

From: [REDACTED]
To: [West Midlands Interchange](#)
Subject: Objection / Submission by Greensforge Sailing Club Re: WMI – Proposed Amendments to Article 44, and Requirements 25, 34 and 35(b) NMC Application
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Objection / Submission by Greensforge Sailing Club Re: WMI – Proposed Amendments to Article 44, and Requirements 25, 34 and 35(b) NMC Application

My name is Ian Cooper and I am the Principal and a Trustee of Greensforge Sailing Club. We sail at Calf Heath Reservoir at the North-East corner of the WMI site.

I regularly attend the quarterly Community Liaison Group meetings hosted by the developer to keep the interested community parties and residents updated with the progress of the warehousing project.

I attended the recent meeting (on 7th Sept 2026) where we were informed about this submission, a so-called Non Material Change to the DCO regarding relaxation of the timescale of the statutory requirement to build the Rail Freight Terminal. Interestingly I note that the sailing club and many other local community bodies were deliberately excluded from being formally notified of the proposed amendments, according to the initial application letter from CBRE to the SoS. I am unhappy at this but unsurprised.

I reported the details to our sailing club committee (on Thursday 12th September) to discuss whether we should make any comment or objection. From the outset, years ago, the club has so far maintained its position to focus solely on how the warehousing and bunds might compromise wind flow and affect the safety of sailing on the reservoir especially as regards youngsters and newcomers as opposed to accomplished experienced sailors. Our dilemma is two-fold; whether we comment on this NMC as a matter of principle and secondly that we might risk biting the hand that has fed us. To explain; we have been beneficiaries of the developer's Community Fund to the amount of [REDACTED]. We are much appreciative of this financial input. We purchased a new four-stroke outboard engine for our safety boat to replace a thirty year old two-stroke model, and the club members installed a new galley / kitchen; the new units, flooring, tiles and white goods funded by the grant. Notwithstanding these reasons the committee voted to submit an objection due to our opinion that this is not a Non Material Change, the proposed variation to the rules is significant. A functioning rail hub would be delayed for years if this were sanctioned and the most obvious reason for the extension of the timescale is to ease the developer's cash-flow. One of the reasons the developer requests this change is that the 5000 series warehouses are being constructed first, served by Vicarage Road, where it was initially envisaged that the warehouses adjacent to the proposed RFT would be built contemporaneously, more likely serviced, in part at least, by the rail hub. The developer for some reason has altered the construction roadmap. They are not amateurs, they would have realised the existing triggers would be tripped by doing this, maybe it was done on purpose?

Let's come back to first principles. This project only went to the Planning Inspector and the Secretary of State because of the rail hub. If the developer had been dealing with the LPA directly and had applied to change 700 acres of Green Belt and farmland into a money-making warehousing facility the project would have been rejected out of hand. But introduce the green credentials of an integrated rail hub and it becomes a National Infrastructure Project and the LPA gets bypassed entirely. The rail hub was 'sold' to the Inspectorate as vital to the success of the development. But in the last

weeks of the primary Examination submission the managing director of Four Ashes Ltd at the time, [REDACTED], declared that they'll only build the rail hub if there was the demand for it. Well, the inspector, [REDACTED], quickly crushed that idea, and rightly so, inserting clauses to force the rail hub's inclusion and a structured timetable to implement it. Now the developer wants to alter those rules and criteria. You can understand why. Verbally, at an early meeting with LCP we were told the estimated cost of the rail hub was [REDACTED]. That sum will no doubt have vastly increased. That figure is purely an expense to the developer, it comes off the bottom line; they never wanted an RFT but it had to be included because otherwise the project would never have got off the ground.

At that Monday's CLG meeting I asked what the response from their potential clients had been about the proposed delay in the implementation of the RFT. [REDACTED], from LCP, gave a very polished smooth response about clients' understanding and acceptance that they wouldn't yet be able to shift their logistics operations onto the railway as soon as they would otherwise like. That provoked a sceptical reply from me.

The rail hub was described as a major selling point to clients, not just to the Inspector, but to everyone. If that's the case build the rail hub first and the clients will come running. That construction of the rail hub – a fallacy we saw through from the outset - they are now trying to delay. It's just like HS2, which is an apposite analogy. If HS2 was going to open up the North-West to the benefits and connectivity of the affluent South-East, well, build the northern end first and then the project will definitely get finished rather than what everyone knew would happen – start expanding from London then run out of money. Personally, I don't think the WMI rail hub will ever be completed. All potential freight movements will continue on the road network. The scale of the lorry traffic is hard to comprehend. After all, Phase 1 alone of the project includes 734 parking spaces for HGVs. Clients prefer to use the highways, that's what they are used to. And if this proposed delay to the RFT build is allowed, those clients will have years more time being accustomed to, and investing in, using the road network exclusively.

Interesting the original DCO only went part way in forcing the construction of an RFT. The hub must have the capacity to service four train movements per day but there is no obligation for any of LCP's clients to actually utilise the rail terminal. Little wonder the developer is seeking to kick the can down the road. One might feel some sympathy because they've spent [REDACTED] so far (according to figures presented at the recent meeting) and the developer has received little income, if any, to date. Cash-flow must be tight. Years ago, when LCP's projected costings were laid down, borrowing costs were likely 0.5%, now nearer 4%, times are hard for everyone big and small. But, and it's a big but, we, the local community, are not responsible for the developer's poor financial business decisions.

The developer has one warehouse (5030) erected and currently being fitted out by the client (Britvic), shortly to be occupied. This amounts to around 3% of the floor area of the site. A second client is due to be announced in the next few weeks who will take the occupied proportion to, we were told, around 6%. That may trip the current six-year provision for building the RFT. I didn't ask that specific question at Monday's meeting, but in scanning the full 201 page submission it appears the first two warehouses reach 40,000 sqm, the trigger being 47,000 so they are getting mighty close. One more client in a small warehouse will exceed the 6% limit. The 'sweetener' that the developer offers is that once the trigger is tripped the timeframe to complete the RFT is reduced by one year (from 6 to 5). With the reduced rate of progress, at their own admission indeed, at which FAL is currently attracting clients

for their warehousing, the 14% increase in the trigger point will span a significant number of years before that new revised threshold is reached, certainly more than the twelve months that they so generously offer as a compensator. All rather devious and we are sure the Inspector won't be hoodwinked.

We know that the speed of take-up of warehouses has reduced, clients aren't lining up in a frenzy to occupy the site at the rate that had been envisaged. For example, the two plots that directly affect the reservoir were scheduled to have applications submitted, along with detailed wind tunnel assessments, in Winter 2025; that has been and gone, and there is no further information as to any rescheduled timeframe. The sailing club is in limbo, maybe for many years to come. FAL wanting to extend the percentage from the existing 6% trigger to 20% is understandable but we consider that this is not a Non Material Change, it is a major, significant amendment to the overall timescale of the project and is the thin end of the wedge – the ultimate aim is to ditch the provision of an RFT totally, just like Four Ashes attempted to do so many years ago. Even if it does eventually get built these proposed changes might well mean that a functioning rail hub is ten years or more away.

Hence Greensforge Sailing Club formally objects to the Applicant's submission to amend Requirement 35 (b) of the DCO.

Ian Cooper

Principal and Trustee, Greensforge Sailing Club

On behalf of the committee 21st September 2026

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