Howbury Park, Slade Green
in the London Borough of Bexley
planning application no. 15/02673/OUTEA

Strategic planning application stage 1 referral

The proposal
Cross-boundary outline application for the demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment to provide a strategic rail freight interchange comprising a rail freight intermodal facility, warehousing, new access arrangements from Moat Lane, associated HGV, car and cycle parking, landscaping, drainage, and associated works (within London Borough of Bexley). Creation of a new access road from the existing A206/A2026 roundabout, incorporating a bridge over the River Cray, landscaping and associated works (within Dartford Borough Council). All matters reserved except for Access.

The applicant
The applicant is Roxhill Developments Ltd and the agent is Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners.

Strategic issues summary

Green Belt: Proposed development is inappropriate and would be harmful to the Green Belt. A ‘very special circumstances’ case based on identified strategic need and the lack of alternative sites which could accommodate such a large facility and have access to the road and rail network has been made, which is considered to be persuasive but further information should be sought on the proposed carbon emission savings, reduction in traffic movements and the impact on the passenger rail network, in line with London Plan policy 6.15.

Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI): Supported under London Plan policy 6.15, subject to clarification on carbon emission saving and wider transport impacts. Recognition of previous planning consent for Howbury Park in supporting text,

Economic development: The proposal would make a significant positive economic impact and help support the Bexley Riverside Opportunity Area and Regeneration Area.

Transport: Concern regarding the potential impact on passenger rail, in addition to a number of other strategic transport issues raised (including level of cycle parking and contributions to signage and bus shelters).

Biodiversity: The proposal would result in the loss of a significant area of land that proposes complementary habitats to the adjacent Crayford Marshes. Mitigation is proposed, but compensation measures should also be secured.

Recommendation
That London Borough of Bexley be advised that the application does not currently comply with the London Plan, for the reasons set out in paragraph 86 of this report; but that the possible remedies set out in paragraph 86 of this report could address these deficiencies.
Context

1. On 25 April 2016 the Mayor of London received documents from Bexley Council notifying him of a planning application of potential strategic importance to develop the above site for the above uses. Under the provisions of The Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008 the Mayor has until 3 June 2016 to provide the Council with a statement setting out whether he considers that the application complies with the London Plan, and his reasons for taking that view. The Mayor may also provide other comments. This report sets out information for the Mayor’s use in deciding what decision to make.

2. The application is referable under the following categories of the Schedule to the Order 2008:

- 1B 1. (c) “Development (other than development which only comprises the provision of houses, flats, or houses and flats) which comprises or includes the erection of a building or buildings outside Central London and with a total floorspace of more than 15,000 square metres”;
- 2C 1. “Development to provide – (g) an installation for use within Class B8 (storage or distribution) of the Schedule to the Use Classes Order where the development occupies more than 4 hectares”;
- 3D 1. “Development - (a) on land allocated as Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land in the development plan, in proposals for such a plan, or in proposals for the alteration or replacement of such a plan; and (b) which would involve the construction of a building with a floorspace of more than 1,000 square metres or a material change in the use of such a building;”
- 3E 1. “Development - which (a) which does not accord with one or more provisions of the development plan in force in the area in which the application site is situated; and (b) comprises or includes the provision of more than 2,500 square metres of floorspace for a use falling within any of the following classes in the Use Classes Order — (viii) class B8 (storage and distribution).”

3. Once London Borough of Bexley has resolved to determine the application, it is required to refer it back to the Mayor for his decision as to whether to direct refusal; take it over for his own determination; or allow the Council to determine it itself.

4. The environmental information for the purposes of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 has been taken into account in the consideration of this case.

5. The Mayor of London’s statement on this case will be made available on the GLA website www.london.gov.uk.

Site description

6. The 57.4 hectare site is located on an area known as Crayford Marshes, adjacent to the boundary between the boroughs of Bexley and Dartford. To the immediate west of the site is the existing rail depot at Slade Green and the Grosvenor Waste Depot, while Thames Road, Bob Dunn Way and the edge of the River Cray abut the southern boundaries of the site. To the north the site extends as far as Moat Lane, which links Slade Green with Howbury Farm and Farm Cottage. To the north of the site, beyond Moat Lane and the drainage channel that extends to the River Darent, the marshes continue northwards to the River Thames. The subject site encloses “The
Grange’, a former residential building that is now in commercial use, while to the immediate north is the Howbury Moat, a scheduled ancient monument.

7 The site is relatively flat pasture land that is used for grazing. With the exception of The Grange, the site is open. To the east of the site is a large open area that has been used as a landfill site and open fields that stretches to the River Darent.

8 The site is located in the Metropolitan Green Belt and is part of the London Green Grid. The marshes to the north are an Area of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation, while the marshes to the east are a site of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation. The adjacent rail depot is within the Thames Road (including Crayford) Industrial Area Strategic Industrial Location. The site also falls within the Bexley Riverside Opportunity Area and an area for regeneration, as designated within the London Plan.

9 The site has frontage to the Slade Green Train depot and Moat Lane to the North West, and Bob Dunn Way/Thames Street to the South. Thames Street forms part of the Strategic Road Network (SRN) and the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN) is approximately 3.3km away (A2 Rochester Way) from the northern most extent of the site. Vehicle access to the site is proposed via the Thames Street/ Bob Dunn Way/ A206 gyratory. There is a pedestrian and bus access proposed from Moat Lane to the north east to improve pedestrian connectivity and enable bus services to access the site directly. The north west aspect of the site is approximately 330 metres from Slade Green Station which is served by National Rail. There are currently three existing bus stops within walking distance to the northern extent of the site, at Slade Green Station and Howbury Lane serving the 88, 99 and 428 routes. Measured on a scale of 1a – 6b where 6b is the highest, the site has a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) ranging from 0 to 2, which is considered low.

Details of the proposal

10 The proposal is an outline application for a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) including an integrated intermodal area and 184,500 sq.m of rail-served warehouse distribution floorspace. Key features of the development are:

- rail access via the existing connection off the South Eastern Trains depot at Slade Green;
- a central rail port forming part of an integrated intermodal area to serve the site and surrounding businesses to facilitate the interchange of goods between rail and road;
- a series of development plots providing c184,500 sq.m of rail served warehouse distribution floorspace;
- road access via the A206/A2026 roundabout across a bridge over the River Cray and into the development.

11 There are currently six SRFIs in the UK and intermodal rail freight traffic has grown 27% since 2009. The majority of the SRFI developments to date have been in the Midlands and the North, and the aspiration is to have a network of three SRFI around the M25, including this site at Howbury Park, South East London, Radlett, North London (approved by the Secretary of State) and Colnbrook, West London (decision awaited from the Secretary of State) to build a national network.

12 The majority of existing users at the other UK SRFI are domestic retailers and there are a number of major UK retailers with distribution centres outside of London in Kent and the Thames Estuary including ASDA, Co-Operative, LIDL, Sainsbury’s, Tesco, Waitrose and Marks & Spencer. The majority of the rail traffic to and from the site would be domestic intermodal
services linking with SFRIs in the Midlands. The applicant has also identified the potential for use from the Channel Tunnel and ports including Southampton and Felixstowe.

13 The scheme assumes seven intermodal trains and one conventional freight train per day and 840 two-way HGV movements per day.

Case history

14 A pre-planning application meeting was held on 11 June 2015 and an advice report was issued on 24 June 2015. In summary, it was started that the proposals for a rail freight interchange development represented inappropriate development within the Green Belt and the proposal could only be supported by GLA officers if the applicant could demonstrate ‘very special circumstances’. The applicant was advised that mitigation measures would be required to reduce biodiversity impacts.

15 It should be noted that a similar scheme for a rail freight interchange with dedicated intermodal facility and rail-linked warehousing on the Howbury Park site, was allowed on appeal to the Secretary of State in December 2007. The Mayor issued a stage 1 report in July 2005 (PDU/0940/01) and Stage 2 report in February 2007 (PDU/0940/02), these were supportive of rail freight interchange, subject to delivery of the intermodal facility.

16 Against the backdrop of the 2008 recession, the consented scheme was unimplemented and has since lapsed. Control of the site has since passed onto the current applicant who is seeking to develop a similar, but not identical, scheme.

Strategic planning issues and relevant policies and guidance

17 The relevant issues and corresponding policies are as follows:

- Green Belt/MOL: London Plan;
- Opportunity Areas: London Plan;
- Transport: London Plan; the Mayor’s Transport Strategy; Land for Industry and Transport SPG
- Crossrail: London Plan; Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy; Crossrail SPG
- Parking: London Plan; the Mayor’s Transport Strategy
- Open land: London Plan; East London Green Grid SPG; All London Green Grid SPG
- Biodiversity/Geodiversity: London Plan; the Mayor’s Biodiversity Strategy; Preparing Borough Tree and Woodland Strategies; London’s Foundations (Geodiversity) SPG
- Ambient noise: London Plan; the Mayor’s Ambient Noise Strategy;
- Sustainable development: London Plan; Sustainable Design and Construction SPG; Mayor’s Climate Change Adaptation Strategy; Mayor’s Climate Change Mitigation and Energy Strategy; Mayor’s Water Strategy
- Air quality: London Plan; the Mayor’s Air Quality Strategy;
- Blue Ribbon Network: London Plan
- Economic development: London Plan; the Mayor’s Economic Development Strategy; Employment Action Plan
- Employment: London Plan; Land for Industry and Transport SPG
- Urban design: London Plan;
For the purposes of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the development plan in force for the area is Bexley’s Core Strategy (2012), saved policies of the Bexley Unitary Development Plan (2004) and the London Plan consolidated with alterations since 2011 (March 2016).

The following are also relevant material considerations:
- The National Policy Statement on National Networks (2014)

Principle of development

Policy context

Green Belt

The site is located in Metropolitan Green Belt. Although the site was subject to a previous consent for a rail freight interchange in 2007, it should be noted that the application would have been assessed against PPG 2 and an earlier iteration of the London Plan. The proposal therefore needs to be assessed anew against the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and London Plan policy 7.16 Green Belt.

The NPPF states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belt. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. The Green Belt serves five purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The NPPF continues to place substantial weight on any harm to the Green Belt in considering planning applications. Paragraphs 87 states:

‘As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.’

Whilst paragraph 88 states:

‘When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.’

NPPF, paragraph 89 states:
'A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- achieving sustainable development provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; or
- limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development."

25 The NPPF in paragraph 90 identifies a further list of uses and circumstances where development can be viewed as acceptable:

‘Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt. These are:

- mineral extraction;
- engineering operations;
- Local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction; and
- development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order.’

26 London Plan 7.16 Green Belt reflects the national policy guidance and specifically in relation to planning applications states under section B:

‘The strongest protection should be given to London’s Green Belt, in accordance with national guidance. Inappropriate development should be refused, except in very special circumstances. Development will be supported if it is appropriate and helps secure the objectives of improving the Green Belt as set out in national guidance.’

27 The National Policy Statement for National Networks (NPS) also addresses this issue in paragraphs 5.172 and 5.178.

‘Promoters of strategic rail freight interchanges may find that the only viable sites for meeting the need for regional strategic rail freight interchanges are on Green Belt land. Promoters need to recognise the special protection given to Green Belt land. The Secretary of State would have to be convinced, and promoters would need to demonstrate, very special circumstances to justify planning consent for inappropriate development in the Green Belt.’

‘When located in the Green Belt national networks infrastructure projects may comprise inappropriate development. Inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and there is a presumption against it except in very special circumstances. The Secretary of State
will need to assess whether there are very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. In view of the presumption against inappropriate development, the Secretary of State will attach substantial weight to the harm to the Green Belt, when considering any application for such development.‘

**Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges**

28 Although London Plan policy 6.15a Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges is supportive of the type of facility proposed due to identified strategic need, policy 6.15b caveats this support and sets out criteria which must be delivered within the facility.

A) The provision of strategic rail freight interchanges should be supported. Including enabling the potential of the Channel Tunnel Rail link to be exploited for freight serving London and the wider region.

B) The facilities must: (a) deliver model shift from road to rail; (b) minimise any adverse impact on the wider transport network; (c) be well related to rail and road corridors capable of accommodating the anticipated level of freight movements; and (d) be well related to the proposed market.

29 Supporting text paragraph 6.50 acknowledges that these types of large facilities can often only be located in the Green Belt. The Howbury Park site is referenced as a site potentially fulfilling these criteria, reflecting the previous planning permission. Paragraph 6.50 also states:

‘The Mayor will need to see robust evidence of savings and overall reduction in traffic movements are sufficient to justify Green Belt loss in accordance with policy 7.16, and localised increases in traffic movements.’

**Assessment**

30 The NPPF does not recognise rail freight facilities as fitting within the established exceptions and therefore the proposal is defined as inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore should be refused, except in very special circumstances. Thus it is for the applicant to demonstrate that harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by very special circumstances that justify granting planning permission.

31 Whilst the London Plan supports SRFIs, in principle, and acknowledges that this type of development can often only be located in the Green Belt, referencing the previous scheme at Howbury Park, a clear set of criteria are set out which frame that policy support including the delivery of modal shift from road to rail and evidence of emission savings and overall reduction in traffic movements.

32 The key areas for consideration are considered to be:

1) **Harm to the Green Belt** i.e. the extent to which the proposal would result in harm to the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

2) **Other harm** i.e. the extent to which the proposal would cause other harm, including, but not limited to, harm to the landscape and visual impact, heritages assets, biodiversity interest, flood risk, air quality, noise pollution, transport impacts and any amenity impacts for local residents.
3) **Very special circumstances** i.e. those offered by the applicant including identified need, policy support and whether alternative sites are available.

**Harm to the Green Belt**

33  As per the NPPF, the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belt are their openness and their permanence. Set against the essential characteristics of Green Belt, GLA Officers consider that the proposal for development on c.57 hectares would indisputably lead to substantial harm to the Green Belt, on account of loss of openness.

34  In terms of the five purposes of the Green Belt set out within the NPPF, GLA Officers observe the following:

i) **to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas:** the proposal would lead to development beyond the existing urban boundary of Slade Green. However, as the applicant has highlighted, there are a number of designations around the site which would halt any further development beyond the site boundary, including the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) at Howbury Moat, the protected area of the Crayford Marshes and the flood plains of the Rivers Cray and Darent. GLA Officers do not consider the proposal would lead to unrestricted sprawl.

ii) **to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another:** the proposal would diminish the gap between Slade Green and Dartford. However a clear, visual gap of 1.1km would remain and this was found by the Inspector, and the Secretary of State, to be acceptable in 2007. Accordingly, GLA Officers do not consider the proposal in itself would lead to the merging of the towns, however would need to be assured that other sites have not come forward over the intervening period to erode that gap.

iii) **to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment:** GLA Officers consider that the proposal would encroach into the countryside, and this is acknowledged by the applicant.

iv) **to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns:** The proposal does not affect any historic towns and therefore this purpose is not applicable to the proposal.

v) **to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land:** In order to consider whether the proposal would undermine urban regeneration objectives, GLA Officers need to understand whether the proposal could be accommodated on brownfield land within London or the wider South East. In this regard, the applicant has produced an Alternative Site Assessment (ASA) which identifies three possible alternatives at London Gateway (Essex), Barking & Dagenham and Northfleet (Kent). The applicant states that the sites at Barking and Northfleet would be too small to accommodate a SRFI of the scale and operation proposed and any SRFI function at London Gateway would primarily serve the container port operation, rather than demand for rail freight per se. GLA Officers consider the ASA to be robust and would also highlight that this part of London is one of the 20% most deprived, and is identified for regeneration within the London Plan, the proposal would
contribute directly to urban regeneration with the creation of new jobs and investment in the area.

35 In conclusion, GLA Officers consider the proposal would cause substantial harm to the Green Belt with the ensuing loss of openness and would cause harm to at least one of the five purposes, notably encroachment into the countryside, and would also need to be assured that it would not lead to the merging. The applicant has proposed mitigation through the siting and landscaping to reduce the development’s impact, and it is noted that the proposal is smaller than that proposed previously, but GLA Officers consider this does not outweigh the harm and therefore this will need to be balanced against the applicant’s ‘very special circumstances’ case.

Other Harm

36 At this stage, without the input from statutory consultees, GLA Officers are unable to make a full assessment on the degree of ‘other harm’ arising from the proposals, but the following are considered to be the key issues for consideration by the Council, and subsequently by the Mayor at Stage 2:

- **Landscape & Visual Impact:** As set out above the applicant is proposing substantial landscaping to mitigate the visual impact of the proposal. The applicant’s Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) illustrates the proposals prominence would be somewhat off-set through planting and bunds over the medium to long-term, but the proposal would be visible in the short-term before landscaping matured.

- **Air Quality:** The applicant has submitted an Environmental Statement (ES) which is currently being reviewed by GLA Officers.

- **Biodiversity:** Initial comments are set out in paragraphs 49–52 below. Whilst the proposed development would result in the loss of a significant area of land that provides supporting and complementary habitats to the adjacent Crayford Marshes, on-site mitigation is proposed. However, further details of the proposed management plan and compensatory measures are requested.

- **Heritage:** To the north of the site, Howbury Moat is a scheduled ancient monument and a Grade II Listed tithe barn. It is noted at the 2007 appeal, English Heritage (now Historic England) considered that the proposed bund and landscaping would adequately mitigate the impact of the development.

Very Special Circumstances

37 The applicant has set out a ‘very special circumstances’ case in line with those which were used to justify the previous proposal at Howbury Park and were accepted by the Inspector and Secretary of State to outweigh the identified harm:

1. **Identified Need** – There is a recognised need for SRFI development to meet growth and this is set out in the National Policy Statement on National Networks (NPS). The London Plan is supportive of SRFI and recognises that these may need to be located within the Green Belt, due to their scale.
2. **Lack of alternative sites** – The applicant has prepared an Alternative Sites Assessment (ASA) which examines whether the proposal could be accommodated on sites which do not fall within the Green Belt, or another Green Belt site where they may be less harm than that which acknowledged at Howbury Park. The ASA concludes that there are no alternative locations that have a realistic potential to function as an SRFI.

3. **Lack of alternative options** – The applicant contends that there are no alternative operations for the SRFI and that a smaller SRFI or the disaggregation of the SRFI function would compromise the efficiency of the operations, the attractiveness of this method of distribution and the availability of the development. This is supported by both the NPS and the Inspector’s conclusions in 2007.

4. **Other benefits** – The applicant has set out the other benefits which would be provided by the proposal including the economic and community benefits (set out below in the comments on economic development and regeneration) and the environmental benefits including the potential to remove up to 59.5 million km of long-distance lorry traffic per annum and reducing carbon emission by 40,000 tonnes per annum. The applicant also contends that the proposed development will have a long-term positive impact on local ecological conditions.

**Conclusion**

38 The need for a SRFI is accepted, and is borne out through the NPS, the London Plan and the Inspector’s decision on the 2007 case. The applicant has made a compelling ‘very special circumstances’ case but GLA officers would advise further clarification should be sought on the biodiversity benefits of the proposal and the environmental benefits, notably whether the emission savings and overall reduction in traffic movements are sufficient to justify the loss of Green Belt in line with London Plan policy 6.15 and supporting paragraph 6.50. It should be noted that TfL has raised concerns in respect of the potential impact on the passenger rail network and has suggested conditions to limit the hours of operation of rail movements in and out of the SRFI. GLA Officers would want to know the full details of the potential impacts on the wider transport network (in line with London Plan policy 6.15B (b) and whether such conditions would hinder the operation and whether this would reduce the potential emission savings and traffic movements. GLA officers would also seek details of the proposed biodiversity management plan and compensatory measures. GLA officers would also expect a similar obligations package as that previously agreed to encourage the take up of rail use.

39 For the above reasons, at this stage, it is considered premature for GLA officers to make a concrete judgement as to whether the applicant’s very special circumstances case outweighs the identified harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm.

**Economic development & regeneration**

40 The site falls within the Bexley Riverside Opportunity Area (which identifies capacity for up to 7,000 new jobs) and is within an identified Regeneration Area within the London Plan.

41 The applicant’s Environment Statement sets out the socio-economic benefits of the scheme across the Royal Borough of Greenwich, London Borough of Bexley and Dartford Borough Council. The estimated economic benefits include:

- The direct creation of 1,966 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs;
- A capital investment of some £125 million in the local area;
• Business rates with a potential annual receipt of £2.5 million;
• Gross Value Added (i.e. contribution to the economy) of around £49.5 million each year; and
• 960 person-years of construction employment (temporary).

The applicant has also sets out the wider socio-economic benefits, including:
• Enhancing the profile and image of the Thames Gateway and Bexley Riverside Opportunity Area as a major focus for the distribution sector, sending a strong signal of investment confidence in the area;
• Building on the competitive advantages of the area for the distribution sector, helping build a critical mass of such activities and encouraging further distribution investment so that the area remains competitive against other regions with similar facilities;
• Diversifying the local economy, in a region where manufacturing is declining and growth is focused on the service sector; and
• Helping to maintain an efficient, sustainable logistics industry in the London area which is necessary to maintain and support the growth of other sectors such as manufacturing and higher technology activities.

In accordance with London Plan policies 2.13 (Opportunity Areas) and 2.14 (Areas for Regeneration), the positive socio-economic regeneration benefits the proposal could bring are acknowledged, and welcomed. We would encourage Bexley to look at opportunities for apprenticeships and training for local people through any section 106 legal agreement.

Urban design

Good design is central to all objectives of the London Plan (2015) and is specifically promoted by the policies contained within chapter seven which address both general design principles and specific design issues. London Plan Policy 7.1 sets out a series of overarching design principles for development in London. New development is also required to have regard to its context, and make a positive contribution to local character within its neighbourhood (policy 7.4).

This is an outline planning application with full details of access only, therefore no formal details of building or bridge design have been submitted. To help overcome this lack of clarity, the Design & Access Statement does set out some key design parameters including some indicative elevations and potential elevational treatments.

GLA officers acknowledge that the design of the SRFI does present a challenge (where form inherently follows function) particularly within a Green Belt location, where there will be visual harm. The applicant has sought to mitigate the visual impact through a soft landscaping strategy which incorporates landscaped bunds. The accompanying Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) indicates that this will help screen the development, in due course, as the landscape matures, but Bexley is better placed to evaluate this aspect of the scheme.

The proposed bridge access is also applied for in outline. The previously approved bridge design was for a lifting bridge and the applicant is now proposing a fixed bridge which would avoid the need for in-river stanchions and this would help from an ecological perspective. It is proposed that the bridge would be standard deck bridge with steel and concrete beams. GLA officers consider there is scope for the detailed design to make a positive contribution to the marshes and mark the entrance to Crayford Marsh.
Inclusive design and access

48 The aim of London Plan Policy 7.2 is to ensure that proposals achieve the highest standards of accessibility and inclusion, not just the minimum. Inclusive design principles help to ensure that all of us, including older people, disabled and deaf people, children and young people, can use the places and spaces proposed comfortably, safely and with dignity.

49 The applicant’s Design & Access Statement indicates that the detailed design of the entrances, footpaths and facilities will all be designed to meet Approved Document M of the Building Regulations. Full details should be secured through conditions, along with Blue Badge parking provision.

Biodiversity

50 The application site occupies part of a Borough Grade 1 Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) known as Crayford Landfill Area & Howbury Grange, as identified through the adopted procedures for London. The northern boundary of the application site abuts Crayford Marshes, a Site of Metropolitan Importance for nature conservation. This is an area of grazing marsh, valuable for a wide range of uncommon flora and fauna. The proximity of the Site of Metropolitan Importance increases the nature conservation value of Crayford Landfill Area & Howbury Grange as the habitats present provide valuable supplementary habitat.

51 The proposed development would cause the direct loss of a sizeable area of the existing SINC, reducing the area of grassland and ruderal habitats and decreasing the availability of foraging areas for birds and invertebrates utilising the adjacent Crayford Marshes. Some of the habitats or features found on the SINC are not present within the Crayford Marshes and, therefore, the loss of these features or habitats would diminish the overall nature conservation value of the area. The on-site mitigation proposed by the applicant would reduce the scale of impact, but arguably not some of the specific adverse impacts. For example, although the consultant’s report notes that most of the skylark territories were in the area of the site to be retained, it is arguable that the overall loss of openness resulting from the development would reduce the potential for skylarks to breed because of the reduction in foraging areas and an increased likelihood of predation from corvids. Similarly, some of the invertebrate species present at this site and migrant and roosting birds will be dependent, in part, on the openness of the site.

52 Consequently, should permission be granted for this development, the applicants should demonstrate they are providing adequate compensation, in addition to the proposed mitigation. The applicants are proposing to prepare a Management Plan that should result in improved management and maintenance of the adjacent Crayford Marshes. This is welcome but there seems to be insufficient detail about the scope and content of the proposed Management Plan and this should be provided by the applicant ahead of Stage 2.

53 It is noted that London Wildlife Trust (LWT) has undertaken an independent biodiversity offsetting calculation which could provide the basis for agreeing the scope and size of the compensatory package. GLA Officers suggest that as part of any proposed s106 agreement the applicant’s ecological consultants work with the LWT to review and agree a biodiversity offsetting calculation that can provide an objective basis on which to base the proposed Management Plan.

Air Quality
The applicant has submitted an Air Quality Assessment (AQA) which is currently being reviewed by GLA officers. An update will be provided at Stage 2.

**Climate Change**

**Energy**

55. A range of passive design features and demand reduction measures are proposed to reduce the carbon emissions of the proposed development. Both air permeability and heat loss parameters will be improved beyond the minimum backstop values required by building regulations. Other features include low energy lighting and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery.

56. The applicant should provide evidence of how policy 5.9 has been addressed in order to minimise cooling demand. The BRUKL sheet provided shows that one of the building zones significantly exceeds the Part L solar gain limit. Further passive measures should be considered in line with Policy 5.9 to ensure all zones are within the Part L solar gain limits. The applicant should provide an updated BRUKL sheet demonstrating that the solar gain limit can be met. Any additional passive design measures should be detailed in the response.

57. The applicant has carried out an investigation and there are no existing or planned district heating networks within the vicinity of the proposed development. The applicant has, however, provided a commitment to ensuring that the development is designed to allow future connection to a district heating network should one become available.

58. The applicant has investigated the feasibility of CHP. However, due the intermittent nature of the heat load, CHP is not proposed. This is accepted in this instance.

59. The applicant has investigated the feasibility of a range of renewable energy technologies and is proposing to install 600kW of Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) to provide space heating.

60. The applicant is proposing 60 sq.m of solar thermal panels to provide hot water. The applicant is also proposing 10,290m2 of Photovoltaic (PV) panels. A roof layout drawing should be provided to demonstrate that there is sufficient space to accommodate the proposed solar arrays.

61. Based on the energy assessment submitted, a reduction of 812 tonnes of CO2 per year in regulated emissions is expected, compared to a 2013 Building Regulations compliant development, equivalent to an overall saving of 36%.

62. The carbon dioxide savings exceed the target set within Policy 5.2 of the London Plan; however, the comments above should be addressed before compliance with London Plan energy policy can be verified.

**Climate change adaptation**

63. A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) accompanies the application and confirms that the majority of the site is within Flood Zone 1, with some parts of site falling within Flood Zones 2 and 3. The FRA confirms that there are some areas of surface water flood risk, notably a flow path through the site.
The FRA confirms that the site is defended to a high level by the existing flood defences and states that even in the event of a breach in the Flood defences the buildings would not be affected by flood water.

Given the risks present at the site, the land uses proposed and the proposed mitigation measures, the proposals are acceptable in principle in terms of London Plan policy 5.12 (Flood Risk Management).

Given that the proposals represent the development of a predominantly greenfield site, the application of the London Plan policy 5:13 (Sustainable Drainage) with the aim of achieving greenfield run-off rates is an important consideration for this development. The Drainage Strategy states that the proposed development will restrict surface water run-off from the site to below the current greenfield run-off rates at a maximum of 5l/s/ha up to the 1 in 100 +climate change storm event. This will be achieved through a combination of infiltration and other SUDS measures.

The overall approach is welcomed and is, in principle, compliant with London Plan policy 5.13. The details of the drainage scheme should be secured via an appropriately worded planning condition.

Transport

Road impacts

In discussions with the applicant on the modelling and trip generation assessment, TfL has accepted the trip generation assumptions and noted that the results of the modelling have demonstrated, in part, that mitigation measures are required on Junction 1A of the M25. These measures will need to be considered further by the Highway Agency and Kent County Council as the relevant highway authorities.

Rail impacts

TfL have raised concerns regarding capacity constraints on the rail network and whether increased freight train movements will impede passenger services across the network. It is TfL’s view that there is limited capacity on the network and there is the potential that the increased train movements especially at peak times from the interchange would hinder TfL’s and other’s aspiration for higher frequency passenger services in the future to help meet existing demand and that which would be generated by the expected significant growth in the wider area and further along the rail lines. A potential extension of the Elizabeth Line using dedicated track throughout is amongst the options under consideration.

TfL requests that there are conditions restricting movements into and out of Howbury to between approximately 23:00 and 06:00, to avoid congesting the passenger train network. Furthermore TfL considers that trains should operate at the maximum possible length at any one time to minimise the number of train movements.

Walking and cycling

A PERS audit formed part of the Transport Assessment and identified future improvements to the pedestrian environment. TfL seeks that all these improvements are secured as part of the S106 agreement. The proposed improvements to Slade Green Station and walking links from Slade Green Station to the site, particularly Moat Lane, are considered by TfL to be the most important as they link the site with public transport and thus help encourage more sustainable travel.
TfL request that £6,929 is secured payable to Bexley for Legible London signage to be installed. This would fund map based signage at Slade Green Station and finger post signs to enable pedestrians/cyclists to navigate to the site.

Extending the existing footpath along Bob Dunn Way, into Kent, should also be considered, subject to the views of Bexley and Kent as the highway authorities. A cycling audit to assess the Level of Service (LoS) for cyclists accessing existing connections should also be undertaken to identify any necessary improvements to mitigate the impact of the scheme and subsequently these should be secured by legal agreement and/or condition.

The level of long stay cycle parking provision proposed falls short of London Plan (2016) standards. To comply with London Plan (2016) standards, a minimum of 360 long stay spaces should be provided. Whilst it is acknowledged that full compliance with short stay (visitor) parking may not be necessary on the basis that the site will not be open to the general public and TfL would accept minimum of 12% of the required figure. Cycle parking should be located within secure convenient and well lit spaces and, with the exception of visitor parking, covered. In addition cyclist facilities (showers, lockers and changing areas) should be provided sufficient for all staff who would or may cycle. It is anticipated that Bexley will also have a view on this matter.

Car parking

As the internal layout of the site is yet to be developed, the level of car parking is not yet determined. The applicant has agreed to provide policy complaint Blue Badge parking and electric vehicle charging points and these should be secured by condition. If it is proposed that London Plan standards for car parking will be exceeded, it should be justified and TfL, in conjunction with the developer and Council, will need to agree on a suitable level of parking. This is particularly important in terms of promoting sustainable transport measures such as walking, cycling, buses, and use of rail.

A car parking management plan will be required, to be agreed by the Council prior to commencement. This should be secured by condition or by way of the s106 agreement.

Public transport

TfL is supportive of the (private) shuttle bus service from the SRFI to Slade Green train station as a complementary means of improving the accessibility of the site and which could not be justified as a TfL bus service. This provision should form part of the s106 agreement. The frequency of service and other arrangements should be subsequently agreed with Bexley, in consultation with TfL. TfL consider it should operate from the outset in order to encourage sustainable travel and should be continued in perpetuity.

TfL requests that the sum of £35,000 is secured for bus shelter enhancements to three local bus stops serving the site which would also contribute towards encouraging sustainable travel and complement the shuttle bus provision.

Travel planning

The applicant has agreed with TfL that a Travel Plan would be secured, and include SMART objectives. This agreement should be reflected via condition and s106 agreement in any permission granted.
**Freight management plan**

80 TFL’s previous comments relating to the size of HGV vehicles, reducing HGV’s during peak hours and FORS accreditation have been taken into account in the Revised Freight Management Plan. TFL notes that Automatic Number Plate Recognition is proposed which will monitor how traffic routes when accessing the site. This provision is welcomed by TFL and should form part of the S106 provisions. The ANPR data can then be used as a tool to effectively manage and route traffic.

**Construction and logistics**

81 The applicant has agreed that a Construction and Logistics Plan should be secured and form part of the planning conditions.

**Community Infrastructure Levy**

82 In accordance with London Plan Policy 8.3 the Mayor commenced CIL charging for developments on 1 April 2012. Within London Borough of Bexley, the charge is £20 per square metre.

**Local planning authority’s position**

83 The position of London Borough of Bexley is not yet known. It should be noted that the proposed access lies within Dartford Borough Council (outside of the GLA boundary).

**Legal considerations**

84 Under the arrangements set out in Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008 the Mayor is required to provide the local planning authority with a statement setting out whether he considers that the application complies with the London Plan, and his reasons for taking that view. Unless notified otherwise by the Mayor, the Council must consult the Mayor again under Article 5 of the Order if it subsequently resolves to make a draft decision on the application, in order that the Mayor may decide whether to allow the draft decision to proceed unchanged, or direct the Council under Article 6 of the Order to refuse the application, or issue a direction under Article 7 of the Order that he is to act as the local planning authority for the purpose of determining the application and any connected application. There is no obligation at this present stage for the Mayor to indicate his intentions regarding a possible direction, and no such decision should be inferred from the Mayor’s statement and comments.

**Financial considerations**

85 There are no financial considerations at this stage.

**Conclusion**

86 London Plan policies on Green Belt, Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges (SRFI), urban design, inclusive access, air quality, climate change, and transport are relevant to this application.

- **Green Belt** – The proposed development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and should be refused, except in very special circumstances. The applicant has presented a ‘very special circumstances’ case and further clarification is sought on some of these aspects to consider whether they outweigh the harm which has been identified.
• **Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges (SRFI)** – The proposed development is generally supported through London Plan policy 6.15, however clarification is sought on the impacts on the wider transfer network. Previously agreed obligations to encourage the take up of rail use should be applied.

• **Urban Design** – The key issue relates to the proposed mitigation of the visual impact through the landscaping and siting.

• **Inclusive design and access** – Conditions should be included on any consent to ensure the measures proposed are secured to meet the aims of London plan policy 7.2.

• **Biodiversity** – The proposed development would cause the direct loss of a sizeable area of a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). Some mitigation measures are proposed, and a management plan would be secured by condition. Further details are requested in terms of the proposed management plan and scope for compensatory measures.

• **Air Quality** – The submitted air quality information is currently being reviewed by GLA officers and an update will be provided at Stage 2.

• **Climate Change** – The proposed carbon dioxide savings would exceed those set out within Policy 5.2 of the London Plan, but the further information requested should be provided to verify these.

• **Transport** – The strategic transport issues raised should be addressed, notably the concerns raised on rail capacity and the impact on passenger services.

for further information, contact GLA Planning Unit (Development & Projects Team):

Colin Wilson, Senior Manager – Development & Projects
020 7983 4783 email colin.wilson@london.gov.uk

Justin Carr, Strategic Planning Manager (Development Decisions)
020 7983 4895 email justin.carr@london.gov.uk

Jon Sheldon, Senior Strategic Planner (Case Officer)
020 7983 5852 email jon.sheldon@london.gov.uk