



Preliminary meeting note

Application: Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange

Reference: TR050008

Time and date: 10:00 am Tuesday 29 September 2026

Venue: Bicester Hotel Golf and Spa, Green Lane, Chesterton, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX26 1TE

This meeting note is not a full transcript of the preliminary meeting. It is a summary of the key points discussed.

1. Welcome and Introduction

Adrian Hunter (AH) welcomed those present and introduced himself as the lead member of the panel of Examining Inspectors. Alex Oyebade and Guy Rigby introduced themselves as panel members to examine the Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange project application.

AH explained the appointment was made by delegation from the Secretary of State (SoS) for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

AH explained that the ExA would be examining the application made by Oxfordshire Railfreight Limited ('the applicant') before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State who will decide whether an order granting development consent for the proposed project, which is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), should be made.

AH explained the purpose of the preliminary meeting (PM) and noted that the Examination will commence after the PM closed.

The ExA confirmed that all documents and submissions received and accepted during the Examination would be published on the project-specific page of the National Infrastructure Planning website.

2. Audio recording

A video recording of this PM would be made available on the National Infrastructure Planning website (it can be accessed [here](#)).

3. General Data Protection Regulation

The ExA explained The Planning Inspectorate's duties under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Further info relating to the GDPR can be found in the Planning Inspectorate's '[Privacy Note](#)'.

4. Examination process

The ExA briefly explained the examination process under the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008). Further info can be found:

- ['Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: What to expect at a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project event'](#)
- ['Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: Registering to speak at, or attend, an event'](#)

5. Initial assessment of principal issues

The ExA explained the purpose of the initial assessment of principal issues (section 88 of the PA2008), which can be found in annex C of the [Rule 6](#) letter of 24 August 2026. The ExA then invited parties in attendance to make observations on them.

The ExA was asked to consider several additional principal issues by interested parties in attendance. These included some detailed matters that would fall under the principal issues identified by the ExA. Requests for additional principal issues included:

- Utilities and Services
- A request for an Accompanied Site Inspection
- Climate Change and Resilience
- Ardley Track Way to be separated from the Ecology and Biodiversity section and treated as a paleontological issue
- 'Forever chemicals' to be given detailed consideration
- Food security.

6. Examination Timetable

The ExA noted requests already received in writing to amend the draft examination timetable contained in [annex D of Rule 6 letter](#) and also welcomed further suggestions from the parties in attendance.

There was a discussion around future issue specific hearings, where a dedicated hearing focused on highway and transport matters was requested, dealing with cumulative traffic impacts, the adequacy of the applicant's cumulative assessment and that the examination fully tests the applicant's traffic modelling and assessment framework.

The applicant requested a degree of flexibility so that they could provide substantive responses in relation to all matters at Deadline 2 (D2), while factoring in the submission of a formal change application at D2. The applicant identified that given the limited time between D1 and D2, and depending on the amount of information to which they may need to respond, they may need to submit provisional or headline responses at D2, with, if necessary, more substantive response at Deadline 3.

In addition, due to unavailability of key members of the project team, the applicant requested that, when scheduling any hearings for the week commencing 9 November, it would be welcomed if the ExA could avoid holding them on 12 and 13 November.

There was a detailed discussion around the applicant's proposed changes to the application.

The examination timetable can be found in the [rule 8 documentation](#) published on Thursday 8 October 2026.

7. Hearings and site inspections

The ExA clarified the purpose of:

- Issue specific hearings
- Compulsory acquisition hearings
- Open floor hearings
- Accompanied site inspections
- Unaccompanied site inspections

The ExA sought comments on the arrangements for the above events. These were duly noted and considered by the ExA.

Further information relating to hearings and site inspections can be found:

- ['Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: What to expect at a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project event'](#)
- ['Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: Registering to speak at, or attend, an event'](#)

8. Procedural decisions

The ExA clarified the procedural decisions which had been made under section 89(3) of the PA2008 and asked for any observations.

Procedural decisions can be found in [annex F of the Rule 6 Letter](#).

The ExA requested that if parties used AI to generate or alter examination submissions, they should declare its use, identify the AI tool used, explain the source of information relied upon, and specify which parts of the submission were AI-assisted. Undeclared AI-generated content may be rejected, and responsibility for ensuring accuracy and reliability remains with the submitting party.

The ExA formally requested Local Impact Reports from Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council. Other relevant local authorities were also invited to submit Local Impact Reports should they wish.

There was a discussion around the likelihood on whether the Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) could be agreed and concluded between identified parties and the applicant. The ExA asked the applicant to keep the ExA informed of any changes to SoCG.

The ExA confirmed it had already undertaken an unaccompanied site inspection (USI) and requested a draft itinerary for a future accompanied site inspection (ASI). Specific locations identified for inspection include the Ardley Trackway SSSI, the former Ardley Station, the former landfill site, Ashgrove Cottages, Ashgrove Farm, and the eastern end of Upper Heyford Airfield.

The ExA exercised its discretion to accept several late submissions, including representations from organisations such as Network Rail Infrastructure Limited, The Garden Trust, British Horse Society, West Berkshire Council, and the Ministry of Defence National Armaments Director Group. It also accepted additional documents from the applicant, including a Statement of Common Ground with Network Rail and responses to Section 51 (s51) advice.

The ExA directed parties to submit comments on relevant representations before the Preliminary Meeting. This was intended to assist the examination by identifying key issues and positions at an early stage.