



Planning Inspectorate
Arolygiaeth Gynllunio

Hearing Transcript

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SPEAKERS

Speaker 4, Speaker 7, Speaker 15, Speaker 10, Speaker 17, Speaker 3, Speaker 5, Speaker 6, Speaker 1, Speaker 14, Speaker 16, Speaker 12, Speaker 13, Speaker 11, Speaker 2, Speaker 8, Speaker 9

Speaker 1

Well, thank you. Welcome back, everybody. Time is now 1130, and this hearing is resumed. I'm going to pass over to Adebaye, who's going to continue with item 3.1.

Speaker 2

Thank you, mr. Hunter. I will now turn to the rare report,

Speaker 3

I think I think OCC were

Speaker 2

keen.

Speaker 4

Thank you. Yeah, George Gurney speaking for Australia County Council. I think there was there was a couple of points that we've heard this morning from the applicants. OCC would just sort of like to come in on to provide some some clarifications. So we've heard sort of around the morning that things have been agreed with OCC, and many things have been agreed with OCC, and not just OCC. Actually, the wider transport working group that's been working since 2021 on this project. I just like to clarify there was one area where we are not yet in agreement with the applicant, and that's on the parking standards that were mentioned this morning. That one in 200 ratio, as that does not comply with our our parking standards. Just to clarify that point, I think we've also heard a lot about Ardley Station and the ability to bring forward Ardley Station. So, if it's okay with the examining authority, I'd quite like to invite mr. Tony Cahill to sort of explain how far OCC are along with the works to bring forward the station, if that's okay,

Speaker 2

that's fine.

Speaker 4

Okay, thank you. That would be useful

Speaker 2

as well.

Speaker 4

I hand over to mr. Cahill.

Speaker 5

Thank you, Tony Cahill, SSC, on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council. I'd be pretty brief, noting there's a long agenda, but to bring the examination board and people here up to speed, a pre-feasibility study has been undertaken recently, commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council, undertaken by SLC, and the pre-feasibility study is the first step really in developing a new station proposition. That would typically, if found to be positive, followed by a strategic outline business case, which hasn't been undertaken yet, and just to be clear, that there is no promoter determined yet for the future station. It's at a very early stage. The scope considered in the pre-feasibility study, the strategic delivery and operations elements of a future Ardley station. The conclusion of the work is that Ardley station is feasible, and the historic station site has less constraints compared to other locations within the vicinity, from a railway corridor perspective. It is therefore important that the applicant's proposals safeguard and support sustainable access to a potential future location, noting the proposed growth that has been mentioned previously in this session, potentially around in the area. We're aware the applicant is proposing a change request that proposes a pedestrian and cycle route through the site that could support improved access to a future station. This would be reviewed once received, and we look forward to seeing that information in due course, so that summarises really the position at this point.

Speaker 2

If I can ask, I know you said it's feasible, and potentially the council supports the reopening of the station. Then, in terms of because the applicant was saying everything to do with sustainable travel modes have been agreed with the council, I would like to the council to confirm whether support for the reopening of the station in terms of contribution in association with other developers. We now hold in the proposed development to this particular action. So, in combination with all the other developers, does the council agree with their applicant that nothing else should be done?

Speaker 4

George Goely, speaking on behalf of Oxford County Council, all I can say at this point is the public transport strategy has been agreed with the applicant, and that doesn't ask for a contribution towards the railway station. I think there is potentially an avenue in the DCO which will allow consideration of the railway station, if that is brought forward, which is under Schedule Two, Part Three, the role of the Sustainable Transport Working Group, under Section One 3e, one of the roles is to review the framework travel plan and the public transport strategy. So, in the event that a railway station was brought forward, it is possible to revisit that public transport strategy. Although I am very happy to be corrected about the interpretation of that particular section.

Speaker 2

I think that will be a little bit ambiguous because once the development consent should it be granted, it will be. Very impossible to hold the applicant to say come back. What we expect you to do, come and do it now. I think that will be too late. So my concern here is that if the applicant, if you agree that I just like the council to confirm that everything that the applicant has proposed so far, sustainable transport strategy is agreed, and should they do more? Should the applicant do more, or should the applicant do nothing else? I

Speaker 4

think all I can say now is that the sustainable transport strategy that has been submitted was agreed with the council.

Speaker 2

Thank you. I will now ask the applicant to respond to the OCC's queries.

Speaker 3

Well, sir, I can respond very briefly on behalf of the applicant, Alexander Booth, on behalf of the applicant. In terms of what Mr. Gurney has said, we note firstly the very helpful and positive indication, confirmation rather, that as regards sustainable transport, all matters are agreed, save for, and we do understand that save for the issue of parking, the one in 200 versus the one in 300. I mean, without wanting to open up that debate now, because I know we do have to make some real progress on the agenda. I mean, essentially, a central nub of the applicant's point is that whereas certain forms of development can be directed to particular locations, potentially more sustainable locations, an SRFI is extremely constrained in terms of its locational requirements. In particular, the nexus of strategic road network and rail, and we say one in 300 is one in 200 is appropriate. But we note that that's the only matter of disagreement as between ourselves and the council. We note also the very helpful summary of the position in relation to Ardley Station, which is our understanding, namely that the county council has undertaken the first steps as regards feasibility. That there is no outlined business case, no promoter, and that things are attempted at a very early stage, and that there is no suggestion on the part of the county council that the applicant should do more or could do more in relation to its measures taken to safeguard any future opening of the passenger station. That was our understanding, and I think we are at one with the county council on that. So, nothing further that I would wish to say in relation to that, really. And we're happy to move on to rail matters.

Speaker 2

Thank you. I think it's the with Mr. Broad. I would like to call Mr. Broad to come on, make his comment.

Speaker 6

Thank you, Sam. John Broad, CPRE. Just very, I'll keep this extremely short. When we were talking about the employee transport, you know, transporting people around for the first couple of years, there's going to be transporting the workforce who are constructing the site, and so they will probably come by car. And I was just thinking of the congestion on the existing roads before they manage to rebuild the new roads. So that transport section needs to be covered. With the buses, how long would these bus routes continue? I mean, I know that's an open-ended question because you don't know what the future is going to be. But we all know bus services are very good when they start and then they just cease for some reason. One of the comments was made that the bus service to Banbury was going to go through Lower Hayford. You do know there's a weight limit on the ancient bridge down there, so that's not going to work. Upper Hayford itself will have its own employment in the development that is proceeding, so it's not just houses; it will have employment. So taking some of those people away. Thank you.

Speaker 2

Can I ask the applicant to respond to the points Mr. Broad has made.

Speaker 3

Sir, I don't propose to respond to any of those points. Thank you, sir.

Speaker 2

Thank you. I do understand. Can I

Speaker 1

just push a little bit just on the just on the bus service length, because I think that will be helpful to understand the commitment that the applicants making in terms of the length and the time, which are

Speaker 3

certainly so. In which case, I can pass to mr. Dunhill. What I will say before it goes to mr. Dunhill is that what's been agreed with the County Council is not that we will ourselves provide or guarantee any particular service for any particular. Increase in service. What we have been asked to do is to provide monies to the county council for them to deploy as they see fit, because we see the sense in that, because that allows for a degree of flexibility. But before I yes, I'll just leave that to mr. Duncan.

Speaker 7

Thank you, Stuart Duncan, for the applicant. As mr. Boo says, one of the key strategies for the public transport strategy is that flexibility to respond to changing demands and so forth. The cost-revenue model that sits behind that that contribution is looks at a 10-year funding period.

Speaker 2

Thank you. I know we dealt with the issue of loading gauge yesterday, and we have dealt with that yesterday. I will now ask the applicant to confirm if all road sections in that in the construction traffic routes are presently in a state that will withstand the weight of heavy goods vehicles serving the proposed development, and if not, what measures will be put in put into place to ensure that these roads will continue to be safe for all road users? The applicant will also be required to confirm whether any pre-commencement condition surveys of the proposed HGV route have been undertaken, and if not, explain when such surveys are intended to be carried out, and how the results will be used to establish the baseline condition of the highway work.

Speaker 3

So thank you very much. I think we'll take the rail issue first. Then, as you say, we spoke about gauge yesterday. I'm going to ask mr. Kapoor of GB Rail Freight to clarify the point or the position in relation to those works, further works, which would be required, which I think is a nub of your question. Before we move away from that point, what I was proposing to have mr. Kapoor also do was speak to the pathing stroke capacity issue, which was also flagged yesterday, which wasn't addressed yesterday. I think was slightly bumped into today, and so rather than wait for another party to raise it, we thought we'd sweep that up now. If that's

Speaker 2

okay,

Speaker 3

okay, thank you. So, mr. Kapoor, if you could just firstly address the issue raised by the inspector as regards works that need to be undertaken in relation to the line in order to allow for. I think it was weight was the issue raised. What works, if any, need to be undertaken in order to render the line capable of bearing the necessary weights. But I think also in that context, not just weights, sort of effectively dimensions of the W8 freight position. Thank you,

Speaker 8

Ian Kapoor, head of strategic access planning at GB Rail Freight. Firstly, with respect to the capability of the route, and that is with gauge and maximum weights and maximum lengths of trains that can be carried, that is dictated by Network Rail and published in their many operational documents. So the the route is currently W7 gauge, but as Nell has clearly stated, little work is needed to make it W8. It is mainly heading northwards with Ardley Tunnel, and there are minor works to do there, none of which will affect the speed of the line. There are no issues in terms of the maximum length of train or the maximum weight of a train. So, for example, today there's a large amount of freight travels from London to on the London Prince's Risborough axis, those trains are in excess of 2,000 tonnes in many cases.

Going further north, the published maximum weights of services to Ardley and beyond Ardley to Banbury are. Are way higher than we are anticipating running. So, from pure capability of the line as it currently stands, with the little bit of work to do at Ardley Tunnel, there are no other works to be done.

Speaker 2

Thank you. The next

Speaker 3

one. Thank you very much, mr. Kapoor. And then, so having dealt with that issue, could we then speak briefly, or not so briefly? However brief or long it needs to be, in order to explain the pathing and capacity issue. That's to say, the ability of the Chiltern Main Line to accommodate rail freight, the minimum number of movements being four trains per day, alongside passenger services.

Speaker 8

Yes, of course. In Kapoor, GB Rail Freight, for the purpose of the recording, GB Rail Freight has undertaken detailed capacity work for this for this scheme, as with Northampton Gateway (SRFI) GB Rail Freight worked out the pathing opportunities abiding to the normal network rail industry processes. We worked out the various pathing opportunities that could easily be found, and we found the following four northbound out and back services heading towards Banbury, which then can go through the West Midlands and up to Crewe, and I'll explain a bit more about that later, and three southbound services from Ardley, which go to a mixture of Wembley as a staging point and Eastleigh near Southampton as a staging point. Those were seven out and back services that we found relatively straightforwardly, and then we also found other individual legs of capacity to see, you know, how far we could reasonably find existing capacity with the timetable in place, the passenger timetable in place at the time. Taking those into account, I personally am very confident that this can serve those paths can serve the ports at Tilbury, London Gateway, Southampton, Felixstowe, all livable, with sufficient terminal times at those ports and the journey time back. My suggested paths were then, of course, checked and verified by the advanced timetabling team and Network Rail as being valid. That they have done, and they may they have made that point in their in their statement in their document. It's also worth noting that the SLC Oxfordshire County Council report has stated that's in Appendix One of its document RR 109 that the parting study report, Appendix C of APP 312, the document we're discussing is a competent piece of work which demonstrates that the test being able to provide at least four passenger trains a day has been met. Further to that, GB Rail Freight and Chilton Railways have had discussions on the paths that have been highlighted and validated by NetWail, so the individual ones, the seven that I've been talking about, and the additional legs as well. Chilton Railways has built into its future timetabling processes, which it is continuously doing, more regular freight paths along the complete length of the line between Southwateslip and Ardley, and also Ardley to Banbury, so they are on board with the paths that we are looking at right now, and we have suggested pass the test of at least four passenger trains a day. And Chilton Railways are also in conversation, ongoing conversations with Network Rail about this work and all future timetables that they wish to carry out. And just one final piece of detail. So, as part of the the works were done, we have also, which I mentioned yesterday, made note that the project will be providing additional signalling between Inho Junction south of Banbury and Biston North Station, which encompasses the Ardley facility. And that provides even more capacity, and reduces the time the trains can follow each other in the same direction from five-minute gaps to three-minute gaps, which is a substantial change to the headway of the line. Not only does it permit freight services to run along these sections, intermingled with the passenger services, but but actually that allows room for future services and for good performance.

Speaker 2

Thank you.

Speaker 3

Thank you. So those were the two points that I wanted Mr. Capo to address. I think he was talking about a minimum of four passenger trains. I think we mean freight trains, freight trains in that regard. Just in case there was any confusion. The only other point that I was just going to come back on was that yesterday there was a request. I think it may have been Mr. Broad. It may have been the forum who queried the position as regards freight traffic on the Chiltern Main Line as is? Just to confirm, we can put a note in in terms of those freight paths. But in essence, so the position is broadly as follows. In terms of the stretch of the line from Banbury down to London, it breaks into three areas: i.e. London up to Princess Risborough, Princess Risborough up to Bicester, and Bicester North. The position is that, on a daily basis, over the last five years or so, certainly in terms of the southern section and the central section, there's been between 20 and 30 freight trains, freight paths per day. It's right to say that the northern section hasn't had that same number. It's sort of between sort of two and six freight paths per day. The reason being that there isn't hasn't been the demand for those. But to be clear, the lines throughout that stretch-north and central and southern-are exactly the same. It's two lines. It's the same capability. So yes, to confirm what was said yesterday on behalf of the applicant, there is significant freight traffic already on the Chiltern Main Line. Thank you.

Speaker 2

Thank you. Before I move on, I would like to call Mr. Nostrand for his comment.

Speaker 9

Thank you very much, sir. My name is Mr. Philip Nostrand. I'm the founder of Stop the Trojan Horse, and I'd like to comment on the issue of the capabilities of the Chilton line, and I understand the applicant's position to be that it will be adjusted to to W8, and that the applicant believes that that is the minimum standard in the national policy statement. And also, as Mr. Kapua explained yesterday, although high cube containers cannot fit in with standard waggons, well waggons can be used to to get those those that popular container size through. Now, one thing is obviously is is the question of whether it's theoretically possible here, but it's what is significant here is to look at the other strategic rail freight interchanges in this country. Every one of those are connected with W10 gauge track or better, and that applies to Dürf, Northampton Gateway, West Midlands, Hams Hall, Radlet, East Midlands Gateway-they all connect directly to W10 freight corridors that are designed to accommodate the dominant high cube container traffic on standard carriages, and OX SRI, SRFI would therefore be an exception. It would be the only comparable strategic railframe interchange that relied only on a W8 route, and obviously that results in fewer equipment choices, less operational flexibility, and a less resilient operating environment for this particular location, and I think the most telling comparison actually is Ratlet, because Ratlet was originally located on a on a significantly smaller gauge, and in in that case it was actually a planning condition that the gauge was enhanced to W10 before planning permission was was granted, and so so the issue of precedent in terms of loading gauge is is important when it comes to strategic rail freight interchanges. The other thing is that the narrow loading gauge would be a. Significant barrier to future electrification. Chiltern Railways carefully analysed the potential for electrification and concluded that it is extremely costly to electrify certain pieces of infrastructure without severely disrupting existing journeys. And for that reason, Chilton Railways envisioned, and I quote, battery electric trains, alongside the partial electrification of the Chilton network, and partial electrification could, in combination with batteries, meet the energy needs of light passenger trains, but it would be entirely unsuitable for the much greater energy requirements of fully laden freight trains. In other words, the narrow loading gauge would preclude future CO2 neutral freight operations on the Chilton Mainline, as required to support the government's policy of delivering a net zero rail network by 2050. So, in conclusion, the National Networks Network National Policy Statement seeks infrastructure that is fit for long-term freight growth, and the applicant has not demonstrated why one of Britain's

largest proposed logistics developments should be built on a busy, non-electrified rail line with a restrictive loading gauge that will remain below the operational standard adopted across every comparable straight strategic rail freight interchange. Thank you.

Speaker 2

I would like the applicant to answer the concern, please.

Speaker 3

Thank you very much, sir. I'm going to pass to my right in a moment for relevant documentary references. I'm just going to make, I think, three overarching observations. The first of these, and I mean no respect disrespect by it, is that, as I understand it, mr. Nordstrand does not claim any relevant experience or qualifications in the operation of rail freight. So that is significant in circumstances where the position. Hang on, hang on, hang on. I don't interrupt you. Doesn't claim any significant, relevant experience or qualifications as regards the operation of rail freight. The evidence before you is provided by the applicant by Network Rail in the form of the statement of common ground, and also by GB Rail Freight, who are themselves the market leader in the operation of rail freight in the UK, and we say that is, to put it mildly, a very significant consideration. Secondly, I think what I've just heard is a fundamental dispute with government policy. Insofar as what appears to be said is that this proposal is in some way deficient because the rail gauge would be W8 as opposed to W10. Now, of course, it's right that a number of existing facilities, if not all existing facilities, are W10 based, and that is because both the East Coast and West Coast rail mainlines are W10 gauge. However, and again, sir, we do say this is of fundamental significance. The National Networks NPS states in terms not that one must have W10 gauge, but one must have minimum W8 gauge, and that is what we are providing. So, what we are providing is wholly consistent with government policy. Further than that, insofar as national policy is also seeking that the network of SRFIs be expanded beyond the existing areas and corridors, so that there is greater coverage, that necessarily we say entails just the type of development that we are proposing on a compliant rail gauge. So, so I'm afraid we don't accept anything of what's been said there. And as regards the suggestion that what we're proposing would be a significant barrier to future electrification of passenger services. I'm afraid I'm going to have to take that away and take instructions on the point, and we'll respond in writing. But as regards the remainder of what mr. Nordstrand has said, I don't think I need to say any more. I just I'm going to turn to my right to see if there's anything that mr. Kapoor or anyone else, or mr. Holmes.

Speaker 10

If you would be helpful, just just quickly, just a couple of references. So you've got them from documentation. There are there are two points, and we I think we mentioned these yesterday. So, but for the point of repetition, so section 6.3 of the rail report includes a section. Which deals with with gauge, and there is a an appendix to the GB rail freight supporting statement, which is done as a sort of question and answer, which specifically deals with gauge and the suitability of the gauge from a from a sort of an operations point of view and a commercial operations point of view. So, just point you back to those documentation we we seek to deal with in various application documents.

Speaker 2

Thank you. Just following up on that, for the benefit of mr. Nostrand, I just like the applicant to at least clarify this aspect of the rail report APPA-312, paragraph 7.14 states that network rail and the applicant have undertaken a series of gauging studies using asset data on clearances between the main line tracks and lineside stroke over line structures. The studies have examined the availability of W8 loading gauge clearance across 52 miles of route. More than 1,300 individual line size structures currently cleared to W7 loading gauge, which previously accommodated traffic up to W9 gauge. So, if 52 miles of

this, I've identified that some of these lines were cleared, line side were cleared up to W9 gauge. Why then W8 loading gauge?

Speaker 3

I'm going to pass that to mr. Kapoor, or if mr. Kapoor feels it's better to put that in a note, we can put it in a note, but if he's content to answer now, I'm going to pass to him. Thank you,

Speaker 8

sir. Ian Capullo, GB Relfrate. What I yes, I will have to put that in the note because there is some detail, obviously, to go through and submit to you in answering that question Fully, this this sits perhaps a bit more with network rail in that the the line had previously been at a certain gauge, but if traffic historically didn't need to use it at that gauge. On occasions, the gauge will drop, and you know you won't maintain to a high gauge if if previously traffic did not need to use it. We've seen that elsewhere in the country. W7 is where it currently is, and as I say, a very small number would push it up to w8. w9 is well.

Speaker 3

I think, in the circumstances, given we've heard from the applicants team for quite some time, what I am going to suggest is that mr. March potentially has his moment in the sun, and

Speaker 1

I was actually once you'd finish that was going to be I didn't want to discharge, but that was going to be around. Yes, I think

Speaker 5

perhaps mr.

Speaker 1

Marsh wanted, as we do have a representative for Network Rail. I think we're hearing what it might well be actually that we can hear from somebody who can no disrespect, but actually is is that it's better for people to speak to the issue. Absolutely right. I was looking for you. Excellent,

Speaker 11

Gregory March, Freight Business Development Manager with the Rail Freight Team at Network Rail. So, on the general consensus about W8 gauge and its ability and suitability for the market. I believe both yesterday and today, mrs. Ingeborg and Alex Kirk articulated why it is both suitable, but also that it is also quite common across the network. I think it's important to say that as you get higher in gauge, the in terms of gauge capability, the amount of the network, as in network rails infrastructure, that is cleared to that gauge, the percentage reduces. If you look at W8 gauge, roughly two thirds of the network is cleared to W8 gauge. So, from a connectivity point of view and opening new markets, which is exactly in line with government growth targets, it's important to note that I think quite often when people think about gauge, and particularly when they talk about W8 gauge, they focus on limitations rather than looking actually at the connectivity and actually it being an enabling thing. And I think one of the other points I would make is by clearing this particular route to W8 gauge, it enables it further track. Figure as well to say traffic that potentially isn't actually related to SRFI. In terms of the question about the assessment, so as Incabor has highlighted, we did a survey on of over 1,300 structures. There was only one that was found to be foul of W8 gauge, and that was Ardley Tunnel, of which the requirement to rectify that essentially relates to a task called scumbling. So essentially, what's happened is there's been a build-up of calcite from water drainage that's built up over time, which has meant that it's fouled the gauge, whereas it was previously cleared. In this case, it hasn't. So we are in agreement with the

applicant that works will need to be done to that, which the applicant will fund, and we are in discussions about a timescale for that delivery.

Speaker 2

Sorry, could you clarify if this WH loading gauge is capable of enhancement in the future.

Speaker 11

It would have to be assessed. What I would say is, and point to the comment about historic SRFIs being built on WTN gauge. If you look at the gauging history of the network, it's been one that's evolved over time. Quite often, that's been something that that's kind of the industry has pushed for over time. If that was something that was to be looked at in the future, again, that would be considered in a wider context. I think we shouldn't lose sight of the fact, though, by clearing Ardley Tunnel to W8 gauge, you enable viable containerised traffic to and from Oxfordshire SRFI is proposed. Should it gain consent?

Speaker 2

Thank you. I now have one question relating to that. Would the applicant agree to research in future if the opportunity occurs for the loading gauge to be enhanced, is that something that the applicant would agree to do something about it, maybe to enhance the loading gauge if it's possible in the near future?

Speaker 3

Sir Alexander, with on behalf of the applicant, I suppose a couple of points there. The first point I would make is to echo what Mr. March has just said on behalf of Network Rail, which is that, in a sense, the focus on increasing the gauge, whilst it may be feasible, is to slightly miss the point that there are benefits with a lower gauge, that is to say, W8, there is two thirds of the network, as Mr. March has explained, that is can accommodate W8 traffic, and that is, in one sense, an enabler. But parking that, I mean, in terms of W10 gauge, I think the count, I think the applicant, insofar as it was involved in any discussions regarding an increase in gauge on that line, would actively participate in those discussions. But ultimately, that's going to be a matter chiefly for Network Rail, because this the Chiltern Main Line doesn't wouldn't belong to us. I mean, we would be a user of the Children Main Line. That infrastructure would be its network rails and network rails' responsibility. And certainly, we wouldn't seek-I don't anticipate-to bar anything that Network Rail would wish to do in relation to any increase in gauge. But it's a matter for them. Again, I'm probably have to put back to Mr. March on that regard.

Speaker 11

Sorry, Gregory March, Freight Business Development Manager for the Rail Freight Team at Network Rail. So I would agree. I think, like many things within the industry, it is absolutely right to have aspirations to increase the capability of the network. That could include electrification. It could include all sorts of things. I think what's important to note is, and I come back to the point about sometimes people focus explicitly on gauge as some kind of blocker or stopper or deficiency, and I don't think that's the case. I think it's also true to say that if you were to look at the likely amount of works that would be required to clear such a route to W10 gauge, the amount of disruptive access that would be required, which would disrupt both freight and passenger services on the route, would likely be considerable. Now, I say that in a general sense, we haven't looked at it in kind of the fullness of it, but I think it's an important point to make. And I would again cite the fact of the evolving gauge, you know, as as terminals develop and they look at new markets, customers have different requirements, and it's not it's often not a case of one size fits all. I think it's important to note that the location of Oxford SRF, the proposed location, does serve a new geographic market, and I guess I would really. Iterate points that were made yesterday about the government growth targets. That ultimately, if we're to hit other rail

freight growth targets, both 2040s target and 2050s target, we are going to have to connect new facilities in new geographic locations.

Speaker 2

Okay, thank you, mr. Marsh. That's been very useful.

Speaker 1

So, just one question from me. Well, actually, it's not a question; it's more of a point of clarification. Actually, mr. Booth, you referred to the MPSNN, which is really helpful. And I just want to check that I've got the right paragraph number that I think you refer to. I've got 4.82, which sort of talks about adequate links to road networks for essential rail access will vary between lines, but what it says in the middle of that is, as a minimum, an SFRI should ideally be located on a route with a gauge clearance of W8 or more, or capable of enhancement to a suitable gauge. So that's the relevant bit that you are directing us to. That's right. I just wanted. So that's absolutely

Speaker 3

right. Yes. Thank you very much indeed. mr. Eberly, I'm aware that there were two limbs to your initial question. The first related to rail, the second related to HGV. I have to say, I've now forgotten what the question was in relation to.

Speaker 2

Okay, I'll read it out. There is the sorry. Before I go on to that, I will ask the Midshawe Neighbourhood Plan Forum to speak, please.

Speaker 12

Yes, thank you very much. First, a vote of thanks for getting the statistics around Rail Photon on the children line. That's very helpful. Thank you. Second point is in communication with Network Rail some time ago, they communicated with us that there were five areas of the Chiltern Line that required upgrade, and that included. And I don't understand because I will profess, as a parish councillor, I am not a rail expert. But these five areas included the South Harrow Tunnel, Bridge Number Five, a change in clearance category. The South Harrow Tunnel Bridge, which is to track lower the slab, and in the case of Ardley Tunnel, which we've been talking about, it was the lowering of the slab of Ardley Tunnel, which is about 16. I understand 16 miles, no 15 miles and 12 change. Got the wrong glasses on. Sorry, along. So my question is essentially: one is, are those five areas required to upgrade the Chiltern Line to W8? And two, Arby Tunnel is a long tunnel. You talked about the removal of calcification on the track. The Network Rail report suggested that the track needed to be the slab needed to be lowered. What are the consequences of the removal of calcification, and how long are the works going to be taken to establish that, shall we say, clearance to W8 standard?

Speaker 2

Can I ask the applicant to take that question, please?

Speaker 3

Yes. Again, I think it's not really for the applicant. The question is really asked of Network Rail, so I'm going to invite mr. March.

Speaker 11

Gregory March, Freight Business Development manager with the Rail Freight team at Network Rail. So I think in the wider question, the gauging assessment confirmed that Ardley Tunnel was the only limitation. I think in terms of the advice around lowering the track, I think it's fair to say that when it was

first looked at, that was one of the initial positions and options taken. However, further detailed work showed that actually via the scumblings or such a kind of scraping mechanism, as far as my non-expert view on it says, was actually more viable, and actually, from a disruption point of view, would involve significantly less disruption in terms of the required possessions. So, therefore, was the optimal solution to deliver that gauge.

Speaker 2

Thank you, mr. Marsh. So, if I can now turn to the applicant to confirm if all the road sections in the HGV route, I know you submitted HGV routing strategy. So, just to confirm, if all the road sections in that route are presently in a state that will withstand the weight of heavy goods vehicles serving the proposed development, and if not, what measures will be put into place to ensure that these roads will continue to be safe for all road users? The second part of the question is that the applicant is also required to confirm. Whether any pre-commencement condition surveys of the proposed AGV route have been undertaken, and if not, explain when such surveys are intended to be carried out, and how the results will be used to establish the baseline condition of the highway network and inform any necessary monitoring, maintenance, or remedial works, because I couldn't see that in any of your submission.

Speaker 3

Thank you, sir. Again, and I'm just repeating this because there's quite a lot of multiple limbs to that question. As I understand it, the applicant's team is being asked about the various road sections in the HGV routing strategy, and we're being asked: Are they of a sufficient standard, or is there are there any measures that would be required in order to render those road sections safe, not only for HGV traffic but also for all road users. So that's item one. And then item two, obviously related, is as regards pre-commencement conditions. We're being asked what surveys have been undertaken, and to the extent if surveys haven't yet been undertaken, when will those surveys be undertaken, and how will the results be used to inform the position?

Speaker 2

Yeah.

Speaker 3

Okay. And I think the relevant gentleman is mr. Simon Hilditch of BWB, who will address those matters. Thank you, sir.

Speaker 2

Thank you.

Speaker 13

Thank you, Simon Hilditch, on behalf of the applicant. So, in relation to the operational HGEVs, you'll see from the HGV routing strategy that the the routing takes HGVs from the main site principal access along the proposed RD bypass to Junction 10 from when it distributes around the strategic road network. There is no impediment in terms of weight or other restrictions on HGVs on that part of part of the network, and then clearly, once you answer the strategic road network, its national highways is a strategic asset for one of the principal reasons it exists is for the transportation of HGVs. So, therefore, in relation to the first part of the question, we don't see that there is any any impediment to HGV traffic using those routes. In relation to condition surveys, the the RD bypass being clearly new and being provided as part of the development, so therefore there isn't an existing asset to actually do a condition survey for. But obviously, that will all be dealt with in terms of the detailed design and inspection regime that gets put in place for the construction of that road, in terms of the works at Junction 10, then we

appreciate it's probably buried away somewhat. But in the in the draft DCO in the protected provisions for national highways, which I believe is Schedule 14 Part Two, there is requirements for condition surveys to be undertaken and agreed with National Highways for their road network.

Speaker 2

Thank you. Can you reassure us that the HGV route would not involve any local roads?

Speaker 13

Simon Hilditch for the applicant. Yeah, so the the HGV routing strategy. I'm trying to remember what the actual reference number is. I think it's TA Appendix Six, which is application examination library reference AS dash 056, contains quite a lot of significant detail about the proposed HGV routing strategy and the enforcement measures. So Oxford SRFI HGV traffic will be expressly required to use Junction 10 and the Studio Road. No work won't be permitted to travel south along the B430, And that's enforced by a combination of physical and AMPR automatic numplate recognition systems. So the physical measures are that at the site exit roundabout, HGVs will have to use the left turn lane to go through to Junction 10 along the oddly bypass because there'll be height-bearing restrictions to physically prevent them from able to turn right onto the B430. But an important supplemental consideration as part of that is: well, if you should be coming to the site, how can they be controlled as well? So that's where the AMPR system comes in, and effectively together with the ANPR system described in the aforementioned HGV routing strategy, then that will prohibit, and there'll be a fining system effectively in place to ensure that HGVs stick to the appropriate routes, and those appropriate routes, therefore, effectively, as I said, of the strategic route network from Jung. 10 to the M40 to the north, to the south the A43 to the north, and then the B4100 heading south only towards Bista, but not the B4100 to the north. So there is a drawing within the HUD strategy which shows where the proposed cameras are located.

Speaker 2

If I can follow up on that, you you spoke about physical measures, but there are other measures like contractual measures that can be follow-up. Would there be any contractual measures, say, for instance, the AGV route as a map will be supplied to contractors, and there'll be penalties for any contractor that that does not adhere to that AGV routine. Is there any mechanism that that can the enforcement mechanism in terms of contracts that we can rely on?

Speaker 13

So the enforcement mechanism I was talking about is for operational HGVs, and there is a finding mechanism set out in the operational HGV rating strategy, which then imposes fines if the HGVs taking appropriate routes within the funding then discussed and agreed as part of the Sustainable Transport Working Group as to how to deal with those fines. That's how the operational HGVs you're talking about contractors, which could be a haulier or could be a constructing construction

Speaker 2

because they are contractors.

Speaker 13

Yeah, so construction traffic is dealt with in the construction traffic management plan, and I will hand over from May to mr. Duncan, who's done the assessment of the construction traffic.

Speaker 7

Stuart Duncan. So the construction traffic management plan, which is library document AS o6 and Appendix 38 of the TA, that sets out the permitted routes for HGV construction traffic, and those routes

are set out prior to opening of the Ardley Bypass and post opening of the Ardley Bypass, similarly to the operational traffic, all HGV construction traffic to and from the main site needs to travel via Junction 10. So, post completion of the Ardley bypass, which is in year three, that traffic will use the Ardley bypass, and pre-opening of the Ardley bypass, that traffic will use the B430 through Ardley. The construction traffic management plan sets out measures that would be put in place to minimise those impacts during that post-opening phase. The construction traffic management plan requires the contractor to effectively manage and enforce the use of those construction routes. So that could include those measures will depend on the contractor, but that could include, as you suggest, monitoring and documentation showing those routes. In addition, and as set out in Oxfordshire's County Council's relevant rep 109, We have prepared a further analysis, which will be submitted as part of the change submission, that looks at and provides additional assessment of the environmental impact of the construction traffic through Ardley prior to the opening of the Ardley bypass, and as a result of that assessment, there is an additional traffic management measure that would be put in place, which is a temporary 20 mile an hour speed limit through Ardley, and they are secured via requirement 10R of the DCA.

Speaker 2

Thank you, mr. Duncan. The way you explained it, you leaving the owners to rest on the contractor to sort of control their activities. The way I understand it, the proposed development, the applicant will be the the the main. person having a contractual agreement with the with the construction construction vehicle owners yes so what I like to establish is contractually could there be any thing Any sort of statement inserted into the contract to say, if we find any contractor's vehicle traversing on local routes outside the agreed construction route, this is the penalty we go. Is terminate their contract or suspend their contract for certain period. That's the sort of thing I'm looking for because that's more effective than just rely on the contractors to manage their own activities. I I don't believe that will work.

Speaker 7

Stuart Duncan for the applicant. So I think we'll take that one away and come back to you.

Speaker 2

Thank you.

Speaker 14

So, if I may, Laura Beth Earton for the applicant. Of course, the compliance with the construction traffic routing strategy is secured by the DCO requirement. So the applicant is in the applicant's interest to ensure that its contracts ensure compliance with that, given the enforcement provisions of those of those provisions. So, I think it's fair to say that they will be covered by contract, but it is secured by the DCO.

Speaker 2

Yes, I understand that, but without this separate issue inserted, whether is then incorporated into the construction management plan that there is enforcement action on the part of the applicant to control the activities of the appointed contractors. So that's where I'm getting at. So that could be a statement in the contract or any contract that we issue out will contain that statement that if you if any contractor should use any local roads, for instance, outside the established construction traffic route, then there are certain penalties that that should be inserted, and then that can be incorporated into the construction management plan. Then we can rely on that. So that's my point. I think we got Mitchell neighbourhood plan. Want to talk, please?

Speaker 12

Yes, Jonathan Boyce, Mitchell, Neighbourhood Planning Forum. In support of your, I think your line of inquiries to your body, we have lived experience in the area. One of the reasons for requesting an attended site visit through Fuku's Fritwell and. and Somerton is that I think it's pretty well known that the M40 Junction 10 roundabout has been a hotspot for many years. A very poorly designed structure which has evolved over the years, and just a quick inquiry of the national highways database. There's been 28 severe incidents of traffic snarl ups on the M40. I'm not going to suggest that all of them have caused issues, but one in particular in July diverted traffic off the M40 because it was closed for four hours through the villages of Fucot, Fritwell, and through Somerton, and I had personally to direct HGV traffic because they didn't know the area to essentially clear the clogged roadways. So that's one of the rationales, and we do observe that even though there may be a TRO that comes out of this, I think TROs are only as effective as ANPR and enforcement methodologies that essentially stop that traffic from going through and diverting through small villages. Thank you.

Speaker 2

Thank you. Has the applicant got anything to comment on that?

Speaker 3

No, sir. I don't think we'd propose to make any response to that.

Speaker 2

I think I'll call mr. Broad again to make his comment.

Speaker 6

Thank you, sir. John Broad, CPRE. I'm intrigued by the constant talk of HGVs running around the area. I mean, this is when the site is in operation. The idea is, I thought, that you put as much stuff onto the railway, and the reason we want to try and get W10 on the gauge through Ardley Tunnel is because you can get bigger containers, which reduces the length of the trains and increases the load. So it just seems logical that that's what you would do. I'm also intrigued that nobody has answered yet when the line is going to be electrified, because at the moment they're just using thundering great diesels, and I believe Great British Rail is supposed to be trying to electrify everything. So it would be interesting to know when and if that line can be electrified, going back to the HGVs, my real question is: the rail comes into the warehouse. This is this is me completely misunderstanding probably how how an SRF works, but I'll continue with the thought, And then the items on the rail freight are put into the warehouse for storage, and then it is distributed from the storage at a later date to whoever, and that is done in light vans. I don't understand the idea of putting it into another HGV and then taking it. Why don't you just leave it on the railway, as I said yesterday, and take it to a nearest possible site, and then distribute it from there? I don't understand why you're going to put it back on an HGV. So surely the idea is to reduce HGV traffic, not increase it. Thank you.

Speaker 2

In terms of the loading gauge, I think we've had clear answer from Network Rail on that one. Would you like to?

Speaker 1

Yeah, I was just going to say, and I think on electrification, I might be wrong, but I think that was a matter you took. You said you were going to take away and look at. I think that was something,

Speaker 3

Sir Alexander Booth, the applicant. What I said was that, insofar as there were any implications for electrification of the line consequent on delivery of Ox S R F I, I would look at that, but I can't speak to

the electrification, and I'm hesitant to bring Mr. March in as the Network Rail punch bag to basically answer for the entirety of Network Rail on all issues. But I mean, that's electrification of the line. It would be a matter for him, so it's not a matter for

Speaker 11

us. So, very briefly, Gregory March Freight Business Development Manager with the Rail Freight Team at Network Rail. So I think it is fair to say that the electrification of the Chiltern Main Line is an aspiration, albeit an unfunded aspiration. So therefore, there are no current timescales for it. I would point to the fact that increasingly rail freight operators such as GBRF, represented by Ingeborg and Alex Kirk, have invested in locomotives that have buy and try motor technology, so the ability to operate on electric and non-electrified routes, which represents a significant investment and also a significant vote of confidence in the rail freight industry as well, and I'd also reiterate, referring to the statement of common ground document, which is AS 092, whereby we're in agreement with the applicant that their design essentially doesn't prejudice any future ability to electrify in that

Speaker 3

sense. So I have to say I hadn't noted. I certainly hadn't recalled provision in the statement of common ground, and to the extent that it is included in that statement of common ground, that Network Rail and the applicant are agreed that delivery of the SRFI will not prejudice electrification of the line. So I'm going to withdraw my offer to come back to you because it's there already in the documentation. Thank you, sir.

Speaker 2

Can I ask if National Highways has any comments, please?

Speaker 5

Vicky Fowler, on behalf of National Highways, so no, we have no comments. Thank you.

Speaker 2

Thank you, Mrs. Fowler. I think we've completed, we've sort of completed this item on the agenda. I will now hand over to my colleague Adrian Hunter, who will take up the next agenda. The next item on the agenda. Sorry.

Speaker 1

Thank you, Mr. Ray. I'm guessing there might be need to be a little bit of a shift around in terms of personnel from the applicant and possibly from the host authorities as well. Yeah. Yes. Have you just gave us two minutes? That's absolutely fine. Thank you very

Speaker 13

much.

Speaker 1

I'm reassured. That's just the blinds closing. Hopefully that will give the applicant an ability, bit of relief, but also the ability to perhaps see as well. I think.

Speaker 3

So I'm going to move on to agenda item 3.2. If I could, just turn into the applicant. Did you want to introduce colleagues at this stage, or is it worth introducing them when I pose questions? So I may as well just introduce them now. So you'll recognise some of the faces still at the table, notably Mr. Holmes and Mr. Harley, to Ms. Laura Beth Hutton's Wright. Beyond them, you now have Mr. Tim Jackson of

FPCR, and beyond him, you have mr. Dan Spreadborough of Design for Lighting, And I anticipate it's mr. Jackson that's going to lead because he is the lead witness in relation to landscape and visual matters.

Speaker 1

Thank you. And I'm wondering whether the host authorities have just got somebody they would just like to to introduce as well. Be helpful. Yeah.

Speaker 4

Yes. Thank you, George Gurney, for the host authorities. We have two specialists to introduce. There's Ms. Hydran Bryth from Oxford County Council, and mr. Andrew Cox from Chairwoman District Council.

Speaker 1

Thank you both. That's that's very helpful to to do those. So in terms of this this item on landscape and visual, we posed three particular sort of areas that we want to explore. First off, just the general sort of approach to the landscape and visual assessment and the design approach, and how it links to the design that's been undertaken, and also exploring proposed mitigation as well. Got some questions around photo montages and visualisations. Just some clarifications on those. Possibly some clarifications on what we might expect in terms of being prepared. And then we've just got some questions around the residual effects as well. Looking at the time, I suggest that it might well be. Hopefully, we can perhaps get through the first one of those, and then come to sort of an appropriate break, but I'll keep an eye on the time, and then we'll see where we where we get to. So, if I could just sort of start by asking the applicant just to briefly explain how it's approached the LVIA, particularly the key judgments you've made when assessing significance of the landscape and visual effects.

Speaker 15

Good afternoon, sir. Tim Jackson, FPCR. I'm a senior director, and I'm for the applicant. So, in terms of the LVIA approach, we've followed the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment Guidelines, third edition. I think known as Glivia Three. Again, I think it's the industry standard in terms of approaching landscape visual impact assessments of certainly all developments, really, and particularly these sort of larger scale developments, it's it's a robust approach, an approach that we've adopted previously on other SRFI schemes. So, as with probably a number of other people you've already heard from, I've been involved with the SRFIs at East Midlands Gateway, Northampton Gateway, Durfd, and the West Midlands Interchange. So, quite a bit of experience of progress in these types of schemes. I think, in terms of the methodology, it's sort of tried and tested and set out in the environmental statement. I think your particular reference, in terms of significance, is a matter that is quite frequently debated, particularly in the context of EIA assessments. And there's been clarification notes produced by the landscape. Institute over the years, the Landscape Institute do make it clear, and the guidelines make it clear that a significant effect is very much a matter of judgement. It does, however, suggest that you should make clear what that judgement is. I think it also spells out that you know major adverse impacts would be expected to be significant, but probably minor adverse wouldn't. I think where it's sort of where there's a grey area is when you come up with moderate adverse effects. Now our approach, which is one like I say we've adopted over many years on all of the previous SRFI schemes is that we say, in landscape and visual terms, a significant effect is an effect that's moderate, major, or major. So we we effectively say that you know at that level it's significant. So again, it depends on whether it's just a significant view or impact upon one particular view, or equally, it could be a significant impact on a large landscape area. But it would be significant, relevant to what the landscape or visual receptor is. So again, there is quite a lot of debate. I'm very aware of other landscape consultants that adopt moderate adverse. Equally, I'm aware of others that don't adopt major, moderate, and will just go for major. I think, sorry, just to finish on this point, I think what we do, however, that I think is helpful, is that

we clearly set out all of the effects. So, if it is a case that you, for instance, as the panel, consider a moderate or wanted to consider that a moderate adverse effect was deemed significant. We clearly set out where those moderate adverse effects are as well. So we do a full suite of all the assessments, but in terms of where we pitch that level, and we explain in the again in the methodology that that's where we set our bar.

Speaker 1

Thank you for that. That's helpful, and you've almost sort of second-guessed my follow-up question, which was a particular reference in the ES, which talks about your approach, major, moderate major, and the fact that other practitioners may take may take a different approach. So, so I was going to sort of ask to follow to justify that, but I think you probably you probably answered that, I think. So I'm not really going to go any further than that. But I do know that was a concern that I think the council raised in terms of that. So it'd be useful to sort of hear sort of the council's position and how they sort of interpret that.

Speaker 4

Okay, thank you. I'll invite Ms. Bryth to address that.

Speaker 16

Yeah. Hello, Hydran Breath, landscape officer at the Oxfordshire County Council. Yes. So, as mr. Jackson pointed out, this is Glavia is the industry standard that is used for assessing impacts on of schemes, and that these are guidelines, and that it has often resulted in some discussions about how an assessment should be take should take place, and methodologies are basically created for each development, so not there have there are some rules. You know what what should be covered, but and not there's no standard methodology that should be used now because moderate effects have have been a point of discussion quite a lot. The Landscape Institute did provide another a technical note to clarify this, and that's what we refer to in our representation or on our relevant presentation to the scheme, so it's the guidance note TGN 124, I think. I can check that, and this states in in section 3.5, and I don't know. It might be helpful if I just quote the relevant sentences. So, as indicated in Glavia paragraph 3.33, it is not necessary to establish thresholds for levels of significance, provided that it is made clear whether effects are or are not significant. However, typically effects falling below the middle of the range of overall effects are assessed as not significant. For example, if using a scale of minor, moderate, major, then major effects will be significant. Significant and minor effects will not be significant. In this example, moderate effects may or may not be significant, and justification would be needed in the methodology or receptor assessment as to whether a moderate effect is significant or not. So that's basically what we are referring to in our in our representation, and I think because it was was a matter of contention, that's our experience is that a lot of consultancies do use that approach that they say yes, moderate effects could be significant, but it's not automatically that if it's moderate, it's not significant.

Speaker 1

So I suppose. So I suppose. Just sort of following following that up. What are the implications of the approach that the applicant has has taken?

Speaker 16

Well, the the consequences are that you end up with more significant effects. It highlights where where areas are that are more you know significantly affected, either in landscape or in visual terms. That's the consequence of it. And maybe it's worth it's helpful to say. I mean, we have been dealing with, or we're dealing with other national infrastructure projects. So, for example, with the Botley West Solar Farm project that is currently in the decision stage, that was a point of discussion as well, and the White

Force Reservoir National Infrastructure Project also adopts the approach that moderate effects could be significant or not significant. Thank you.

Speaker 1

Thank you. Perhaps if I could just turn to the applicant and see if there's anything in particular you want to address in terms of those comments, or how you know you would respond to those,

Speaker 15

Tim Jackson for the applicant. Just very briefly, sir. I mean, I think it's addressed just in terms of a reference, in terms of the environmental statement, chapter seven. It's principally at chapter at paragraph seven point 2.29 to 7.2 30 is the is the main reference. Again, I'm familiar with the the common debate on this. All I would say, sir, is that we do set out clearly where there are moderate adverse effects, and if you or anybody else considers that should be deemed significant, then you've got that information. Again, the approach we've adopted is one that we've adopted over many years and over the previous SRFI schemes that I've referenced. And again, we've had no we've had no debates at those sort of DCO processes. But equally, you know, I'm aware of having that debate at other sort of appeals. So again, that's the approach we adopt. Equally, some do moderate. Equally, some just do major. It's the information's there. That's all I would say.

Speaker 1

Okay, thank you. I think that's that's sort of helpful to explain that sort of issue to us and the position of the council. What I'd now like to do, sort of, move on to sort of landscape character and how this has been sort of considered in the assessment. And from what I understand, the application site lies predominantly within the Oxfordshire Estate farmlands character area, but also we're on the edge of the Upper Heyford landscape character area as well. So that's that's my understanding. Looking at the specific sort of guidelines around both of those, I think, for the farmland platter landscape identifies the exposed plateau as being particularly sensitive to visual intrusive development and large buildings, and recommends concentrating new developments in and around existing settlements. Whereas the farmlands guidance sort of seeks to avoid development which intrudes into locations remote from urban influences. So there's a sort of crossover and a key sort of pattern in there. Really helpful if the applicant could explain how you've taken those characteristics and guidelines and how you've assessed those.

Speaker 15

Yeah, Tim Jackson for the applicant, if you don't mind. So, can I just take one, just very brief back step? Just let me take a minute, but just in terms of the overall approach to landscape and landscape character, I think the certainly the national networks NPS has got quite a helpful, almost gauge. So again, within that NPS paragraphs 1. No, sorry, 5.169 to 5.177. It almost provides a hierarchy. So this is very much a sort of a very broad contextual point, but it refers to developments that lie within nationally designated landscapes. Firstly, again, I think this is under the landscape and visual impact. Section and it's also under the decision-making section, but I think it's quite helpful just to provide that overview and context, and I think it provides a sort of sort of almost a hierarchy of three tiers. Firstly, there's that designated nationally designated landscapes. The second one is the development that might affect a designated, a nationally designated landscape. That's often within the setting of such a landscape, but it might affect it in other ways. And then, thirdly, it refers to locally designated landscapes. So, just very quickly on those three points: the site, no part of the site lies within a nationally designated landscape. The nearest national landscape is the Cotswolds national landscape, which lies sort of 11 and a half kilometres to the southwest. There's no intervisibility. There's no inference anywhere that our site has any bearings on the setting of that national landscape. So again, in terms of those first two references within the the NPS, we lie beyond both of those. And then again, I think what is also helpful, just as a

contextual point, sir, is in terms of local landscape designations, there was formerly a local designation areas of high landscape value that applied across the district. Now, at that stage, the site lay beyond those areas. Now, there's been a recent 2024 local landscape designation study undertaken for Cherwell District Council that has looked, I think, essentially re-evaluated those local landscape areas, and it has recommended that there are a number of landscapes across Chirwell that would qualify for that local landscape designation. I mean, the bar they use for their local landscape designation is, it's a landscape that's above ordinary. So again, it's sort of above that mid level. Again, the the landscape character areas to which you refer don't fall within a local landscape designation. So the site itself, again, is some distance from the nearest local landscape designation, which is the Chirwell Valley, which is over to the west of the airfield. So again, just in terms of the picture, and just drilling down to where, certainly where the site as a whole sits, just in terms of designations and local local designations. We're not within any of those tiers. Now, clearly, we're not saying that you know the landscape's got no local value because that that isn't the case. But it is a case that if you were doing an initial sieving exercise, then we sit certainly in an area that is less constrained in landscape terms, so you have to forgive me, sir. I may have missed your point. I've sort of set the scene, and now I've forgotten what your question was.

Speaker 1

So have I. Let me go back. Yeah, no, but I think that that scene setting is helpful. It was really just to do the guidelines in both the landscape character areas, which talks about digital intrusion and proximity to urban areas.

Speaker 15

Yeah, so I think again in terms of the those character areas, the two to which you refer, I mean the main one is the Oxfordshire estate farmland within which the majority of the site sits. The other one sits to the northwest and stretches across the Heyford Airfield, but in terms of the Oxfordshire Estate farmlands, I think the points that you can also draw from that character area is that it's characterised as being a well-wooded landscape. So there is a predominance of woodland across that site, including woodland belts. Again, clearly within the landscape character assessment, it refers to this landscape being structured on a large scale by woodland belts, and it also refers to it being a well enclosed landscape. It does it does refer to certainly away where you're away from major transport infrastructure and urban urban edges, that there is a much stronger rural character to it and tranquillity. But I think, in terms of some of the key characteristics and where we sit, I think the enclosure, the woodland, are particularly important and relevant, and then again, I think as you referenced in terms of the plateau landscape, again there are it is more exposed to the west, particularly across across the airfield. There are there are more open views, but again, we largely sit to the east of. Area, and again, I think we've we've drawn upon all of that information in terms of how we've dealt with, I suppose, dealt with the design process and the design proposals as they've come forward.

Speaker 1

Okay, thank you. I think that that helpfully answers to the questions that I had. Was there anything that the the council wished to to say or deal with on on that?

Speaker 4

Yeah, George Gurney speaking on behalf of the councils. I will hand over to mr. Cox.

Speaker 17

Andrew Cox, Chairwoman District Council Chartered Landscape Architect. I was wondering if a site-specific character assessment was undertaken in accordance with other guidance that's been produced by the Landscape Institute and relevant bodies, and was referred to in the scoping response, and in

particular the requirement for field survey record sheets that demonstrate that the assessor has established the variations in local character, because the LCTs are quite large, the Wooded Estates, and Upper Hayford Plateau.

Speaker 1

Kate, thank you. It's probably on whether the applicant is able just to to clarify whether.

Speaker 15

Yeah, just very briefly, sir. Tim Jackson for the applicant. I mean, we've done we've done detailed field survey and appraisal work since 2018. My first visit to the site was 2018. I think since then we've done a lot of site-based appraisal work. I think the reference I know Mr. Cox refers to field survey sheets. I think these these days certainly field survey sheets where we're undertaking district-wide or borough-wide landscape character assessment studies. We we adopt those, but for individual development projects, we we essentially use detailed photographic records, marked up plans, as opposed to detailed character assessment sheets, and that's been that's been the case, and on all of the other SRFI projects we've been involved with.

Speaker 1

And is that is that information contained within the the application? Has that been submitted?

Speaker 15

All of that information won't be submitted. I mean, we've got, like I say, we've got folders and folders of marked up plans and photographs and the like. I mean, essentially, in terms of the the character of the local landscape and the site in its immediate context, I mean, that is set out very clearly over quite a number of pages within the the ES chapter, chapter number seven. I mean, we haven't we haven't got, I suppose, a a set of survey sheets that all align with that as such. I mean, we've built up the information over quite a number of years.

Speaker 1

Okay, thank you very much. I'm just conscious of the time; it's just coming up to 1 o'clock. So my next question sort of moves on to the integration between the LVIA and the design process. I'm thinking that might not be something we can deal with in perhaps a minute. So it might be a suitable time to stop for lunch. But before I do, I just want to see if anybody else had any any sort of comments or issues on the landscape before we then perhaps adjourn for lunch. Mr. Broad.

Speaker 6

Thank you, Chef John Broad, CPRE. As you might expect, I have a huge amount of comments on this because this is the very subject that CPRE stands for and has been fighting and campaigning against for decades. From a point of view of looking at this particular site and what is going to be built on it, as I referred yesterday to you, when we had a look at the plan, which was 2D, I did suggest that somebody should do a cross section of the landscape, because, as has already been mentioned, Upper Hayford is on a plateau, and if you go the other side of the M40, that also to the east is also on a hill. So whether you're on ground level or whether you're on looking at it from one of the two sides, this is an eyesore and cannot be hidden, and it removes what is wonderful farmland that is producing food for this country at the moment, away from food production, and so whether you agree or disagree with the project actually going ahead is entirely your decision, sir. But from CPRE's point of view, this is a nightmare.

Speaker 1

Thank you for those. In terms of some of those points you raised, actually they are questions that will hopefully come up later on in terms of whether that's the under the mitigation or perhaps some of the residual effects as well. So yes, yeah. If I could come

Speaker 12

to, as I think we're closing now, just a very quick procedural point. I would have raised yesterday, but I didn't know about it. We're working with the Environmental Law Fund, and they've asked for guidance from the EXA when we provide our written representations. Do you want all of the topic areas to be in single documents, or do you want them to be separated out?

Speaker 1

I think I know what you're asking, but one single document is probably easier for us from one one representation from one body rather than multiple on different different topics. But one one document that covers all the other relevant topics that they would wish to make comments on is perfectly fine, and probably easier for you in terms of uploading and and doing all that side of things as well. Perfect. Thank you. Thank you. Okay. Well, looking looking at the time. It is two minutes past one. But what I suggest is perhaps we take 58 minutes and come back at 2 o'clock, if that's okay. So this hearing is adjourned until 2 p.m.