inside the Main Order Limits and for a wide area around is not subject to any protective landscape designations. The closest designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the Main HNRFI Site is the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 43km to the north-west. The closest designated National Park is the Peak District, 60km to the north-north-west.
- 2.33. As noted above, in respect of landscape character the DCO Site lies within Natural England's National Character Area (NCA) no. 94 'Leicestershire Vales', which feature 'low-lying clay vales and river valleys'.
- 2.34. In the Blaby District Character Assessment (2008) the Main HNRFI Site lies in two Landscape Character Types (LCT). The northern area of the HNRFI Site falls within LCT A 'Floodplain' and the southern area is within LCT G 'Wooded Farmland'. In terms of Landscape Character Areas (LCA), the Main Site falls similarly within two zones. The northern parts of the HNRFI Site lie in LCA E: 'Elmesthorpe Floodplain' and the southern portions are located in LCA A: 'Aston Flamville Wooded Farmland'. Explanations of the meaning and significance of these characterisations is provided in Chapter 11: *Landscape and visual effects* of this PEIR.

Nature conservation

- 2.35. The Burbage Wood and Aston Firs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies close to the south-western boundary of the Main HNRFI Site and outside the DCO Site. This SSSI is designated for its mixed ash, oak and maple woodland, one of the best remaining examples in Leicestershire. The SSSI adjoins the Burbage Common and Woods Local Nature Reserve (LNR).
- 2.36. Three further SSSIs are found to the north-east of the Main HNRFI Site and outside the DCO Site, as follows:
- Croft Pasture SSSI (2.8km from the nearest point of the Main Order Limits), an area of acidic mixed grassland;
 - Croft and Huncote Quarry SSSI (3.1km from the nearest point of the Main Order Limits), designated for geological reasons;
 - Croft Hill SSSI (3.2km from the nearest point of the Main Order Limits), an area of

tussocky acid grassland, the largest of its kind in Leicestershire.

- 2.37. There is one European-designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC) within 15km of the Main Order Limits, at Ensor's Pond, 11km to the south-west. It is designated for its large population of white-clawed crayfish.
- 2.38. In terms of non-statutory designated sites, Leicestershire and Rutland County Councils use a system of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), candidate Local Wildlife Sites (cLWS) and potential Local Wildlife Sites (pLWS). LWS are designated sites, cLWS are sites that meet the criteria of being a LWS but have not yet been designated, and pLWS are sites that might meet the criteria but have not yet been assessed.
- 2.39. Within 2.5km of the Main Order Limits there are thirteen non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), three of which lie partly inside the DCO Site (Burbage Common and Woods, Field Rose Hedgerow, Elmesthorpe Plantation Hedgerow). There are several potential LWS within the Main Order Limits for which designation has not been formalised. These include Freeholt Meadow, Castlewood Grassland, Burbage Common Road Hedgerows, Burbage Common Road Railway Bridge, M69 Junction 2 Grassland, B4669 Road Verge and Elmesthorpe Boundary Hedgerows. Further descriptions of these habitats are provided in Chapter 12: *Ecology and biodiversity* of this PEIR.

Cultural heritage

- 2.40. There are no designated World Heritage Sites, scheduled monuments, listed buildings, registered parks and gardens, battlefields, or conservation areas inside the DCO Site.
- 2.41. In general terms, the majority of designated heritage assets in the wider area comprise listed buildings clustered in the historic cores of local settlements. Within 5km of the Main HNRFI Site are six scheduled monuments, 98 listed buildings and nine conservation areas. There are several groups of listed buildings in the settlements of Stoney Stanton to the east, including the Grade II* listed Church of St Michael, and in Elmesthorpe to the north is the Grade II listed Church of St Mary. The Church of St Mary in Barwell, 1.8km to the north-west of the Main HNRFI Site and 0.75km from the western end of the proposed A47 Link Road, is a Grade I listed building.
- 2.42. Scheduled monuments closest to the Main HNRFI Site include the ruined church at Elmesthorpe to the north, and Sapcote Castle and Moat on the west edge of Sapcote, 2km to the east-south-east. The Aston Flamville Conservation Area lies 1.3km to the south of the Main Site and lies c. 100m from southern arm of the Main Order Limits that contains the southbound slip road proposed as part of the reconfiguration of M69 Junction 2.
- 2.43. Further non-designated heritage assets and finds in the DCO Site and surroundings are identified in the Chapter 13: *Cultural heritage* of this PEIR. These include medieval crop marks.

Agricultural land quality

- 2.44. Natural England maintains a grading system for agricultural land on a scale of 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). Farmland within the Main Order Limits generally falls within grade 3a (good) and 3b (moderate). In general terms this means that the land can be farmed for a variety of purposes with a few limitations that affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield.

Flood risk

- 2.45. The Environment Agency's (EA) Flood Zone map shows the majority of the land inside the Main Order Limits to be in Flood Zone 1. This indicates that the land is largely at low risk of flooding (a less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river flooding). Limited areas around the Thurlaston Brook Tributary, which crosses the corridor of the proposed A47 Link Road to the west of the Leicester to Hinckley railway and then flows through the extreme northern corner of the Main HNRFI Site, are in Flood Zone 2 (between a 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000 annual probability of flooding) and flood zone 3 (a 1 in 100 or greater annual probability of river flooding). Flood risk is considered in detail in Chapter 15: *Surface water and flood risk* of this PEIR.

WORKS TO HIGHWAYS AND RAILWAY LEVEL CROSSINGS

- 2.46. The DCO Site includes land outside the Main Order Limits required for modifications to roads and pedestrian level crossings over the Leicester to Hinckley railway, at the locations described in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 below and shown on Figure 3.3 of this PEIR.

Table 2.1: Land included in the draft Order Limits to accommodate modifications to roads in connection with the HNRFI development

No.	Location and site description
	Blaby DC
B1	Mini-roundabout at the junction of B581 Station Road / New Road and Hinckley Road, Stoney Stanton, adjacent to the Living Rock Church to the north and Stoney Stanton Social Club to the south.
B2	Junction of B4669 Hinckley Road and Stanton Lane, a T-junction adjacent to Sapcote Garden Centre
B3	Stanton Lane / Hinckley Road, south-west of Stoney Stanton, a single carriageway two-lane road runs through linear suburban development into countryside.
B4	B4669 Hinckley Road / Leicester Road, Sapcote - a single carriageway two-lane road that forms the main east-west route through the village.
B5	A T-junction opposite the Mill on the Soar pub and restaurant at the junction of B4114 Coventry Road and B581 Broughton Road at Soar Mill, Broughton Astley, south-east of Stoney Stanton.
B6	B4114 Coventry Road and Croft Road, a T-junction next to the Esso filling station, south-west of Narborough.
	Hinckley and Bosworth BC
HB1	Crossroads in a suburban setting forming the junction of A47 Normandy Way and A447 Ashby Road, on the northern edge of Hinckley.
HB2	Roundabout at the junction of A47 Normandy Way / Leicester Road, the B4668 Leicester Road and The Common, adjacent to the Leicester Road Stadium south-east of Barwell.
HB3	B4668 Leicester Road 300m south of the junction with the A47 Normandy Way, where a new junction for a proposed link road from M69 Junction 2 is proposed.
	Harborough DC / Rugby BC
HR1	Cross in Hand roundabout at the junction of the A5 Watling Street, A4303 Coventry Road, B4428 Lutterworth Road and Coal Pit Lane, adjacent to the Magna Park South distribution centre west of Lutterworth.

Table 2.2: Land included in the draft Order Limits to accommodate modifications to pedestrian level crossings in connection with the proposed HNRFI development

Level crossing	Location and site description
<p>Thorney Fields Farm No 2: Grid Ref: SP480959 Footpath No. XU17/2 1 km NW of Sapcote.</p>	<p>Land required to enable the permanent closure of the pedestrian level crossing and the diversion of the footpath over an existing bridge over the railway south of Thorney Fields Farm.</p>
<p>Elmesthorpe: Grid Ref: SP471958 Footpath No. T89/1 between Bostock Close and the B581 Station Road, opposite the Wentworth Arms public house.</p>	<p>Land required to enable the permanent closure of a pedestrian level crossing and the diversion of pedestrian traffic over the existing Station Road bridge.</p>
<p>Billington Rough: Grid Ref: SP460954 Footpath No: U50/3-U50/4 from Elmesthorpe.</p>	<p>Land required to enable the permanent closure of a pedestrian level crossing and a footpath diversion to a new railway bridge proposed for the A47 Link Road.</p>
<p>East of Bridge Farm: Grid Ref: SP457952 Footpath No. V23/1 from Barwell.</p>	<p>Land required to enable the permanent closure of a pedestrian level crossing and a footpath diversion to a new railway bridge proposed for the A47 Link Road.</p>
<p>The Outwoods: Grid Ref: SP442941 Footpath no. U8/1-U52/1, connecting Burbage and the Hinckley Academy and John Cleveland Sixth Form Centre in Hinckley.</p>	<p>Land required to enable the permanent closure of the level crossing, its replacement with a new pedestrian footbridge, and associated footpath diversions.</p>